

The Role of Ulama in Countering Boko Haram Insurgency: A Pattern of the Al-Azhar 'Ulama

Rabiu Shehu Muhammad
Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria
Email: mshehu2002@gmail.com

Aminu Umar
Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria
Email: babanwalle@gmail.com

Abstract

The eruption of Boko Haram and its insurgency in 2009 caused the loss of life and property that is unprecedented in northern Nigeria's history since independence. Various tools and approaches have been used in analyzing a phenomenon with a view to offering solutions to it. People from various walks of life including professionals and experts have expressed their views and opinions about groups, their activities and ways to limit them. Since the group is rightly or wrongly associated and identified with Islam in its activities, experts especially the ulama analyze the group from an Islamic perspective using the Qur'an and Sunnah and the actions of the salaf as their basis for offering solutions. to group problems. With this background, this paper examines the role of Ulama in dealing with the imbroglio of Boko Haram by using the Ulama model of Al Azhar University in particular. The historical method was adopted with data mostly collected from printed materials and the internet. This paper recommends among other things that our scholars should follow some of the approaches used by Al'azhar scholars in eliminating the influence of extremist and rebel groups. .

Keywords: Boko Haram, Ulama, Al'azhar, Rebellion.

Abstrak

Letusan Boko Haram dan pemberontakannya pada tahun 2009 telah menyebabkan hilangnya banyak nyawa dan harta benda yang belum pernah terjadi sebelumnya dalam sejarah Nigeria utara sejak

kemerdekaan. Berbagai alat dan pendekatan telah digunakan dalam menganalisis fenomena dengan maksud untuk menawarkan solusi untuk itu. Orang-orang dari berbagai lapisan masyarakat termasuk profesional dan ahli telah menyatakan pandangan dan pendapat mereka tentang kelompok, kegiatannya dan cara membatasi mereka. Karena kelompok itu benar atau salah dikaitkan dan diidentifikasi dengan Islam dalam kegiatannya, para ahli khususnya ulama menganalisis kelompok dari perspektif Islam dengan menggunakan Al-Qur'an dan Sunnah dan tindakan salaf sebagai dasar mereka untuk menawarkan solusi. terhadap masalah kelompok. Dengan latar belakang inilah tulisan ini mengkaji tentang peran Ulama dalam menghadapi imbroglia Boko Haram dengan menggunakan model Ulama Universitas Al Azhar pada khususnya. Metode sejarah diadopsi dengan data yang sebagian besar dikumpulkan dari bahan cetak dan internet. Makalah ini merekomendasikan antara lain bahwa para ulama kita harus mengikuti beberapa pendekatan yang digunakan oleh ulama Al'azhar dalam menghilangkan pengaruh kelompok-kelompok ekstremis dan pemberontak.

Kata kunci: Boko haram, Ulama, Al'azhar, Pemberontakan.

Introduction

Boko Haram refers to a deviant militant group that emerged in northern Nigeria in the mid-1990s. Initially the group called itself “Ahlussunnahwal-jamā'a alaminhaji as-salaf meaning “people of the way of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the community (of muslims) in line with the earliest generation of Muslims” but later when the group turned militant, it started calling itself “Jamā'atuAhlissunnah lid Da'awatiwal jihad” which means “(The people of the prophetic tradition on the methodology of pious predecessors).”

Boko is a Hausa word meaning “western/ formal education or western ideology” or “westernization” in its entirety. In the classical Hausa language, the word means “deception”, because of the experience of the people of the region with the colonial masters who used western/formal education to lure them into accepting Christianity. “Haram” on the other hand, is an Arabic word which means “prohibited,” or “forbidden” (Da'awa Co-ordination Council of Nigeria; 2009). BokoHaram therefore, the word means either “western /formal/ secular education is prohibited or forbidden or “evangelism deceptively camouflage as western education is unacceptable or both

from Islamic perspective. The name has its origin in media and public or community coinage perhaps due to the group's condemnation of western education, which they set as the main cause of all the problems facing the Muslim Ummah (Da'awa Co-ordination Council of Nigeria; 2009).

The group started like many other movements as a religious study groups in the mosque holding intermittent public preaching, however, the group became militant after several violent skirmish with the Nigerian security agents, particularly after the eventual killing of the group leader Muhammad Yusuf (Hassan; 2015). The killing of Yusuf provided the group with a justification for further violence which extended to the civilian population in different northern states from 2010 –2015. Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau (the successor of Muhammad Yusuf), Boko Haram destroyed thousands of human lives and properties on a massive scale, resulting in at least 14,000 toll of human deaths as documented by the media as of July 3, 2015 and the displacement of 1.2 million people (Campbell, July 6, 2015; UNHRC statistical snapshot, July 6, 2015).

Various tools and parameters have been employed by different people from different walks of life including professionals and religious scholars/groups and organizations in Nigeria and other Muslim countries in analyzing the Boko haram group and its nefarious activities with a view to proffering feasible solutions to its mayhem that has bedeviled the whole Muslim Ummah especially as the group was formed by Muslims and, rightly or wrongly it claims to have the advancement of Islam as its mission.

Boko Haram as mentioned earlier, started like any other movement or group as a religious group formed by some Muslims to advance the cause of Islam. The formation of such societies or associations in Islam is usually based on the saying of Allah in Surah Aal Emran verse one hundred and four of the Qur'an which urges Muslims to constitute themselves into a group for the purpose of enjoining good on people and forbidding evils for them. The verse reads thus:

“Let there arise among you (Muslims) a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong they are the ones to attain felicity” (Qur'an 3:104).

This verse according to Abdulhakeem (2016) has been the motivating factor for Muslim not only in forming groups, societies or

associations but also in striving to correct societal evils they consider it duty bound do so particularly that the verse ends with the description of those who do so as ones who attain felicity. Evidences on its founder and the activities of the group prior to its militarization point at this. Muhammad Yusuf, a radical self-proclaimed Islamic cleric who founded the group, for example was said to have been a member of the Islamic brotherhood group of Ibraheem el-Zakzakiy in Zaria but when the group was accused of Shiite tendencies and consequently broke into two, Muhammad Yusuf joined the JamāatulTajdidil Islam group (Abdulhakeem; 2016), he was however, said to have later found the teachings of the Tajdid group also unpleasant and therefore founded his own group in 2002. His followers according to (Hassan 2015) were initially called Yusufiyya (followers of Muhammad Yusuf) but latter Ahlus sunnah wal Jama'ah AlaMinhaji As-Salaf.

The group started its activities as a religious study group in the mosque holding intermittent public preaching. As its followers increased of its provision of welfare services, it modified its name to Ahlussunnahwaljama'ahAlaMinhaj As-Salaf (the people of the Prophetic tradition and the organization on the methodology of the pious predecessors) to emphasize orthodoxy not only in theological but also in social and political ideals (Abdallah; 2011).

A cardinal preaching of the group is that western education is the main cause of corruption which according to them is the mother of all the problems facing the Muslim Ummah and should therefore be rejected in its entirety by the Muslim (Hassan: 2015, Abdulhakeem; 2016). Alternatively, the Muslims should subscribe to another system of education based purely on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah as understood by the earliest generations of Muslim (salaf). Before long, many of those who listened to Yusuf's sermons withdrew from school; others stopped sending their children and wards to school while those who had acquired educational certificates burnt them. (Abdulhakeem: 2016) In his famous debate with Mallam Isah Ali Pantami, Yusuf was reported to have expressed that if the environment for the cultivation of Boko (non – Islamic education) meets the Islamic requirement of separating the genders, and if theories at variance with the teaching of the Qur'an are expunged then Boko is acceptable and can be cultivated. (Hassan: 2010) Mallam

Sani Umaru one of the earlier proponents of the group elucidates this belief further where he argues thus:

Boko haram does not in any way mean Western education is a sin as the infidel media continue to portray us, Boko haram actually means western Civilization is forbidden. The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the west...which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by western education (Nigex News August 17, 2009)

But this assertion by this Boko haram member sounds absurd because the value of knowledge in Islam is not dependent on its geographical or cultural origin but on the basis of its usefulness and whether it contradicts the clear text of the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah or not. The prophet was reported to have used knowledge that came from non-Muslim sources if it did not contradict the Qur'an and especially if it was useful. He also instructed his companions to do the same for instance he (peace be upon him was reported to have instructed one of his companions Zaid bin Thabit to learn the Hebrew language from Jews. (Dar al-Ifta al Misriyya;1997), just as he directed some Pagan Arab prisoners to teach Muslim children literacy as a ransom to secure their freedom (Albaihaqi,11460/6/124,Musnad Imam Ahmad,2216/1/247)

At different times, prominent Islamic scholars, activists and Da'awa workers engaged in dialogue and debates with the leadership and followers of the group, challenging Muhammad Yusuf's position as not in tandem with the teachings of the Salaf and also drawing his attention to the socio-political and economic implications of his position especially on the people of Northern Nigeria who are educationally disadvantaged compared with their counterparts in other parts of the country. In order to either convince them of their wrong position or to dissuade others from joining the group. The dialogues and debates succeeded to some extent in convincing some members of the group from rejecting their ideology. Other Muslims started boycotting and disassociating themselves from Boko haram functions and members. This according to some analysts, might have been the factor that pushed Boko haram members to go extreme by eliminating some Islamic scholars, a case in point was the late Sheik Ja'afar Mahmud Adam who was assassinated in 2006 for what some

people attributed to his stern opposition to the group 's ideology (Hassan; 2015, Abdulhakeem; 2016).

Boko Haram came into prominence and public notice in 2009 when the group became a militant group. While details of the circumstances surrounding its militarization still remain sketchy perhaps due to the killing of the founder who would have explained better. Muhammad Yusuf was reported to have claimed during a tafsir session in Maiduguri that some mobile policemen attacked and injured some of his followers and prevented their families and friends from visiting them in the hospital where they were receiving treatment. He was said to have further claimed that attempts by members of the group to visit their injured fellows in the hospital were met with stiff resistance by the police and several members of the group were killed. Yusuf further maintained that while those killed were being taken for burial, the policemen further attacked them and killed some of his members he vowed not to ever allow the security actions to go scot free without taking measures. (Abdulhakeem; 2016). The group acted upon its treats by attacking police formations in Maiduguri where the group's headquarters was located. The then president Umaru MusaYa'rAdua perhaps acting on intelligence report, ordered a clampdown on members of the group which led to the capture and eventual extra judicial killing of Muhammad Yusuf in the hands of Nigerian police. This act according to some analyst had further aggravated the crisis as members of the group became fully militarized, engaging and waging murderous warfare against not only state forces but also innocent civilians. (Da'awa Co-ordination Council of Nigeria; 2009).

An inventory of some of the nefarious activities associated with or for which the group claimed responsibility include; Bauchi prison break of 7th September, 2010; Abuja attack of 31st December, 2010; Yola jail break of 22nd April, 2011; a series of bombings in some states in northern Nigeria on 29th May 2011, bombing of Nigeria police Headquarters, Abuja, on 16th June 2011, bombing of the united Nations' Building at Abuja on 26th August, 2011, the massacre of hundreds Muslim faithful during Friday Prayer at the Kano Central Mosque on 26th February 2014 the abduction of hundreds females secondary school students of Government Girls College Chibok in Borno State on 14th April 2014 and many others.

The nature and dimension of the attacks of Boko Haram have made it difficult for analysts, commentators and even Islamic scholars to describe the group and what it stands for. Especially as a good number of the attacks were suicidal. When the attack was on the church, Christian leaders were often quick to say the group was targeting Christians with a view to Islamizing the country and the Muslims reacted by debunking the allegation. While the “debate” was on, the group would shift its attack to the Muslim no sooner would the Muslims claim they were vindicated that the group would attack people from the eastern part of the country who had settled and are residing in the north, analysts and commentators would then interpret the group’s action and mission as aiming at the disintegration of the country. When the attack was on government establishments and security institutions, people read political meanings into it claiming it was a play of politicians of northern extraction to destabilize the then president Good Luck Jonathan led government which the former had earlier objected to.

At times the group backed down certain individuals including politicians and leading Islamic scholars of the region. Some of the attacks were carried out in the month of Ramadan in which Muslim worldwide fast and which they hold with very light esteem.

Results and Discussion

The fundamental and basic ideology of the Boko Haram as mentioned earlier and from where they drive their name is that Western Education is forbidden in Islam. And as stated earlier, a number of Muslim scholars have engaged the leadership of the group in dialogues and debates with the leadership and followers of Boko Haram group in order to either refute their ideologies or dissuade others from joining the group, especially as they claimed their action were “Islamic”. Prominent among such scholars included Sheikh Abdulwahab Abdallah (from Kano), Dr. Isah Ali Ibrahim Pantami (from Bauchi), Sheikh Muhammad Bin Usman (from Kano), the late Sheikh Muhammad Auwal Albani (from Zaria), the late Sheikh Ja’afar Mahmud Adam (from Kano) and a host of other scholars. Islamic organizations and groups such as Da’awa Co-ordination council of Nigeria (DCCN), Muslim Students’ Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Jamā’atu Izalatul Bid’ah wa Iqāmatuṣ Sunnah (JIBWIS) among others. While some scholars such as Quadri (2013) have on the

basis of the nefarious activities of the group disassociated it from Islam, others feel that the group started like any other groups formed by Muslims to advance the cause of Islam, but later derailed and become militarized as a result of the brutality of the Nigeria's security agencies on its members and the eventual killing of their leader. (Hassan; 2015)

During one of his interaction with one of the Islamic scholars Muhammad Yusuf was said to have defended his stand on detesting western education mainly on the negative influence of western education on Muslims which is according to him is the main cause of excessive corruption in the public sector (Hassan; 2015).

In Islam the acquisition of knowledge is encouraged, Muslims are called upon in many verses and sayings of the prophet to seek for useful knowledge in all fields of human endeavors as discussed earlier. Based on these therefore, seeking of western education or Boko cannot be said to be haram simply because it came from the West. The truth, falsehood, benefit or otherwise of information and knowledge is not assessed on the basis of whether such information is indigenous or foreign, Islamic law does not classify information or knowledge on the basis of its geographical or cultural origin rather it is classified or assessed on the basis of whether it contradicts the clear teachings of shari'ah. If it is not in tandem with the clear teachings of shari'ah, then it is rejected. Otherwise, it may be considered on its own merit and its consonance with the objectives of Shari'ah (Maqasidul Shari'ah) and the common good of the Muslim Ummah (Maslaha).

The prophet (peace be upon him) was reported by Abu Huraira to have said "wise word is the lost property of the believer so wherever he finds it he has more right to it" (Sunan ibn majah book 37 Hadith no 4308). For example, disciplines such as Agriculture, Accounting, Linguistics, Mathematics, Engineering, Defense, Medicine, Communication and Information Technology are regarded as secular or worldly but the plain truth is that these sciences were originally borrowed from Muslims and then they were given secular or western outlook. In other words, ungodly elements were incorporated to them later by the west. Muslim scholars however, do not classify these subjects or fields as secular or irreligious as distinct from spiritual or religious knowledge. They are classified under the category of Mu'amalat where every innovation and new knowledge is permissible,

except what is authoritatively prohibited. In fact those fields such as medicine, agriculture, commerce, security, education that are essential for the public benefit (Maslaha) and general survival or absolute necessities (i.e. daruriyyat) of a good and just society, are not just considered permissible (halal) but a societal or collective obligation (fardukifaya) that must be studied. To neglect these aspects of life is harmful evil (mafsada), which the community (or its leaders) will be held accountable for by Allah. (Da'awah Co-ordination Council in Nigeria; 2009).

In addition, Muslim Jurist maintains that what is a prerequisite for the performance or realization of an obligation (fard) itself becomes regarded as an obligation (fard). If for instance, the study and practice of Agriculture and Medicine are FarduKifaya (collective societal obligation), then their prerequisite subjects such as Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Language become regarded as FarduKifaya. This is because, without these basic subjects, professions like medicine and agriculture would cease to fulfill their functions effectively in modern world. (Da'awa co-ordination Council; 2017)

The Method of Al-Azhar University Scholars in combating extremism

Al-Azhar University is the worlds largest and the third oldest Islamic university based in Cairo. It was founded in 309 A.H (970 A.D) with branches in across the Egyptian provinces (Hussam, 2017). The main objective of the University is to serve as a center for imparting Islamic culture and ethics, and to denounce the sectarian and political intolerance among the Muslim globally. The University has many centers and departments with a view to achieving its goals and or objectives. (Shakir; 2017).

Darul – Iftah al Misriy, This is a center established in 1895 to keep Muslims abreast with religious principles, and clarifying certain issues that may seem unclear. (www.dar-alifta.org)

The Mission and Activities of Dar-al-Ifta al-Misriyyah. Manned by qualified and competent cUlama, the center receives questions and inquiries on various Islamic issues either verbally or through telephone or email where the questions are answered by the fatwa council (At-tayyib; 2014).

a. Issuing Various Religious statements

As part of its mandate or jurisdiction the center issued statements on current and contemporary issues prevailing in the Muslim world.

b. Answering Misconceptions about Islam

The center also receives questions on some issue that appears ambiguous both from Muslims and non-Muslims in this regard a whole section is dedicated for these purpose. With a team of researchers assigned for the duty. The center also publishes its journal periodically which includes among other things summaries of its researches.

c. Offering Scholarship and Organizing Seminars and Conferences

The center also offers scholarships in one of the Islamic sciences departments at al-Azhar University such as Usulu-deen, Islamic Shari'ah, Arabic Language, Arabic and Islamic Studies and Islamic Da'awah both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. It also organizes seminars, conferences and training to different scholars in various specializations from all countries of the world, with emphasizes to countries suffering from the cancer of terrorism such as Nigeria and Syria. However, the beneficiaries are mostly imams of Friday mosques and du'ats and preachers so that they can ultimately carry the message to their followers and or listeners.

d. Al-Azhar Observer

As a means of combating the menace of extremist ideas and ideologies that are prevalent in the Muslim world, this department was created on 3rd June 2015 by the grand mufti of Egypt Grand Shaikh Ahmad Altayeb. It was meant to serve as the focal eyes of al-Azhar University community in combating extremist and terrorist tendencies in the Muslim world where it operates in eight different languages namely; English, French, Germany, Persian, Urdu, Chinese, Spanish and other African languages. The observer monitors the entire world terrorist and extremist events and day to day news, were the assigned and scholar's analyses and react swiftly to all misconceptions and distortions relating to Islam. The employees of Al-Azhar Observer were chosen from among the highly educated scholars who master the above foreign languages.

The main activities of the observer are:

- a. Creating awareness campaigns and clarifying the misconceptions presented by terrorist groups whose ideology is based upon misinterpretation of Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions.

- b. Refuting and countering the terrorist deviant ideologies through presenting a counter narrative and clarifying the brilliant facts of Islam stemmed from the Glorious Qur'an, authentic Prophetic traditions and the statements of the righteous ancestors.
- c. Organizing and participating in international conferences and other forums on the peril of extremist groups and their effects on the Muslim Ummah
- d. Responding to all that is raised by the enemies of Islam using the world wide web, social media, newspapers, world magazines, journals as well as all the research centers interested in the Islamic affairs which all aim at distorting the image of Islam.

Below are some examples of the responses and replies to some of the terrorist beliefs and thoughts by Al-Azhar Observer;

1. On their restriction of Jihad to Combat

"The fanatics restricted the concept of Jihad to combat, restricted combat to killing, and confined Jihad to Jihad of demand (Jihad At-Talab) based on certain verses and hadiths such as:

"And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah is worse than killing. And do not fight them at al-Masjid al-Haram until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers" (Q 1:191),

"Fight them until there is no [more] fitnah and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors" (Q 1:193), and

"Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled" (Q 9:29).

This may be refuted by the fact that jurists have divided jihad into two types: jihad of demand which becomes legal when the Muslim ruler – whatever political title he may have – declares jihad in the cause of Allah in defense of and under the banner of Islam. After jihad had been approved, it was never reported that the companions of the Prophet – who were the best generation – went to the community of disbelievers to kill them except under the banner of jihad and with the permission of a Muslim leader capable of carrying out jihad.

Defensive Jihad (Jihad al-Daf '): this is when disbelievers attack a Muslim country. The people of this country must fight them back with the permission of a Muslim ruler and under the banner of Islam. This matter is imposed by the need to defend the nation and its sovereignty. This sound opinion is supported and agreed upon by international laws. What we have pointed is the consensus of the scholars.

Who Are to be Fought in the Battlefield? It is impermissible to kill women, children or old people. Only for the warriors who carry weapons to fight the Muslims can be killed. This is evident in Allah's statement, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors" (Q 2:190). Moreover, the need for jihad of demand has vanished nowadays simply because that sort of jihad aimed mainly at conveying the message of Islam to people and combating those who stood as an obstacle to this aim. Thus, jihad was permitted to ward off hirabah, not to eliminate disbelief. They could not perceive that jihad in a more inclusive sense is done with the heart, through calling to the worship of Allah, and honoring parents as many hadiths have shown. If the main purpose of Jihad was to eradicate disbelief none of the disbelievers could ever remain alive in the countries that Muslims conquered. During this age of satellites and the internet, the message and call to Islam have become available to the whole world. All in all, Jihad is allowed only with the permission of a Muslim ruler who is able to perform it in the cause of Allah with the aim of making the Word of Allah supreme.

As for their citation of the aforementioned verses then it is not correct, for the imperative verb "fight" undoubtedly indicates defensive fighting and not the fight of demand simply because the conjugation of (Mufa'alah) in Arabic indicates involvement of more than one party, as inferred by the context of the verse: "and expel them from wherever they have expelled you" (Q 2:191). Thus, it is a fight to ward off attacks, not to initiate such attacks. This opinion is further supported by the end of the verse "And if they cease, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful" (Q 2:192). The verse from chapter At-Tawbah makes it clear for any sane person that it was revealed concerning the disbelievers of Mecca and does not constitute a general case. However, it was revealed in an exaggerative word form

to denote that this fighting occurs between two fighting parties. Thus, it is defensive fighting rather than demand fighting.”(www.azhar.eg)

Here also the scholars the meaning of Jihad from the perspective of Shari'ah and the rules and regulations governing its conduct, which are not apparently not being abided by the Boko haram and similar groups, who indiscriminately attack and captured innocent people irrespective of their religious affiliation and beliefs.

2. On Labeling their Opponents as Disbelievers

The Islamic Sharia seeks to free people from all kinds of submission, except to Allah, the Almighty, and teaches that belief or disbelief is an affair between the worshipper and his God alone. Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] instructed us to deal with people based on what they say, and not to judge them by what they bear in their hearts. We are not allowed to scrutinize people's hearts. No one can know what is in another's heart but Allah. So, we judge people by their outward deeds and Allah judges their inward intentions.

The practice of the terrorist groups of labeling their opponents and those who do not adopt their bloody ideology as disbelievers has nothing to do with Islam. When doing so, they violate all Islamic teachings in this regard. Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] warned every Muslim against declaring their fellow Muslims as disbelievers, shedding their blood, seizing their properties and violating their honor.

Such terrorist groups use terminology such as kafir (infidel) murtadd (apostate) to describe those who reject their extremist ideology, and thus find a pretext for shedding their blood and destroying their houses. This definitely goes against the teachings of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) clearly defined belief (iman) when he was asked about it by angel Jibril as “Belief is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in God's Preordainment both its good and its bad.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim). All Muslim scholars agree that belief is an inward affair, and that no one is to be declared disbeliever until she/he declares their denial to the Islamic teachings. Prophet Muhammad says, “If a man says to his brother, O Kafir (disbeliever)! Then surely one of them is as such (i.e., a Kafir).” [Al-Bukhari 5/2264].”(www.azhar.eg)

Here also the Al-azhar scholars are stressing the position of Islam concerning the true meaning of a Muslim and the prohibition of

condemning or declaring a Muslim as a kafir (unbeliever) contrary to the practice of Boko haram and similar groups who often label or condemn their opponents as kafir (infidel) murtadd (apostate) thus finding a pretext or justification for shedding their blood and destroying their houses.

3. On aggression against Houses of Worship

“Aggression against Houses of worships and killing worshippers therein are totally prohibited in Islam. In other words, they have nothing at all to do either with Islam or with his teachings. In actuality, the Islamic Shari’ah, along with all the other laws, have confirmed the obligation of preserving Ad-Daruriyat Al-Khams (The Five Ultimate Objectives of the Shari’ah), including: religion, soul, intellect, honor and property. That is to say, shedding blood, under all laws and religions, is prohibited and that life is protected and dignified. Thus, we strongly stress that killing one innocent soul is like killing all mankind, a ruling which is clearly mentioned in the Saying of Allah, the Almighty, “...whoever kills a person, unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land, it is as he kills all mankind; and whoever saves a life, it is as he saves the lives of all mankind...” (The Quran, 5:32)

These terrorist and aggressive attacks can in no way be classified as an act of Jihad, because the latter was prescribed by Islam to ward off aggression and corruption; Allah says: “And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.” (The Quran, 2:190)

In fact, Islam has guaranteed freedom of worship for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It further shows great respect for Houses of Worship, and thus it is totally innocent from all these terrorist actions falsely attributed to its teachings. Moreover, all the Egyptians should be fully aware of the undeniable fact that these acts are only meant to spread corruption and chaos, which is why we all should stand together to eradicate those terrorists and extremists (www.azhar.eg)

Here also they are stressing the real meaning and aim of jihad which is the suppression of aggression and corruption in the world. Therefore, the attack and destruction of non-Muslim places of worship is not and cannot be linked to the teachings of Islam. Examples of these acts are the incessant attacks of the Christian churches by the Boko haram insurgents in the name of Jihad.

4. On Ethics of War in Islam

Islam is a religion that promotes peace and peaceful coexistence among all mankind, and thus views the protection of the Muslim Ummah from any aggression as the principal reason behind waging any war against others, a fact which is mentioned in the Quran; thus: "And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits." (The Quran, 2:190) It is thus clear that war in Islam is conducted for a noble motive, which is the removal of oppression and injustice. In other words, it is only waged against those who commit aggression against Muslims.

Even at times of wars, Islam proves no brutal religion; it obliges its followers to firmly abide by a number of ethics and principles not to be violated or broken under any reason or circumstance, as follows:

- 1- Not to kill aged men;
- 2- Not to kill young infants;
- 3- Not to kill women;
- 4- Not to be dishonest about booty;
- 5- Not to mutilate the dead bodies of the enemies;
- 6- Not to bring harm to the trees or burn them with fire;
- 7- Not to slay any of the enemy's flocks; and finally
- 8- Not to cause any harm to those people who devote their lives for to monastic services.

Any Muslim army that was about to conduct war in the Cause of Allah used to receive these above-mentioned instructions from Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and even from his companions after his (PBUH) death. In this regard, Imam Malik (May Allah have mercy on him) reported that he heard that Umar IbnA'bd Al-A'ziz wrote to one of his governors, "It has been passed down to us that when the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him, sent out a raiding party (an army or expedition), he would say to them, 'Make your raids in the Name of Allah in the Cause of Allah. Fight whoever denies Allah. Do not steal from the booty, and do not act treacherously. Do not mutilate and do not kill children.' Say the same to your armies and raiding parties, Allah willing. Peace be upon you." (Muwatta')

In conclusion, we strongly stress that the religion of Islam carries, in the very sense of the word, a message of mercy and peace for all humanity. Its ultimate objective is to foster peace, serenity, affection,

kindness and mercy among all mankind, a fact which is crystal clear in the Quran: “O you men! Surely we have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other ...” (The Quran, 49:13)

Here also the Al-Azhar scholar’s enunciated clearly the ethics of war in Islamic law which among other things prohibits the killing of children, women, old and innocent people. On 26th February 2014 the Boko haram group attacked and killed hundreds of Muslim faithful during Friday prayer at the Kano Central Mosque, in the same vein on 14th April 2014 the group abducted hundreds females secondary school students of Government Girls College Chibok in Bornu State on 14th April 2014 and many others were innocent children where maimed. The fact that these acts contravene the prophet’s guidance shows that the Boko haram are not following the true Islamic teachings.

On Lessons Deduced from the Farewell Sermon on Sanctity of Blood, Ten years after his (PBUH) migration (Hijra) to Medina, Prophet Muhammad went back to Mecca to perform the fifth pillar of Islam, and so many people attended it with him (PBUH). So, it was a great opportunity to highlight the main foundations of the religion to that large crowd of people.

On the 9th of Dhu Al-Hijjah, he (PBUH) delivered his most famous sermon known as the “Farwell Sermon” in which he (PBUH) projected the most important and essential pillars of the religion of Islam, starting with praising Allah, the Almighty, informing people of the sanctity of Mecca, the month of Dhal Al-Hijjah, and people’s blood, properties, and honors.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “O People! Lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore, listen carefully to what I am saying and take these words to those who could not be present here today. O People! Just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your LORD, and that he will indeed reckon your deeds.”

With these luminous words of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we can start this article to ascertain how Islam sanctifies people's lives and blood.

Islam instructs that man's life is the most sanctified thing in this life, to the extent that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated clearly that the Muslim blood's sanctity is holier in the Sight of Allah than the Sacred House, a fact which is proved by the Qur'an and the real practice of the Prophet (PBUH).

The Qur'an contains several verses proving this point and stressing that it is not permissible to kill Muslims or non-Muslims alike, without any legal reason approved by the Shari'ah.

In the Chapter of An-Nisa', Allah, Glorified is He, says: "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is hell; he shall abide in it, and Allah will send His wrath on him and curse him and prepare for him a painful chastisement." (The Qur'an, 4:93);

In the Chapter of Al-Ma'ida, He, the Almighty, says: "On account of [his deed], We decreed to the children of Israel that if anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind." (The Quran, 5:32);

In the Chapter of Al-Furqan, He, the Almighty, records the characteristics and features of His true believers, stating that one of these characteristics is that "And they who do not call upon another god with Allah and do not slay the soul, which Allah has forbidden except in the requirements of justice ..." (The Qur'an, 25:68).

These verses undoubtedly affirm that man's blood, under Islam, cannot be shed unless there is a legal reason approved by the Shari'ah, and which is shown in the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). In this regard, Imam IbnKathir, in his Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azim, quotes Mujahid who said: "Whoever slays a soul for no legal reason (approved by the Shari'ah), it is as if he had killed all mankind, since he will eternally abide in the Fire." [1].

But, what is the position of the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) on this point?

The Sunnah of the Prophet, the second source of legislation in Islam, takes the very same position like the Quran. In so many Ahadith, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stresses the sanctity of people's blood. His statement in the Farewell Sermon is a case in point.

Also, he (PBUH) showed that the sanctity of man's blood is even holier and greater than the entire life, saying: "The extinction of the whole world is less significant before Allah than killing a Muslim man." (An-Nasa'i)

Emphasizing the fact that unlawful killing of a Muslim is the most serious sin ever in the world, he (PBUH) said: "If the inhabitants of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth all took part in shedding the blood of a believer, then Allah would cast them (all) in the Fire." (Al-Tirmidhi).

Maintaining the fact that this ruling on the sanctity of bloods is not restricted to Muslims only, he (PBUH) said: "The first son of Adam takes a share of the guilt of every one who murders another wrongfully because he was the initiator of committing murder." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim); and "A faithful believer remains at liberty regarding his religion unless he kills somebody unlawfully."

In brief, we can conclude that those who kill innocent people in the name of Islam are but criminals who act upon their own whims and accords, and that man's life under Islam is totally protected and sanctified unless he violates this sanctity by committing any of its nullifiers shown in the Sunnah of the Prophet and which is the liability of the judiciary to decide on. (www.dar-al-ifta.com).

Here also the Al-Azhar Ulama based on the prophetic teachings reminded and cautions Muslims against unjustly violating the sanctity of all human blood and honor where it concludes that all those who kill innocent people in the name of Islam are but criminals who act upon their own whims and caprice who would have a grievous punishment awaits them on the day of judgment. Therefore, the ludicrous and spilling of innocent people's blood and wanton destruction their properties as perpetuated by the Boko Haram insurgents is contrary and not in tandem with the teachings of Islam.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper is on the role of Ulama towards countering the Boko Haram insurgency taking a clue from the efforts of the Al-Azhar Ulama. The paper traced the evolution, growth and teachings of the Boko Haram group and the launching of its insurgency in Nigeria. The paper also highlighted some of the efforts of ulama's and other Muslim organizations in converting the Boko Haram mayhem.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the distinctive features of Islam is the prominence attached to law in its practice. There is virtually nothing done in the religion or by a Muslim that there is no law guiding it. In order to ascertain the position of Islam regarding anything, Muslims are enjoined to refer to the Qur'an and Sunnah (surah 4:59). Therefore, it is duty-bound upon the ulamas to defend and protect the noble teachings of Islam from the deviant, misguided and erroneous beliefs of the extremist and insurgent groups. This is exactly what some of the Islamic scholars in Nigeria have been doing since the emergence of the insurgent Boko Haram group and this is what the Al-Azhar scholars are doing in fighting similar groups in other Muslim states. This paper recommends that our scholars should follow some of the approaches used by the Al'azhar scholar's in dislocating the effect of the extremist and insurgent groups. Against this background therefore, these paper wish to make the following specific recommendations.

The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in liaison with some renowned Islamic associations such as the Muslim Students' Society (MSSN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), Jama'atu lZalati lBid'ah walqamatis Sunnah (JIBWIS) should imitate from the Al-Azhar Ulama by pursuing a series of programs aimed at educating and sensitizing Muslims on the effect of extremism and how to counteract it.

Islamic educational bodies such as the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Islamic Education trust (IET) and Da'awah institute of Nigeria (DIN) should be encouraged by the well-to-do among the Muslims in their efforts towards the integration of knowledge and publications of various literatures on true, authentic and undiluted Islam.

The mounting of a body such as the Al- Azhar Observer by some Nigerian Universities and or Islamic bodies and centers would be of great help in the obliteration of Boko haram ideologies in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

Abdallah, Nurudeen M. 2011. Nigeria: How Boko Haram began, by Borno P.D.P." Daily Trust(Abuja), November 23, www.dailytrust.com.ng accessed June 9, 2015.

Abdulhakeem, Akanni. 2016. Violence in the name of God: An
Volume 23, Nomor 2 (2021)

Analytical Study of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria in Religion in contemporary Nigeria ed. Y.A. Quadri et.al,87-93, London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd.

Attayib, Ahmed. Ed. 2014. A summary of all papers presented at Al-Azhar Conference for Confronting Terrorism and Extremism. Cairo: Darul Qudus Al-Arabiyy.

Abdallah, Nurudeen M. 2011. Nigeria how Boko Haram Began, by Borno PDP. Daily trust (Abuja), November 23, www.dailytrust.com.ng accessed June 9, 2015).

Al-Azhar University News later: www.azhar.edu.eg/en/News/al-azhar-university-http://ngex.com/news/public/newsinfo.php

Da'awa Co-ordination Council.2009. The Boko Haram tragedy. Minna: I.E.T. 2017 "Is Boko Haram? Minna, I.E.T.

Darulifta Cairo,Egypt: www.dar-alifta.org.

Darulifta Cairo www.dar-alifta.com.

Darulifta Cairo www.dar-alifta.net.

Al-Azhar University News later: www.azhar.edu.eg/en/News/al-azhar-university-http://ngex.com/news/public/newsinfo.php.

Hassan, Ibrahim Haruna. 2015. An Introduction to Islamic Movements and Modes of Thoughts in Nigeria. PAS/ISITA Working Papers No.1 program of African studies Northwestern University 620 Library Place Evanston, Illinois 60208-4110 U.S.A.

International Crisis Group Africa Report N°216 | 3 April 2014 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency", Brussels, Belgiu.

Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos September 2014. Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency? Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House. London: SW1Y 4LE.

- Ngex News. 2009. we have started a Jihad in Nigeria. Which no Force on Earth can Stop-Boko Haram. August 17, <http://ngex.com/news/public/newsinfo.php?mid=8469>.
- Quadri Y.A. 2013. All in the name of God the 133rd Inaugural lecture. Nigeria: University of Ilorin.
- Shakir, Husam. 2017. Al-Muzhar Fiy Ta'ariy fi bi Jami'atil Azhar. Cairo: Darul Imam Razeey.
- Albaihaqi, Abubakar. 1994. Sunan Albaihaqi Alkubrah. Makkatul Mukarramah: Darul baz.
- Ahmad bin Hanbal, Imam. 1999. Musnad Imam Ahmad bn Hanbal. Jordan: Muassatu Risalah Amman.
- Abdullah , Muhammad bin Yazid Abu (n.d), Sunan Ibn Majah. Beirut Lebanon: Darul Fikr.
- Walker, Andrew June 2012. What Is Boko Haram? by the United States Institute of Peace. Washington, U.S.A: Special Report 308.