

Research Paper

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# Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency?

## Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis



**CHATHAM  
HOUSE**

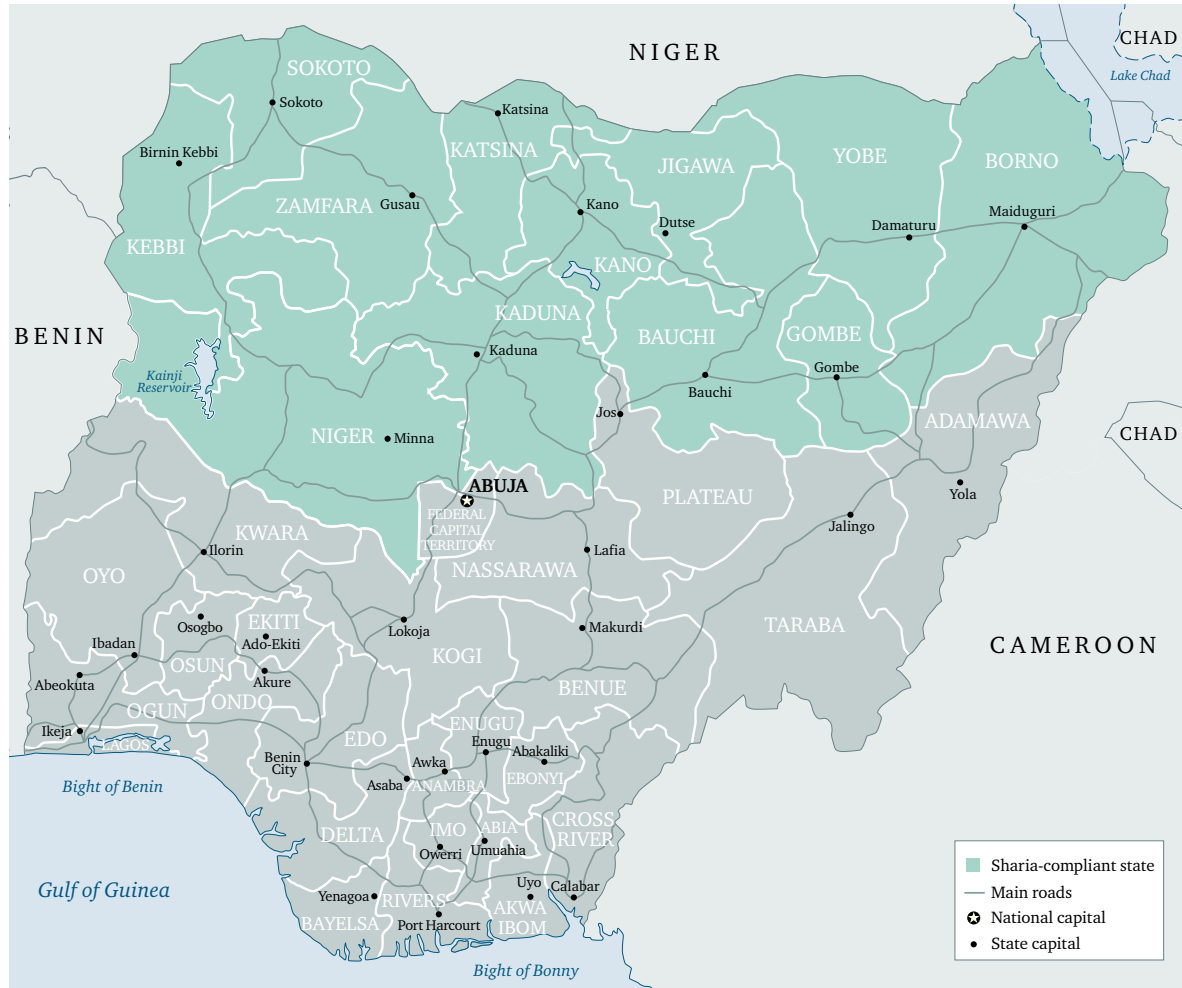
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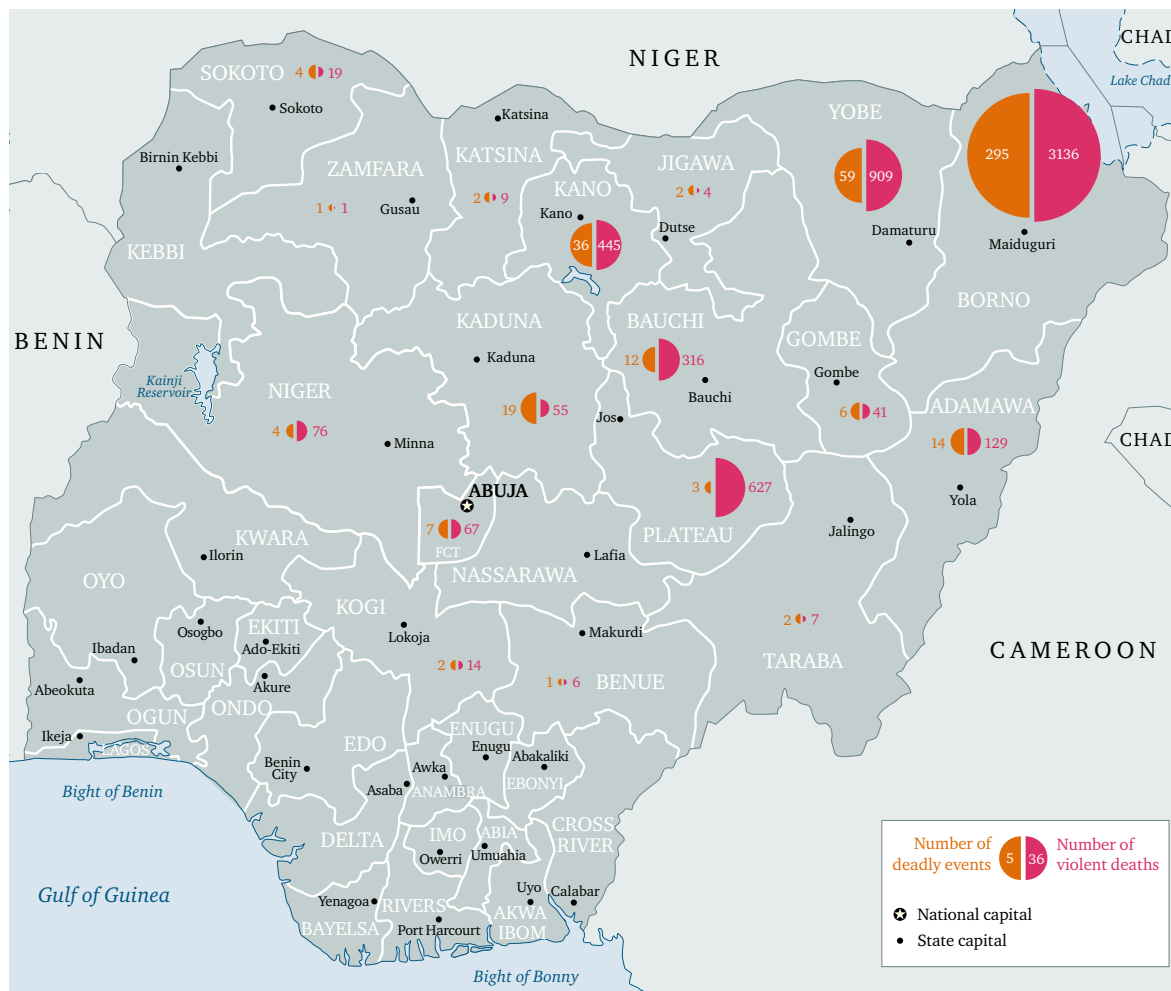
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Source: Modified from map by Institut français de géopolitique; Nigeria Watch data (June 2006–October 2013).

## Summary

Boko Haram has been evolving in northeastern Nigeria for over a decade. An extremely violent Islamist movement, it has in 2014 entered a new transitional phase. The inability of Nigeria's armed forces to obstruct its onslaught, combined with a higher international profile, have lent it a confidence and ambition that appear to have prompted increasingly strategic behaviour, alongside its ongoing indiscriminate and widespread attacks against civilian and state targets.

The movement grew out of socio-economic flux that came with a process of democratic transition, coupled with the consequences of decades of mismanagement resulting from military rule and corruption. In a sense, Boko Haram too has been in a constant state of flux: it has always adapted to changing circumstances, with its methods and membership reflecting this. This has allowed for multiple descriptions of the group to endure, bridging different narratives of terrorism, insurgency and criminality, where different drivers of conflict and instability have converged.

Unique in Nigeria for its combination of sectarianism and terrorist tactics, Boko Haram is skilled at exploiting state institutional weaknesses. Its familiarity with the terrain in Borno state, its home territory, enables it to navigate around a demoralized and deficient security presence to carry out attacks with impunity.

Boko Haram was not a violent movement at its inception, nor at the point of its transition to a terrorist network in 2009–10 was it a movement of such size and organization as to be a national threat. But responses to Boko Haram have suffered owing to the dearth of credible information and the triumph of vested interests in this opaque context. The uncertainties continue, and it is an amalgamation of the lack of facts, competing political interests, multiplying local grievances and under-resourced yet enmeshed armed forces in the northeast of Nigeria that has provided Boko Haram with the space, motivation and opportunity to grow and further entrench itself in its northeastern stronghold.

The movement's ability to use this situation to present itself as a significant threat of substantial capacity, together with the public messaging by its leader, Abubakar Shekau, and the criss-crossing of borders by its members, have led to speculation over the nature of its international links. But while a more internationalized and networked Boko Haram may evolve, viewing the problem through an international prism risks inappropriate policy responses. Boko Haram is strongly rooted in its domestic context and grew out of confrontation with the Nigerian state: it is host to a multiplicity of domestic actors and interests and operates in a complex political environment. Any external actors seeking a more active engagement in the crisis, for whatever reason, risk becoming entangled in what is ultimately a Nigerian crisis.

The actions of Nigeria's security forces have been a significant determinant in the trajectory of the crisis. Since the military repression of the Boko Haram uprising in July 2009, continued massacres, extra-judicial killings and arrests without trial have widened the gap between communities and the armed forces. The purpose of the presence of the armed forces in the northeast needs to change: the only sustainable way to combat Boko Haram is to protect civilians. Without a reordering of priorities and visible efforts to regain the trust of communities, Nigeria's military will be caught fighting an interminable insurgency.

For those seeking to impede Boko Haram's violent advance, Nigeria's coming general elections in 2015 are an important consideration. It will become more difficult to distinguish between ideologically or grievance-driven Boko Haram attacks, politically manipulated attacks and violent political militias that may or may not claim to be affiliates of the movement. Although the April 2014 kidnapping of more than 200 children, still missing, focused new and significant international attention on Nigeria and Boko Haram and triggered offers of assistance by Nigeria's international partners, it is in their capacity to support dialogue, witness protection and the provision of humanitarian relief and shelter for displaced civilians, as well as providing institutional support for inter-agency cooperation, that these partners can be most helpful.

The Boko Haram threat to Nigeria overall has been more oblique than a direct physical threat. The movement has been continually eroding a still nascent sense of cohesion and will to accommodate and compromise in such a diverse nation. This has served to legitimize reactive and short-term policy responses to one of the most complex, unique and poorly understood security crises Nigeria has ever faced.

## Introduction

Nigeria has a history of Islamist sects within its borders. Not all have been violent movements, some existing peacefully in parallel with the state. And not all of Nigeria's violent sects are Islamist; one such is the Ombatse cult, which clashed with security forces in Nasarawa state in May 2013. Until Boko Haram's transition to extreme violence, perhaps the most virulent of the radical Islamic movements was the Maitatsine uprising in the 1980s or the Yan Shi'a movement in the 1990s. But all of these movements could be described as international in some respect: their members or ideologies all crossed beyond Nigeria's northern borders, or they referred to global models of Islamism in Iran or Saudi Arabia.

Now defined as an international terrorist organization, Boko Haram is no different in this regard. There is a lot of speculation about the sect and its links with foreign jihadists. But it is its splinter group, Ansaru, that exhibited much more potential to become Al-Qaeda's Nigerian affiliate. Unlike al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram has no known connections to Nigeria's diaspora. This northeastern violent extremist sect has fused itself to external ideological influences and the tools of global communication but, while benefiting from porous borders, it has remained focused on Nigerian targets and has echoes of other African uprisings that grew out of social grievances. It mutated into a fanatically violent terrorist movement with shades of cultist and criminal motivations over a period of years of mishandled responses by government and security forces.

A peculiarity of Boko Haram in Nigeria is not its criminality but the sectarian nature of its agenda, which is distinct from the dynamics of resource-driven localized violent conflicts between different ethnic groups in Plateau state, or the ethnic claims of insurgent groups such as the O'odua People's Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Based in Nigeria's semi-arid northeast, Boko Haram does not have access to the economic leverage of oil to pressure the government. It adopted the iconography and some of the tactics of foreign jihadist movements, in particular suicide attacks, which had never before been seen in Nigeria. But while this and the extreme nature of its violence, including against children, is of such significant international concern that more countries are becoming engaged in the security response to the crisis, Boko Haram's ideology and tactics do not prove sustained international operational connections and coordination. International interests were much more threatened by MEND in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta.

*As the Boko Haram crisis has persisted through the years as opportunities to address it have been missed, so the situation has become more entrenched, with the consequence of a seeming reduction in the policy options available to respond.*

This paper examines Boko Haram's roots and charts its evolution, exploring apparent contradictions and highlighting uncertainties, including around the nature of the group and its links beyond Nigeria's border. The paper assesses the consequences of the group's development and actions, and the flawed responses. As the Boko Haram crisis has persisted through the years as opportunities to address it have been missed, so the situation has become more entrenched, resulting in a seeming reduction in the policy options available to respond. But there are steps that can be taken, primarily by Nigerian state and non-state actors, but also by Nigeria's neighbours and international partners.

# Defying Definition: The Multiple Classifications of an Amorphous Movement

Boko Haram has been variously described as a radical religious sect, a violent insurgency, a terrorist organization, a network of criminal gangs, a political tool and a cult. In its early days, some saw it as a social movement for the poor. It has always been anti-state and has always purported to pursue an Islamist agenda. It has not always been so extreme or so indiscriminate in its violence. It is possible to ascribe multiple definitions and motivations to the movement since it comprises a complex set of individuals and interests that have been evolving for over a decade. Therefore responses to the crisis must be attuned to what can be seemingly contradictory interests and actions.

## Origins

The movement remains mysterious, with little evidence to substantiate different allegations about its true agenda. Since the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls in Borno state in April 2014, which drew an unprecedented level of international media attention to the movement, Boko Haram has been portrayed as anti-women, anti-Christian, anti-education and terrorist. According to the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA) to President Goodluck Jonathan, 'the sect is ideologically linked to Al Qaeda' and 'it rejects peaceful coexistence with Christians'.<sup>1</sup> While these facets related to gender, religion and politics are all correct, they paint an incomplete picture and on their own limit the understanding of a group that has mostly killed Muslims and young men.<sup>2</sup> This incomplete focus also detracts from a contextual understanding of how the movement developed and became increasingly criminalized over a period of years during which civilians have also been killed by security forces.

The sect's real name is the 'Sunni Community for the propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad' (*Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad*). Nicknamed Boko Haram ('Western education is prohibited'), it was founded around 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, a radical preacher based in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. Its original source of inspiration came from the Movement for the Eradication of Heresies and the Implementation of Sunnah,<sup>3</sup> known as the Izala ('Eradication'), a Nigerian Wahhabi Salafi organization created under the aegis of Sheikh Mahmud Abubakar Gumi in 1978.<sup>4</sup> The difference, however, is that the Izala reject armed struggle. While they have security personnel, the *yan agaji* ('those who help'), to police their religious meetings they favour negotiation over confrontation with the state.

Yusuf himself was inspired by Saudi Salafi scholars: the Ninth Lesson of his book is a copy of an anticolonial publication condemning the 'Westernization of education in the Land of Islam', written

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the National Security Adviser, Abuja, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Chouin, Gérard, Reinert, Manuel and Apard, Elodie (2014), 'Body Count and Religion in the Boko Haram Crisis: Evidence from the Nigeria Watch Database', in Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (ed.) (2014), *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security, and the State in Nigeria*, Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria; Leiden: African Studies Centre, Waposo Series No. 2, pp. 213–36. See also: <http://www.nigeriawatch.org>.

<sup>3</sup> *Jama'at Izalat al-Bida' wa Iqamat as-Sunnah*. See Loimeier, Roman (1997), *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 415 pp.

<sup>4</sup> References to Saudi theologians and the plagiarism of the book written by Mohammed Yusuf testify to this. Yusuf, Mohammed (n.d.), *This is Our Faith and Our Da'wa*, Maiduguri, Al Farba, pp. 46–96. See the analysis of Moumouni, Seyni (2012), 'Boko Haram: Éléments de la 'aqida de Mohammed Yusuf', Niamey. Document in possession of the author.



by Sheikh Bakr bin Abdullah Abu Zayd, formerly of the Saudi Ministry of Justice and a member of the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas.<sup>5</sup> Boko Haram combatants still refer to the Salafi Creed of Monotheism (*Tawhid*). In 2013, for example, they beheaded a policeman in the name of a prominent Saudi Islamic scholar.<sup>6</sup>

Like many Salafi organizations, Boko Haram believes that the full implementation of Sharia requires a change of political regime because a democratic and secular constitution contravenes and is an affront to the law of God.<sup>7</sup> For Mohammed Yusuf, the model of revolution was the jihad of Usman dan Fodio and the Sokoto caliphate established in 1804. The main difference from other radical Islamist movements in Nigeria is that Boko Haram publicly confronted the state; an approach established by Mohammed Yusuf. Unlike the Izala in Jos, Kaduna or Kano, Mohammed Yusuf did not advocate voting in elections and forbade his followers from working in the civil service. He did, however, compromise with the state government of Ali Modu Sheriff in 2003–04 in a short-lived foray into politics.

Mohammed Yusuf either quit or was expelled from the Izala when his spiritual mentor, Sheikh Adam Mahmud Jafar, called on his followers to vote for opposition candidate Muhammad Buhari in Nigeria's 2007 presidential elections. As voting legitimizes secular democracy, Yusuf regarded participation in elections as heresy. Sheikh Jafar was killed in Kano in 2007, most likely by the sect, and Mohammed Yusuf probably wrote his book in 2008 to reshape the Izala doctrine according to his more radical interpretation. It is thus difficult to identify the different sources of inspiration of the group. Some scholars claim that Boko Haram is a mix of the Saudi Wahhabi movement, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Iranian Shia Islam,<sup>8</sup> though with little evidence to back this. The leader of the Nigerian Yan Shi'a, Ibrahim al-Zakzaki, strongly denies that Mohammed Yusuf was his student.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the mix of inspirations, Boko Haram is a sectarian movement. In its original form, it had a welfare system that attracted the poor. Mohammed Yusuf would arrange 'cheap marriages' for his followers in otherwise very 'costly' environments.<sup>10</sup> The original smaller group, with its grassroots following, acted as a cohesive unit and retaliated to avenge killings of its members. For this reason and its rejection of Western education, Boko Haram is often compared to the Maitatsine movement of the 1970s and 1980s, also in northern Nigeria. But in his book Mohammed Yusuf does not absolutely denounce all modern things: Boko Haram makes use of Western technology, while Maitatsine was a Luddite heterodox Islamist movement that spoke out against the use of radios, watches, bicycles and cars. Moreover, *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* is closer to the Salafi doctrine, a position that may partly explain its resilience and capacity to survive longer.

Nicknamed Maitatsine, that movement's founder Mohammed Marwa came from a pagan community of northern Cameroon.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Boko Haram has always straddled Nigeria's porous boundaries with the Republic of Niger, Chad and Cameroon, as borders drawn by the British, French and Germans towards the end of the nineteenth century have little social relevance set against the cultural unity of the old empire of Kanem-Bornu. Since its inception in 2002, Boko Haram has had connections

<sup>5</sup> Sheikh Bakr bin Abdullah Abu Zayd (2000), *Al-madâris al-âlamîya al-âjñabiyya al-istis'mâriyya: târikhuhâ wa makhâtiruhâ* ['Foreign international and colonial schools: their history and danger'], Riyadh, 70pp. See [http://www.islamhouse.com/117118/ar/ar/books/سرداىل\\_اىرطاخو\\_اهخيرات\\_فيرامجتسالا\\_فيبنجالا\\_فيملالعل](http://www.islamhouse.com/117118/ar/ar/books/سرداىل_اىرطاخو_اهخيرات_فيرامجتسالا_فيبنجالا_فيملالعل).

<sup>6</sup> Perry, Alex (2014), 'The Hunt for Boko Haram', London, Newsweek Insight, 50 pp.

<sup>7</sup> Yusuf, *This is Our Faith and Our Da'wa*.

<sup>8</sup> Murtada, Ahmad (2013), *Boko Haram in Nigeria: Its Beginnings, Principles and Activities*, Kano, Bayero University, Salafi Manhaj, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with the author, Zaria, 2 October 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See the interview of Kashim Shettima in Alli, Yusuf, 'Boko Haram not faceless, says Borno governor', *Nation*, 20 February 2012, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> He converted to Islam in his early youth and migrated to Kano from his hometown, Marwa. See Zahradeen, Nasir (1988), *The Maitatsine Saga*, Zaria, Hudahuda, 117 pp.

in Nigeria's neighbouring countries. So it has always been 'international' in the same way that communities around Nigeria's porous northeastern border region are.<sup>12</sup> Yet the focus of radicalization and of the movement's objectives has been within Nigeria's borders.

### Adaptation and motivation

A combination of structural and circumstantial factors explains the radicalization of the sect and its transition to violence. Boko Haram took root against a backdrop of poverty. But this does not explain why it emerged in Borno state and not in Kaduna or Kano states, which were the epicentres of radical Islam and religious violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The neighbouring region of Diffa in the Republic of Niger is much poorer. But Diffa is better governed, less corrupt and less affected by a sense of marginalization and social injustice (see section on the role of the international community). In Borno state, the development and endurance of Boko Haram is linked to the skill and charisma of founder Mohammed Yusuf and political manipulation by the former state governor Ali Modu Sheriff, who temporarily gained the support of the sect by promising to strictly apply Sharia law and won the state elections in 2003.

Before widening their targets, Boko Haram directed their frustration at educated urban dwellers, seen as corrupt, accused of being bad Muslims and inevitably compromised because they are wealthy.

In the same vein, there is no evidence that Boko Haram has particular support from the poor, or in 2014 is fighting for economic justice. It has been alleged that the *Almajirai* itinerant students of Koranic schools are Boko Haram foot-soldiers because they are beggars, have no access to modern education and are easy to indoctrinate to carry out suicide attacks. Such an argument assumes that there is a causal connection between poverty or illiteracy and participation in terrorism, but studies show that this is not always the case.<sup>13</sup> Within Boko Haram and its splinter groups, some elements went to university, including the British-born Nigerian Army deserter, Aminu Sadiq Ogwuche, allegedly involved in the 2014 bombings at Nyanya, Abuja. It is currently not possible to draw conclusions on the extent to which poverty is a driver or a feature of Boko Haram's membership since the social profile of the group remains unknown, as does the balance of membership, interests and hierarchy.

Poor governance, frustration and a sense of injustice among those who live at Nigeria's peripheries, be it geographically or socio-economically, were certainly important in the establishment of Boko Haram. Sharia law was seen as a way to restore social justice, and the radical lectures of Mohammed Yusuf appealed to youth from Maiduguri and smaller towns as well as remote villages. Boko Haram is also the product of a rural exodus that uprooted traditional communities. One Borno state capital resident observed that '[Boko Haram's] militants hate people from Maiduguri with a passion', identifying and executing those from Maiduguri stopped in passenger vehicles and burning trucks transporting goods

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<sup>12</sup> Some of the early members of Boko Haram allegedly hail from Cameroon or Chad, such as Mamman Nur, or from Bama near the Mandara Mountains, such as Aminu Tashen-Ilimi. The so-called Taliban of Yobe state, the remnants of which came to form the most radical youth branch of Boko Haram, had no connection with Afghanistan. After their first settlement was destroyed by a local militia in a dispute over a fishing pond, they moved to Kanamma near Niger. They later clashed with the Nigerian police in late 2003 and took refuge in the Mandara Mountains of Cameroon in 2004. Some of them went to Maiduguri to join Mohammed Yusuf, who had fled to Saudi Arabia to avoid arrest. Yusuf returned to Borno state when local authorities negotiated a truce with him at the end of 2004.

<sup>13</sup> The most radical militants of violent Islamic groups in Palestine were more educated than the average. Krueger, Alan and Malečková, Jitka (Autumn 2003), 'Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 119–44.

to and from the city.<sup>14</sup> Before widening its targets, Boko Haram directed its frustration at educated urban dwellers, seen as corrupt, accused of being bad Muslims and inevitably compromised because they are wealthy.

The movement grew out of socio-economic flux that came with a process of democratic transition, coupled with the consequences of decades of mismanagement resulting from military rule and corruption. In a sense, Boko Haram too has been in a constant state of flux: it has always adapted to changing circumstances, with methods and membership reflecting this. This has allowed for its multiple definitions to endure, bridging different narratives of terrorism, insurgency and criminality, where different drivers of conflict and instability have converged.

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<sup>14</sup> Idris, Hamza, Ibrahim, Yahaya and Sawab, Ibrahim, 'Attacks: Konduga, Bama Residents Flood Maiduguri', *Sunday Trust*, 23 February 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/sunday/index.php/top-stories/16118-attacks-konduga-bama-residents-flood-maiduguri>.

## The 2009 Turning Point: From Extreme Ideology to Extreme Violence

Mohammed Yusuf's sect cannot be reduced simply to a revolt of the rural poor or the urban destitute against the rich. The military repression of Boko Haram's July 2009 uprising and emergency rule in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states since May 2013 certainly contributed to an intensification of violence and the movement's transformation into a terrorist group.

A first consequence of the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf in police custody in July 2009 was the fragmentation of Boko Haram and marginalization of the 'doves' within the sect. Under the aegis of Abubakar Shekau, the 'hawks' now dominate. Those who were keen to negotiate with the state authorities were killed by the security forces in an effort to crush the movement entirely. These moderates were more easily identified and located – and some even had surrendered to the security forces. Such members included Bugi Foi, who until his resignation in 2008 was the Borno state minister of religious affairs under former governor Ali Modu Sheriff. Other moderates were eliminated by the group itself.<sup>15</sup>

A second important consequence of the military repression of 2009 was that the movement went underground. Security forces destroyed its mosque in Maiduguri, Markaz, and some of the leadership went into exile and made contact with foreign jihadist groups.<sup>16</sup> The sect also established or consolidated underground cells in Kano, northern Nigeria's most populated urban centre, Okene in Kogi state, its most southern outpost in Nigeria, and Kaduna city, where Aminu Tashen-Ilimi, the former student leader of the Nigerian Taliban, allegedly retired after the killing of Mohammed Yusuf. But the main consequence was clear: the government no longer had a leader to negotiate with for peace and Boko Haram survived the 2009 offensive by adapting to a diffuse structure. Decimated and having lost its unifying ideological axis, the Supreme Council of Boko Haram, the Shura, was renewed with younger and more radical elements; it allegedly grew from 17 to 37 members, a process which would complicate decision-making and factionalize the sect into autonomous cells.<sup>17</sup>

Boko Haram also fragmented as dissenting groups emerged. The most prominent of these is Ansaru, founded in 2011 by Abubakar Adam Kamar,<sup>18</sup> which demonstrates a greater degree of ideological convergence with Al-Qaeda than its parent movement does. Unlike Boko Haram, which counts women and children among its members, Ansaru is a professional terrorist organization rather than a sect, and all of its members are combatants. Ansaru distinguished itself by attacking international targets

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<sup>15</sup> Believed to have strong fetish powers, Abdullahi Damasak, also known as Mohammed Marwan, was repudiated by current leader Shekau because he was willing to accept a ceasefire with the government in early 2013. Engineer Abubakar Shehu, also known as Abu Sumayya, was suspected of betrayal and injured by the faction of Khalid Barnawi during a failed attempt to assassinate him. Arrested by the security forces, he helped to locate expatriate hostages held by the splinter group Ansaru in Kano in 2012.

<sup>16</sup> As revealed by documents found in Pakistan in the cache where Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011. See Burke, Jason, 'Bin Laden files show al-Qaida and Taliban leaders in close contact', *The Guardian* (UK), 29 April 2012.

<sup>17</sup> ICG (2014), *Curbing Violence in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Insurgency*, Brussels, International Crisis Group, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Also known as Abu Yasir.

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and criticizing Abubakar Shekau for massacring 'innocent Muslims'.<sup>19</sup> Killed by the security forces in Kano in 2012, its leader Abubakar Adam Kamar was replaced by Khalid Barnawi,<sup>20</sup> who is said to have served as the link between Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

In August 2009, barely one month after Yusuf's death, an individual named Thani Umar claimed to have taken over the leadership of Boko Haram, making reference to Al-Qaeda.<sup>21</sup> But in a video released in June 2010 the self-proclaimed Imam Abubakar Shekau resurfaced after having been declared dead by the authorities. He instructed his followers to target security forces and traitors but to spare civilians. The change was dramatic: for the first time Boko Haram carried out suicide attacks and extended its operations beyond Borno state. In August 2011, in something that remains an anomaly in its targets, it bombed the UN's Nigerian headquarters in Abuja. It also began to attack churches, which it had not done before 2009. On 2 January 2012, Abubakar Shekau gave a three-day ultimatum to Christians to convert to Islam or leave northern Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> The following week, Boko Haram members attacked a bishop in Gombe state, as well as a church in Yola and an Igbo community in Mubi, both in Adamawa state.

Boko Haram also increased its criminal activities through multiple bank robberies to compensate for the loss of revenue from local political sponsors after the election of new governors in Borno and Kano in the 2011 elections. Because it does not follow the orthodox Salafi model, it is unlikely that it received substantial funding – if any at all – from wealthy Saudi or Qatari individuals. Furthermore it probably requires relatively little funding for the types of attacks it has hitherto carried out. For supplies and weapons, the group relies on the Nigerian Army, local extortion and the microcredit system set up by Yusuf before 2009, when the sect invested in transport, car washing or selling clean water, extending its commercial network from its mosque in Maiduguri to neighbouring markets and up to Diffa in the Republic of Niger. In Maiduguri, Baga fish market and its motor park became a focal point of violence because traders resisted extortion and informed the police against Boko Haram. The sect retaliated, executing 'collaborators', while the security forces reacted by carrying out more raids on the market. In 2013, the group took advantage of a local group's kidnapping of a French family from northern Cameroon, accepting the hostages in its first involvement in the abduction of foreigners. The post-2009 Boko Haram is thus very different from the original sect and Abubakar Shekau now rarely refers to Mohammed Yusuf in his videos.

**Despite its extreme violence and will to foment chaos, Boko Haram appeared to have no clear strategy to destabilize the state. Its attacks were largely retaliatory: responding to military assaults, assassinating its opponents and terrorizing local Christian minorities.**

Despite its extreme violence and will to foment chaos, Boko Haram appeared to have no clear strategy to destabilize the state. Its attacks were largely retaliatory: responding to military assaults, assassinating its opponents and terrorizing local Christian minorities. It is certainly careful in its planning and demonstrates some skill. It has taken advantage of public holidays for its attacks, for

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<sup>19</sup> See the charter of the 'Supporters of Muslims in the Land of the Blacks' (*Jama'at Ansar Al Muslimin Fi Bilad al-Sudan*, aka Ansaru), published on the internet on 18 January 2012 and translated from Arabic by Mathieu Guidère, in Pérouse de Montclos (ed.) (2014), *Boko Haram*, pp. 246–58.

<sup>20</sup> Also known as Abu Usamatal Ansari.

<sup>21</sup> Murtada (2013), *Boko Haram in Nigeria*, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram Widens Terror Campaign', January 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/23/nigeria-boko-haram-widens-terror-campaign>.

example carrying out a prison break in Bauchi during Ramadan and two days before Eid al-Fitr in September 2010, the bombing of a church on the outskirts of Abuja on Christmas Day in 2011, and a bomb attack in Kaduna during Easter 2012. With the exception of the bombing of the national police headquarters in Abuja in June 2011 and telecoms base stations in September 2012, it was only after the Chibok abductions and its growing profile in 2014 that Boko Haram began to attack strategic targets like bridges. The December 2013 destruction of the Nigerian Air Force base in Maiduguri is most likely to have been a reprisal attack. Boko Haram has not focused its attacks specifically on any one group; it had not, for example, exclusively targeted the southern Igbo living in the northeast.

But the situation is changing again, the ramifications of the Chibok abductions proving a catalyst for the next phase in Boko Haram's evolution. In May 2014, the group attacked Sabon Gari in Kano, an area inhabited by Christian Igbos. The victims of such attacks are buried in their home states, which could provoke reprisal attacks against Muslim minorities in the south, risking a cycle of escalating retaliatory attacks. That same month, during an insurgent attack on Limankara in Borno state, a bridge linking Borno and Adamawa state was destroyed, and around the same time, explosives were detonated on a highway bridge linking Nigeria and Cameroon during an attack in the Ngala local government area. Another bridge was destroyed during an attack in Yobe state in July. Such a cluster of attacks on infrastructure suggests the movement is evolving a more strategic approach. In August 2014, it took this a step further, declaring a 'caliphate' having taken the Borno local government area of Gwoza, home to an estimated quarter of a million people. Whether or not Boko Haram is drawing inspiration from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL), this is significant as a signal that the movement is growing in confidence and ambition, while Nigeria's military insists that the country's territory remains intact. Abubakar Shekau also claimed responsibility for an explosion in the port of Apapa in Lagos in June 2014, the sect's southernmost attack. Any subsequent attacks in the geographically opposite side of Nigeria may point to a capacity for sustained extended reach and Boko Haram's transition into a national rather than local aggressor.

### Box 1: Boko Haram and the Chibok abductions

In two videos received by the French Press Agency on 5 and 12 May 2014, Abubakar Shekau claims responsibility for the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls and justifies the abduction.<sup>9</sup> Speaking in Arabic, he says:

These girls you're talking about, some of them were Christian but they converted to Islam [...] They now accept that Allah is the only God and that Jesus is one of his messengers [...] This is my message to the world and, yes, I'm content with that.

The girls who did not convert to Islam will not be released as long as you detain our people [...] But the Muslim girls are our sisters.

Shekau also speaks in Hausa:

You're worried because I kidnapped schoolgirls. That's because I decided to put an end to the perversity of the school of the whites (*boko*). Girls, go and marry or I'll sell you on the market [...] God also allows us to get a ransom. You want to give us 3 billion? Yes, but we don't want your money.

Islam acknowledges slavery. Don't let them fool you because we hold slaves [...] It's the organization of the idiots, the UN. That's what I call them, Ban Ki-moon and his people [...] Why do you condemn slavery? I have no country like Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger or Chad. Everywhere I go, I'm at home. My real country is the Land of Islam [where there are slaves].

Shekau goes on to claim that the Koran approves of hostage-taking. He dismisses the Islamic scholars who condemned the kidnapping, arguing that the Prophet himself had slaves and prisoners:

Don't tell me I can't sell Muslim people on the market. Do you mean that Christian girls are Muslim? Or that democratic politicians are Muslim? I repeat: I'm going to sell these girls. I'm not going to release them as long as you detain our people and brutalize our own women. One of our women, you released her but you kept her baby. Do you think we don't know?

You're making too much noise about these schoolgirls. Don't you know that I also hold boys? I will also kidnap Westerners. Even Obama, I will capture him. I will release them only if they accept conversion to Islam.

A true Muslim will never be our slave. Our hostages are Christians or corrupted Muslims who follow the Christian way [...] This is my main message. If you really want me to free the schoolgirls who did not convert to Islam [...], release our brothers and sisters in Borno, Yobe, Kano, Kaduna, Abuja, Lagos, and up to Enugu. I swear, anywhere you go in this country, you will find our brothers in jail. Some of them have been detained for five years and could never see their wives and children [...] You even poisoned some twenty of them. And then you come and cry because we kidnapped a few girls! You complain about Shekau doing this or that. Oh yes, I'm going to sell them. Yes, I'm going to sell them, for sure.

The kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls occurred in a region where forced marriages and kidnappings by the so-called Zargina bandits are common.<sup>b</sup> The historical context is important when examining Shekau's statements. Prior to colonization, Borno was subject to frequent slave raids to supply the trans-Saharan trade or the plantation economy of the Sokoto Caliphate. During the 19th century, Fulani jihad saw the capture of both pagans and 'bad' Muslims despite the Koran forbidding the enslavement of Muslims.<sup>c</sup> Yet these raids did not supply the transatlantic slave trade from the south.<sup>d</sup> It is very unlikely that today Shekau would sell the Chibok girls to the human-trafficking networks based in the southern state of Edo for prostitution abroad.<sup>e</sup>

The Mandara Mountains in Adamawa state on the border with Cameroon, where Boko Haram combatants are known to hide, were historically both a refuge for pagans and a place frequently raided by Muslim Fulani warlords. Colonization initially exacerbated the situation when shifting German, French and British control of northern Cameroon during the First World War created a political vacuum that facilitated banditry. The Europeans relied on local warlords to rule the country, and although they banned the slave trade, domestic slavery for local markets was permitted until the 1920s. Fewer export markets for slaves reduced their value and the raids by the Fulani warlords became more reckless and violent as a result.<sup>f</sup> Domestic slaves were used as currency, like cattle, or as a way to extract ransom and settle disputes.

<sup>a</sup> The author is grateful to Mathieu Guidère and other colleagues for their help in translating the videos.

<sup>b</sup> Seignobos, Christian (2011), 'Le phénomène Zargina dans le Nord du Cameroun: Coupeurs de route et prises d'otages, la crise des sociétés pastorales mbororo', *Afrique contemporaine*, No. 239, pp. 35–59; 'Le pulaaku, ultime recours contre les coupeurs de route du Nord au Cameroun', *Afrique contemporaine* No. 240, pp. 13–23.

<sup>c</sup> Van Beek, Walter (1988), 'Purity and Statecraft: the Fulani Jihad and its Empire', in Van Beek, Walter (ed.), *The Quest for Purity: Dynamics of Puritan Movements*, Berlin, pp. 149–82.

<sup>d</sup> Lovejoy, Paul (2002), 'Islam, Slavery, and Political Transformation in West Africa: Constraints on the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade', *Outre Mers* No. 336/7, pp. 247–82.

<sup>e</sup> Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (2012), 'Les défis méthodologiques de l'étude statistique des migrations internationales dans des Etats faibles: le cas de la traite des femmes au Nigeria', Paris, CEPED Working Paper No. 28, 15 pp., <http://www.ceped.org/?Les-defis-methodologiques-de-l>.

<sup>f</sup> Van Beek, Walter (November 2012), 'Intensive Slave Raiding in the Colonial Interstice: Hamman Yaji and the Mandara Mountains (North Cameroon and North-Eastern Nigeria)', *Journal of African History* Vol. 53, No. 3, pp. 301–23.

## The Use of Force: For What, for Whom?

The implementation of emergency rule in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states constituted another transition point in Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis. For the first time since the Biafra war of 1967–70, the Nigerian Air Force bombed its own territory. In 2009, the police and the armed forces of the Joint Task Force (JTF) were deployed to urban centres to quell Boko Haram violence. But from 2013 they began to operate in rural areas, generating an increase in collateral damage. In April 2013 more than 200 people were killed and hundreds wounded by the JTF in the village of Baga in Borno state.

The actions of Nigeria's security forces have been a significant determinant in the trajectory of the crisis. Since the July 2009 repression, continued massacres, extra-judicial killings and arrests without trial have widened the gap between communities and the armed forces, to the point where some civilians have sought the protection of Boko Haram, even if they did not initially sympathize with, support or subscribe to the actions and doctrine of the movement. As result of repression and forced conscription, the sect has allegedly grown from 4,000 members in 2009 to between 6,000 and 8,000 in 2014, against 15,000 soldiers deployed in Borno state.<sup>23</sup>

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One product of emergency rule has been local militias acting against Boko Haram, which have been brought into the government offensive as the 'Civilian JTF', or *Yan Gora* ('those who hold the cane'). The Civilian JTF serves not only as a source of intelligence but also as a proxy force to avoid a direct confrontation with the movement. This is the same tactic used by the Nigerian Army in Liberia in the 1990s, when it supported various factions against Charles Taylor.<sup>24</sup> But in response Boko Haram simply escalated its strategy of terror and increased attacks on entire villages to deter them from cooperating with the security forces. In a video released on 25 March 2014, Abubakar Shekau tells his followers not to spare women, the elderly, the mentally disabled or false converts.<sup>25</sup> Boko Haram used to target individuals such as informants, bootleggers who broke the Sharia ban on alcohol, Muslim clerics, Christian pastors and others who condemned the actions of the sect.<sup>26</sup> Some of the early attacks were only symbolic, destroying buildings representing the state, Western education or the traditional establishment, but avoiding large numbers of civilian casualties.

The role of and abuses by the Nigerian security forces are a critical factor in efforts to address the crisis. In addition to the failure of the JTF to protect civilian life and property, it lost the trust of the

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<sup>23</sup> Interview under Chatham House Rule, Abuja, July 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (1996), 'Libéria: des prédateurs aux ramasseurs de miettes', in Jean, François and Rufin, Jean-Christophe (eds), *Les économies de guerre dans les conflits de basse intensité*, Paris, Hachette Pluriel, pp. 269–97.

<sup>25</sup> The author wishes to thank anonymous translators for their help. See <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?html=12>.

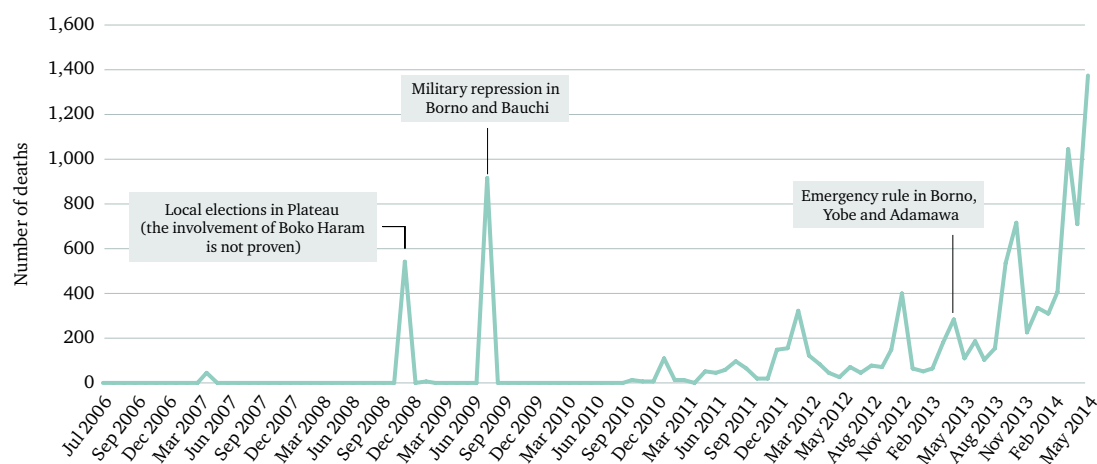
<sup>26</sup> Boko Haram members still do so. A video released on 4 October 2013, for instance, shows the beheading of a woman alleged to be a member of the Nigerian State Security Service (SSS).



people, an important resource in the battle against Boko Haram, as communities were also abused by the armed forces. The JTF were replaced by the 7th Division in September 2013. Nigerian security agencies do not have a track record of protecting civilians or informants and Nigeria does not have witness protection programmes. Local Muslim clerics no longer dare to condemn the movement because they risk being killed. There is a long list of sheikhs who have been assassinated by Boko Haram, including prominent radical Salafists such as Muhammad Auwal Adam Albani in Zaria in January 2014. Despite the aggression of the security forces in communities after 2009, fomenting fear of repercussions if suspected of supporting the movement, Boko Haram continues to be able to recruit new members – for instance from the Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri, from which it freed hundreds of civilian detainees in March 2014.

The upward trend in violence suggests that the more security forces have intervened, the worse the crisis has become (see Figure 1). Even if Abubakar Shekau is killed – a claim previously made but disproved, serving to undermine the credibility of the security forces – the autonomous cells of Boko Haram are likely to adapt and remain active, as they did after the killing of Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. Governments typically use both the carrot and the stick to win asymmetric wars against nebulous enemies, and in 2012 there were talks about an amnesty for the movement. But Boko Haram does not have the economic leverage of oil to press the government to sign an amnesty deal – unlike MEND in the Niger Delta – and there was less of an incentive to negotiate while it was still seen to be active only on Nigeria's periphery.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 1: The Boko Haram crisis: number of deaths caused by insurgents and security forces



Source: www.nigeriawatch.org.

Since 2013, emergency rule and Nigeria's proscription of Boko Haram as an organization as opposed to individual terrorists, the US, the UK and the UN have seemingly sanctioned repression as the solution. The important 'soft approach' of the National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, which outlines a holistic strategy including deradicalization programmes, community engagement and economic regeneration,<sup>28</sup> has ostensibly been lost in a process that has seen more extreme and widespread attacks by Boko Haram in 2014. Yet the situation will not improve without such strategies.

<sup>27</sup> Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (July 2014), 'Le Nigeria malgré Boko Haram: une puissance en devenir', *Diplomatie*, No. 69, pp. 20–23.

<sup>28</sup> Speech given by the National Security Adviser, Mohammed Sambo Dasuki, 'Nigeria's Soft Approach to Countering Terrorism', March 2014, Abuja.

Much like the communities in the region, Nigeria's armed forces operating in the northeast are ensnared in a worsening crisis, and knowledge of this, coupled with reports of lack of resources and malfunctioning equipment, are likely contributors to low morale, desertions and more recently, mutinies. It has been suggested that the deployed forces operate with less than \$100 million a year, which pales against the \$2 billion central allocation to the armed forces, the highest proportion of the national budget since the Biafra war (the military regimes of the 1980s and 1990s were not as generous). While there have been reports of non- or late payments to deployed troops, senior Abuja-based officers and contractors have also reportedly been making substantial financial gains from Nigeria's new war on terrorism.<sup>29</sup> Nigeria's Federal High Court in June 2014 ordered an investigation by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission into a \$470 million deal for the installation of CCTV security cameras, a failed project.<sup>30</sup> The entrenchment of vested interests of influential individuals in Abuja in an on-going insurgency in the northeast presents a significant threat to the effective implementation of policy responses.

The purpose of the presence of the armed forces needs to change: the only sustainable way to combat Boko Haram is to protect civilians. Without a reordering of priorities and visible efforts to regain the trust of communities, Nigeria's military will be caught fighting an interminable insurgency.

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<sup>29</sup> Interviews held under the Chatham House Rule, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Olansami, Kunle, 'Insurgency: Court Okays EFCC Probe Of N76bn CCTV Project', *Leadership*, 11 June 2014, <http://leadership.ng/news/374186/insurgency-court-okays-efcc-probe-n76bn-cctv-project>.

## Global Ambitions and International Reality: Boko Haram's External Links

There has been speculation about potential operational links between Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda.<sup>31</sup> In February 2003, Osama bin Laden named Nigeria as a country to be 'liberated'. A former US ambassador to Nigeria then warned that armed jihadist groups in northern Mali could spread to Nigeria.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Somalia and the Sahel, however, Nigeria is not geographically contiguous with the Arab world. Moreover, no Nigerians are known to have fought with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Foreign preachers were more likely to go to Nigeria. In 2006, for instance, Mohammed Yusuf was arrested with an envoy of Pakistan's Tablighi Jamaat,<sup>33</sup> Mohammad Ashafa, and accused of sending youth for military training in Mauritania, Mali and Niger. The two men were released in 2007 by President Umaru Yar'Adua for lack of evidence.

Map 3: Northeast Nigeria and its neighbours



Source: Modified from map no. 4228, United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section.

<sup>31</sup> Zenn, Jacob (2012), *Northern Nigeria's Boko Haram: The Prize in al-Qaeda's Africa Strategy*, Washington DC, Jamestown Foundation, 48 pp.

<sup>32</sup> Lyman, Princeton and Morrison, Stephen (January 2004), 'The Terrorist Threat in Africa', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1, pp. 75–86.

<sup>33</sup> The Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan is an extremist movement close to Al-Qaeda and associated with various terrorist organizations.

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Boko Haram uses Banki as its main entry point to Cameroon and has established camps on Lake Chad islands including Madayi and Mari.<sup>34</sup> Yet its members have continued to concentrate their violent struggle within Nigeria. A greater military involvement of Cameroon, Chad and Niger could incite the movement to open another front. In May 2014 suspected Boko Haram militants attacked a police station in Kousseri and a camp run by a Chinese engineering company in the far north of Cameroon.<sup>35</sup> However, it is not clear whether the organization has the capacity to sustain conflicts on multiple fronts (see Map 3).

In northern Mali, the success of AQIM and MUJWA (the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa) was clearly a source of inspiration for Boko Haram. In December 2011, it mounted a failed attack on Diffa in the Republic of Niger, to demonstrate that Borno jihadists were also capable of going beyond borders.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that some Boko Haram members even went to fight in northern Mali in 2012. There were reports of Nigerians in Timbuktu and Gao, with a local witness claiming that 200 members joined AQIM.<sup>37</sup> However, with the exception of a few witnesses including Canadian diplomat Robert Fowler, who was kidnapped by AQIM in the Republic of Niger in 2008 and who saw a Nigerian while being held captive, it is difficult to find hard evidence of a massive arrival of Boko Haram combatants in northern Mali.<sup>38</sup>

Contact between individuals to acquire weapons or train bombers is very likely. But this does not mean coordination or even friendly cooperation. The French Army found no trace of Boko Haram when it launched Operation Serval in northern Mali in 2013. Abubakar Shekau never pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda; in turn, he was disregarded by a movement that focuses more on Christians, 'Crusaders', Jews and foreigners. The doctrine of Yusuf was quite different from Osama bin Laden's in this regard. As for Abubakar Shekau himself, he appears to be too unstable, impetuous and unreliable to attract professional terrorists, even if he does now control territory, a prerequisite for Al-Qaeda support. Responses to the crisis have suffered from mistranslated and misquoted video footage.<sup>39</sup> The fact that in 2010 Abubakar Shekau and AQIM emir Abdelmalek Droukdel both expressed sympathy and solidarity for their struggling 'brothers' in northeastern Nigeria or northern Mali does not prove much. One Boko Haram communiqué from 2010 was put on AQIM's media platform, Al-Andalus. However, there was no follow-up. The movement has also produced videos in which Abubakar Shekau affirms its African struggle and denies the support of 'White and Arab mercenaries'.<sup>40</sup>

Boko Haram adopted the rhetoric and tactics of foreign jihadist groups. Abubakar Shekau recently stated his support for ISIL.<sup>41</sup> But while demonstrating an ideological link, references to conservative Saudi Salafi scholars or foreign jihadist groups do not prove an operational link with Al-Qaeda. Expressions of support for Boko Haram and its kidnapping of the Chibok girls on Chechen jihadist or Somali al-Shabaab websites do not mean that it is becoming internationalized; rather that it is drawing

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<sup>34</sup> Interviews with Nigerian refugees in Kiri-Kiri on Lake Chad, Bosso, Republic of Niger, July 2014. The border area of Mora and the village of Amchidé are now a focal point of violence in Cameroon. The Cameroonian security forces, for instance, killed eight alleged Boko Haram members near Banki on 24 June 2014.

<sup>35</sup> In October 2012, the Cameroonian mayor of Makary had already been assassinated because he collaborated with the security forces to track members of the sect.

<sup>36</sup> Author interviews under Chatham House Rule, Diffa, July 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Hinshaw, Drew, 'Timbuktu training site shows terrorists' reach', *Wall Street Journal*, 1 February 2013; Blair, David, 'Timbuktu: al-Qaeda's terrorist training academy in the Mali desert', *The Telegraph*, 11 February 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Fowler, Robert (2013), *Ma saison en enfer: 130 jours de captivité aux mains d'Al-Qaïda*, Montréal, QuébecAmérique, 440 pp.

<sup>39</sup> Such distortion also led the leaders of Boko Haram to complain of misrepresentation in the press and to attack the offices of *This Day* in May 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Video in possession of the author, received by the Agence France-Presse (AFP) on 25 March 2014 and claiming the attack on Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri. Translation from Hausa. In another video received by AFP on 5 May 2014, Shekau also dismisses the king of Saudi Arabia because he shook hands with Bush and Obama. 'We don't follow this Saudi Arabia that claims to be an Islamic Kingdom,' he says. And he adds: 'I know, I'm black. But I will never work for the white skins. Because of your light complexion, you pretend to be Arabs and you claim to speak a better Arabic than me. I don't care. I only follow the way of prophet Mohammed. I will follow nobody else, God forbids.' See <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?html=12>.

<sup>41</sup> Video released on 13 July 2014, in possession of the author.

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international attention.<sup>42</sup> Such statements of support by violent non-state or extremist actors attest to the globalization of extremist anti-state models.<sup>43</sup> A strategy of terror requires combatants to create fear: in this asymmetric conflict, the movement benefits from promoting an image of a behemoth with a wide and growing network that can strike anywhere.

The splinter group Ansaru, however, is certainly more aligned with the doctrine of Osama bin Laden. Its targets are more international and its original name was Al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel. In 2012 its videos claiming the kidnap and, later on, the killing of a German hostage in Kano were posted on AQIM's website.<sup>44</sup> Since mid-2013, it has been alleged that the group reconciled with Boko Haram out of necessity, to combine efforts against the Nigerian security forces. A commandant of Ansaru, Babagana 'Assalafi', who is close to AQIM, is said to have become Abubakar Shekau's deputy in January 2013. He was reportedly killed by the army in Sokoto three months later and replaced by Abu Sa'ad, who may also have died in August 2013. But such reports cannot be cross-checked and are difficult to confirm with security agencies.

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While a more internationalized and networked Boko Haram may evolve, framing the problem through this international prism brings significant risks to policy responses. The continuing lack of basic facts and evidence even while there is an urgent need for credible information has created space for speculation, which may also be leveraged by particular interests. But Boko Haram is strongly connected to its domestic context and grew out of confrontation with the Nigerian state: it is host to a multiplicity of actors and interests and operates in a complex political environment in Nigeria. Any external actors seeking a more active engagement in the crisis, for whatever reason, including self-interest, risk becoming entangled in what is ultimately a Nigerian crisis.

Regional governments that emphasize the international dimensions of non-state or terrorist actors may be seeking international support, such as military equipment and training, to help tackle what can seem intractable security challenges. But this may also be a route to international legitimacy: in power since a *coup d'état* in 1990, Chadian President Idriss Deby, for example, gained greater international standing because of Chad's participation in Operation Serval in Mali in 2013. The Chadian army, which is part of a Multilateral Joint Task Force (MJTF) with Niger and Nigeria against Boko Haram, is now regarded as the most effective African armed force to combat AQIM. Yet it was only in 2008 that this force was defeated during the battle of N'Djamena.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See <http://somalianewsroom.com/2014/05/13/al-shabaab-expresses-support-for-boko-haram-abduction-of-schoolgirls-in-nigeria/>.

<sup>43</sup> In the Niger Delta, for instance, Asari Dokubo converted to Islam and named his son Usama. Yet he did not lead a religious armed movement against the state and oil companies. Asari Dokubo also admitted meeting Mohammed Yusuf at Indimi Mosque in Maiduguri during the course of his Islamic studies in 1995–96. In 2006, he was then detained by the State Security Services in the same cell as the leader of the sect. Yet he is today one of the most vocal opponents of Boko Haram. See Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine, 'Conversion to Islam and Modernity in Nigeria: A View from the Underworld', *Africa Today*, Vol. 54, No. 4, July 2008, pp. 71–87.

<sup>44</sup> At the time, Ansaru obtained from the German authorities the liberation of a woman who was the website administrator of the Islamic Jihad Union. Filiz Gebwicz, aka Sayf Allah al-Ansari, was released in May 2012. But her husband, a German convert to Islam, has remained in jail since his arrest in April 2007 for planning to detonate car bombs at Ramstein Air Force base and Frankfurt Airport.

<sup>45</sup> A French military intervention had to crush the final assault by the armed opposition. Trained and used to fight in the Sahara desert, the elite units of the Chadian army are usually made up of Zaghawa, the ethnic group of the president. It was this group, his allies, which also tried to topple him in 2008. The detachment sent to Mali in 2013 was headed by two famous sons, one of President Idriss Deby, the other of Hassan Djamous, a hero of the battle of Maaten al-Sarra against Libya in 1987, who gave his name to the international airport in N'Djamena. The Zaghawa, however, are not familiar with Borno state. Regarding military operations in the south of Chad, President Deby usually prefers to involve Songhai units, as in the Central African Republic before 2014, where they contributed to the general looting of the country.

Cameroon's army is not part of the MJTF. It has a tense and complicated relationship with Nigeria, owing to a long-standing border dispute regarding the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula in the Gulf of Guinea. But the Boko Haram crisis has served as a means for Cameroon's President Paul Biya, in power since 1982, to win back French support, particularly with Cameroon's facilitation of (and alleged payment for) the liberation of the French Moulin-Fournier family, kidnapped from northern Cameroon in February 2013. Yaoundé has also deployed a special Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) to its border with Nigeria and negotiated a reciprocal right of hot pursuit along 8 kilometres of the border. One of the main objectives of the Paris Summit for Security in Nigeria in May 2014 was to involve President Biya in a common international military response to Boko Haram.

The war-torn Central African Republic, which has no border with Nigeria, presents a different case altogether. Some of its Seleka rebels claim to be members of Boko Haram simply because the Nigerian sect has come to be regarded as a model of resistance. It serves the interests of the anti-Balaka Christian militia to purport to be fighting jihadist terrorist organizations to win international support. Were Boko Haram members seeking to hide in western Central African Republic,<sup>46</sup> it would be very difficult to do so because of the activities of the anti-Balaka and the expulsion of Muslim minorities.

Despite some reluctance to accept foreign assistance and risk external interference, the Nigerian federal government has claimed that Boko Haram is no longer solely a national security challenge, defining it instead as a transnational terrorist organization with links to Al-Qaeda. Such a position legitimizes the government's acceptance of foreign support, and shares the burden of responsibility, including for any unsuccessful responses.

But narratives placing Boko Haram in a terrorist arc from Somalia to Mauritania, as coordinated jihadist movements with the same targets under a joint central command somewhere in the Sahel region, are misleading. The sect is still a local problem and the solution has to be Nigerian first. Improved cooperation with neighbouring countries and closer monitoring by the international community is certainly important but will not, on their own, be enough to eradicate the sect. The long-term solution rests with the performance of critical state institutions, in particular with regard to local government, policing and criminal justice, and the armed forces.

### Box 2: Boko Haram, the Sahel and the arc of instability: myths and realities

Boko Haram has been portrayed in some quarters as a link in a long chain of Afghan-trained transnational jihadist groups, from al-Shabaab in Somalia to MUJWA in Mauritania and Western Sahara. There is no doubt that the various conflicts that have destabilized the Sahel region intersect and interconnect. Before taking refuge in northern Mali in the 2000s, for instance, AQIM grew out of the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) and the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) in Algeria. Libyan rebels in 2011 were supported by the Islamist regime in Khartoum in retaliation against Muammar Gaddafi, who had backed the Darfur rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement.

But armed non-state groups in the region, including in Darfur, the Central African Republic and Western Sahara are not all jihadist. Piecemeal or individual interactions between insurgents or itinerant mercenaries do not mean that they are part of an overarching 'Islamist international' with any form of strategic coordination against common targets. Threading analysis of groups and events of the Sahel region together

<sup>46</sup> The evidence is weak in this regard. See Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine, 'Du Nigeria au Sahel et à l'Afrique centrale: la secte Boko Haram', *Questions Internationales*, No. 58, November 2012, pp. 30–33.

with those of Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of the Middle East is misleading. Such conflation of groups and their interests risks hazardous unintended consequences. A response to Boko Haram, for example, that treated it as a potential direct threat to Europe would be likely to lead to a deepening of the crisis in Nigeria.

There has been a similar debate over AQIM,<sup>a</sup> seen as a transnational organization that threatens the West<sup>b</sup> as a result of its history: its predecessor in Algeria, the GIA, hijacked an Air France plane in December 1994 and perpetrated a terrorist attack in the Saint Michel Metro station in Paris in July 1995. In the early 2000s, the GSPC made threats against the US and Europe, and from 2007 its new incarnation, AQIM, focused on French 'imperialism' because Paris supported corrupt regimes in Africa, had intervened in Afghanistan and had banned the wearing of the full-face veil in France.

Neither GSPC nor AQIM has carried out terrorist attacks in Europe, but their combatants unsuccessfully attempted to bomb the French Embassy in Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania, in 2009, and abducted and killed Western hostages in Mauritania and Algeria.<sup>c</sup> It is argued by some that the influence of jihadists in the region and abroad is exaggerated,<sup>d</sup> and AQIM has also been described as a gang and an offshoot of the Algerian military secret services in competition for the control of power.<sup>e</sup> In northern Mali, its combatants did not have the capacity to destabilize the whole region, but took advantage of an ungoverned space to establish clearly delineated sanctuaries. Unlike al-Shabaab in Somalia, they did not attract foreign combatants; Syria and Iraq have drawn more extremist individuals from Europe. Involved in drug-trafficking and kidnap for ransom, AQIM did not have the spiritual leadership to promulgate the revolutionary and religious message of Osama bin Laden.<sup>f</sup>

From GIA to AQIM, however, the group's rhetoric and history of targets indicate that it is more closely aligned to an anti-Western internationalist Islamist agenda than Boko Haram. The latter, despite some of its rhetoric and the scale of its attacks within Nigeria, against Nigerian targets, has so far displayed little appetite to test its capacity with genuine international ambitions.

<sup>a</sup> Ellis, Stephen and Keenan, Jeremy, 'The Sahara and the "War on Terror": A Response to Jeremy Keenan', *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 23, No. 3, June 2007, pp. 21–22.

<sup>b</sup> Cline, Lawrence (2007), 'Counterterrorism Strategy in the Sahel', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 10, pp. 889–99.

<sup>c</sup> Boilley, Pierre (2012), 'AQMI et le terrorisme islamique au Sahel. Isolement ou enracinement?', in Goerg, Odile and Pondopoulo, Anna (eds), *Islam et sociétés en Afrique subsaharienne à l'épreuve de l'histoire*, Paris, Karthala, p. 382.

<sup>d</sup> Keenan, Jeremy (2009), *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa*, London, Pluto; Obi, Cyril (2006), 'Terrorism in West Africa: Real, Emerging or Imagined Threats?', *African Security Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 87–101; McDougall, Ann (2007), 'In the Eye of the Beholder: Provocation, Promise and Prayer in the Sahara-Sahel', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 1–15.

<sup>e</sup> Gèze, François and Mellah, Salima (2007), *AQMI ou la très étrange histoire du GSPC algérien*, Berlin, Algeria Watch, 72 pp.

<sup>f</sup> Some journalists even claim that, sooner or later, the group would have disappeared, were it not for the French military intervention in Libya in 2011, which precipitated the Tuareg declaration of independence, and Operation Serval in Mali in 2013, which pushed the rebels back into Libya. See Beau, Nicolas (2013), *Papa Hollande au Mali : chronique d'un fiasco annoncé*, Paris, Baland, pp. 40–42.

## The 2015 Elections: The Dangers of Playing Politics

The Boko Haram crisis remains first and foremost a national challenge within Nigeria. The general elections in February 2015 will further politicize and entrench the challenge domestically. Although the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has said that elections will be carried out in the three northeastern states currently under emergency rule, securing polling stations for credible elections could prove an impossible task should Boko Haram focus its energies on disrupting the process. This would have significant implications for the legitimacy of the polls and perceptions of multi-party democracy in Nigeria, since two of the three incumbent state governors are members of the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC), while Adamawa state will hold a by-election for the governorship in October 2014.

Rising violence is anticipated but this is likely to be at least as much related to untreated wounds from past violent elections as to Boko Haram's terrorist attacks and military repression. In Borno state it is likely that some of the clashes in Maiduguri are not related to the movement but to the dispute between former State Governor Ali Modu Sheriff and his former protégé and now incumbent Governor Kashim Shettima, who is seeking re-election. As elections approach it will become more difficult to distinguish between ideologically or grievance-driven Boko Haram attacks, politically manipulated attacks and violent political militias that may or may not claim to be Boko Haram affiliates.

At the national level, the insurgency has exacerbated regional tensions, particularly the north–south divide, infusing it with religion. The fear and misperception that Boko Haram has stoked have politicized religion. In this constitutionally secular state, Nigeria's political parties have not been grounded in any one religion, but rhetoric emerging from the crisis could push parties towards religious bias. The expansion of Sharia law across 12 northern states between 1999 and 2002 fuelled speculation over creeping Islamization of secular politics. During the Boko Haram crisis and the administration of Goodluck Jonathan there has been a visible Christian bias within the presidency, influenced by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). In 2012 the Catholic Church in Nigeria suspended its participation in CAN, stating that the umbrella organization had become too politicized and partisan. This trend presents a dangerous challenge to the secularity of the state and risks further polarizing Muslim and Christian citizens.

Conspiracy theories that have found credence in the opacity of the situation have exacerbated regional and religious splits and suspicions. Many Muslim Northerners firmly believe that Boko Haram is a Christian ploy to justify a religious partition of the country and a US military intervention in order to seize Nigeria's oil fields in the south.<sup>47</sup> Some perceive the crisis to be a deliberate way to develop a doctrine of necessity that would prioritize security over democracy in the coming elections. Another view is that it is being used as a pretext to mask the incapacity of the government to implement economic and social reforms, in particular with regard to corruption and the management of the oil

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<sup>47</sup> Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (2012), 'Boko Haram et le terrorisme islamiste au Nigeria: insurrection religieuse, contestation politique ou protestation sociale?', Paris, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Questions de Recherche, No. 40, 33 pp. For an analysis of Northern political stakeholders, see also Hoffmann, Leena Koni, *Who Speaks for the North? Politics and Influence in Northern Nigeria*, Chatham House, London (2014).



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sector. Locally, Borno state civilians feel that they are being neglected or even punished because they did not vote for Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 presidential election. They believe that the security forces are doing nothing to protect them in a deliberate attempt to destroy their region. They back up this view by pointing to their Civilian JTF, which is credited with success in pushing Boko Haram out of urban centres in mid-2013 where the Federal JTF failed.

In Abuja the federal government view is that responsibility rests with the state governors and local government chairmen who failed to complement the military response in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, and public statements point to a denial of federal government responsibility in the crisis. The federal government argues that since state-level decision-makers all have access to resources through the 'security vote', which is unrestricted and, crucially, unaccountable funding for the restoration of law and order, they carry responsibility. The National Orientation Agency<sup>48</sup> has argued more in the vein of a propaganda agency that northern Muslim politicians support Boko Haram as a means to destabilize the government of southern President Goodluck Jonathan. For their part, the opposition points to the crisis as evidence of weak and incompetent leadership at the centre. Despite accusations and counter-accusations of political backing, neither party has presented evidence to support its claims. Suspects have been released, including Borno state senators from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) such as Ali Ndume and Ahmed Zanna Khalifa; the latter was accused of sheltering his nephew, Boko Haram commander Shuaibu Mohammed Bama, allegedly arrested at his house in Maiduguri in October 2012.<sup>49</sup> After his death, Saidu Shettima Pindar, a former ambassador to São Tomé and Príncipe and PDP deputy state governor candidate in the 2011 elections, was also accused of being a financial backer of Boko Haram, though these claims remain unsubstantiated. President Goodluck Jonathan said in 2012 that the sect had infiltrated all branches of government as well as the armed forces.<sup>50</sup>

**The reality is that Boko Haram is skilled at exploiting state institutional weaknesses. Knowing the local terrain in Borno state as well as it does, it can navigate around the demoralized and deficient security presence to attack villages with total impunity.**

The reality is that Boko Haram is skilled at exploiting state institutional weaknesses. Knowing the local terrain in Borno state as well as it does, it can navigate around the demoralized and deficient security presence to attack villages with total impunity. Security officials may be bribed to allow vehicles to pass through checkpoints without inspection. In Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states soldiers are under-equipped because of the diversion of public funds. In fear for their lives and a long way from home, the federal forces suffer from low morale. It has also been reported that the insurgents wear the camouflage uniforms of soldiers or claim to be members of the Red Cross to infiltrate local communities. Buying uniforms is not difficult; some officers were reportedly involved in smuggling or selling weapons to MEND in the Niger Delta before 2009.<sup>51</sup> Boko Haram members do not need Libyan suppliers or funding from Al-Qaeda to have access to military equipment. The region has been awash

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<sup>48</sup> The National Orientation Agency was established by military ruler President Babangida in 1987 as Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery or MAMSER, to promote civic consultation and education around a transition programme for Nigeria.

<sup>49</sup> 'Nigerian army arrests Boko Haram member at senator's home', Reuters, October 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/20/us-nigeria-bokoharam-idUSBRE89J0DJ20121020>.

<sup>50</sup> 'Nigeria's Goodluck Jonathan: Officials back Boko Haram', BBC News, January 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16462891>.

<sup>51</sup> Saharareporters, 'Secret Army Report Implicates NSA Azazi, Ibori, Alamiyeseigha, Henry and Sunny Okah in Sale of Military Weapons to Niger Delta Militants', October 2010. <http://saharareporters.com/2010/10/30/secret-army-report-implicates-nsa-azazi-ibori-alamiyeseigha-henry-and-sunny-okah-sale>.

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with small arms since the Chad civil wars of the 1980s, and what is stolen from or sold by the Nigerian military bolsters this. Members of the sect repeatedly looted armouries in Baga and Monguno. They also captured vehicles from Giwa barracks in March 2014,<sup>52</sup> and seized weapons left in the border area of Malam Fatouri by fleeing soldiers in August 2013.<sup>53</sup>

Some parts of government still seem to understand the failure to respond effectively to Boko Haram as an international conspiracy led by Al-Qaeda or a local plot of the Nigerian (specifically northern) opposition, or even both. President Jonathan faces a paradox: on the one hand the government strategy has hitherto relied solely on the use of force without complementary policies, and this consolidates the power of the military. On the other hand, this is pushing the armed forces in the northeast to their limits. Desertions and mutinies in the 7th Division could militarize politics, increasing the influence of the armed forces over the civilian government.

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<sup>52</sup> Boko Haram video footage, received by AFP in Lagos on 25 March 2014, in author's possession.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews held under Chatham House Rule during field research, Nigeria 2014.

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## What Role for the International Community?

The military option on its own has failed to address the crisis. If foreign nations engage more actively on the ground in Nigeria, they risk exacerbating tensions within the Nigerian Army, pushing Boko Haram to truly internationalize and making themselves targets of attacks. There are signs that deepening the involvement of neighbouring countries, which has accelerated since the Paris Summit of May 2014 and is essential for intelligence cooperation and border policing, is precipitating retaliatory attacks, particularly in Cameroon. Niger and Chad have both been important in the containment of the western Sahel security crises, but are themselves vulnerable to instability.

### Box 3: The Republic of Niger: stability under strain?

With Cameroon now pulled into the effort against Boko Haram and from mid-2014, most likely as a direct consequence, experiencing an increase in Boko Haram attacks within its borders, it is possible that the movement will increasingly seek refuge in Diffa in Niger, just across Nigeria's northern border, instead of Cameroon.

Niger is already under security pressure: it has long borders with Libya – where the Saharan interior is out of state control and used as a safe haven by jihadists – and eastern Mali, where both Tuareg separatists and Islamist militants are active. In 2013 jihadists attacked a barracks and a mining facility in northern Niger.

One of the poorest countries in the world, Niger has so far maintained stability; President Mahamadou Issoufou, elected in 2011, has close security partnerships with France and the United States. But Issoufou is under increased domestic pressure: his political base may have been eroded owing to a rift with the President of the National Assembly, Hama Amadou, formerly a key ally; and corruption appears to be increasing.

Niger has so far managed to contain Boko Haram along its southern border. Part of this success results from a greater sense of national unity than in Nigeria, where a more complex context creates significant governance challenges. Unlike Nigeria, a federation of 36 states, Niger has a centralized government; it has a much smaller population – a tenth of Nigeria's estimated 170 million – and is spared the recurrent problems of coordination that affect Nigeria's three-tiered administrative structure of federal, state and local authorities. Issoufou has given priority to grassroots rural development, which helps to consolidate the legitimacy of the state at local level. Niger's government and opposition are able to work together to develop responses to terrorist threats, as they did when fighting the Tuareg rebellion of the *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice* (MNJ) in 2007–08.

A further reason for the relative lack of violence by Boko Haram in Niger is that during the rainy season the Komadougou-Yobe River at the border floods, becoming traversable only at two bridges, at Diffa and Mainé Soroa. While motorbikes may cross aboard small boats, it is not possible for large numbers of Boko Haram combatants to travel quickly in vehicles to carry out attacks during this period. This physical barrier lasts beyond the rainy season because Nigeria opens its Tiga dam at different times, flooding the river. However, during these times the flood waters destroy local crops, undermining economic activity, and this may make engaging in Boko Haram activity in Nigeria for payment more attractive to some.

The Niger Army is well trained, protects civilians and has not alienated the local population as has happened in Nigeria, where there are reports of abandonment of posts and abuses by armed forces.<sup>a</sup> In Chetima Wongo, for example, it established a camp to secure the area and help villagers return home after an attack by Boko Haram in May 2014. The mandate of Operation Ngaa ('Shield') in Niger is to protect civilians and contain Boko Haram.<sup>b</sup>

Despite its relative stability in the region, there are signs of fragility in Niger's handling of security threats at the national level. On 1 June 2013 three Boko Haram detainees and two prominent jihadist prisoners, Cheïbane Ould Hama and Alassane Ould Mohamed, collaborated to secure smuggled weapons and stage a successful breakout from Niamey's municipal jail. Ould Hama – who was later recaptured in Mali – had been one of the most wanted men in Niger, yet was not being kept in the main high-security prison. The government admitted that there appeared to have been some internal collusion in the escape and the jail's governor and chief guard were subsequently dismissed.

Recent developments have increased the sense of urgency in tackling the Boko Haram threat among Nigeria's neighbours. At the May 2014 Paris Summit for Security in Nigeria, agreement was reached between Nigeria and Niger, Cameroon, Benin and Chad on reviving a Lake Chad Basin Multilateral Force planned some years earlier but not hitherto fully operational. Based in Chad, this will have battalion-strength units from all five countries – including Cameroon, which had previously been reluctant to commit forces.

France will contribute with training support and equipment. The force will initially be funded by the five participating governments, but the African Union has suggested the force could become an official AU operation; and it is possible that Europe might help finance it from the EU Peace Facility.

<sup>a</sup> Interviews along the border with villagers and Nigerian refugees, Kiri-Kiri and Chetima Wongo, Republic of Niger, July 2014.

<sup>b</sup> There is also a military presence to protect the oil industry in Agadem, just 100 km north of Diffa.

International involvement is important but must be measured and appropriate. Some international partners are already cautious with their assistance, given the reported violations of human rights by the Nigerian armed forces, and may also seek to avoid legitimizing a flawed strategy and fuelling the politicization of the crisis. Former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson warned that designating Boko Haram a foreign terrorist organization could 'raise its profile, give it greater publicity, give it greater credibility, help in its recruitment and also probably drive more assistance in its direction'.<sup>54</sup> UN sanctions are, for now, symbolic because Boko Haram does not currently appear to need to rely on foreign funding. It still resorts to armed robberies and racketeering, extorting money from local businessmen and traders.

The case for greater international involvement is thus problematic, despite the moral compulsion to engage as well as concerns over Nigeria's future, given its regional weight and strategic importance. Nigeria's size and complexity present significant challenges to governance and stability. For now, international assistance is therefore likely to remain restricted to providing expertise and involving neighbouring country troops in border patrols. There is no political space for a peacekeeping operation in Borno state under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union or the UN. Nigeria would refuse any such deployment of

<sup>54</sup> 'Hillary's State Department Refused to Brand Boko Haram as Terrorists', The Daily Beast, May 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/07/hillary-s-state-department-refused-to-brand-boko-haram-as-terrorists.html>.

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foreign troops in its sovereign space, while other African states would recognize the risks of becoming entangled in such a local and multifaceted security crisis.<sup>55</sup>

The international community may find its best advantage in its capacity to support dialogue, witness protection and the provision of humanitarian relief and shelter for displaced civilians, as well as providing institutional support towards inter-agency cooperation. There is a chance that conscripted, uncertain and fatigued Boko Haram members may be looking for opportunities either to reintegrate into their communities or to return to the former 'Yusufiyya' model of a separate, non-violent sectarian community. This is certainly no easy task, requiring the identification of common ground, the right individuals to engage with and neutral mediators acceptable to all parties. The political interests of Shehu Sani and Kabiru Tanimu Turaki, who tried to negotiate a truce in 2012, preclude them now from being effective intermediaries: the former is a senate candidate for the APC, while the latter is seeking the governorship of Kebbi state for the PDP. Some opportunists and individuals falsely claiming to be Boko Haram leaders have tried to profit from a 'connection fee' and defraud members of the defunct Presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North. Some of them, including Abu Mohammed Ibn Abdulaziz, were arraigned before the Maiduguri High Court for this reason.

The critical issue is that the government seems unconvinced that negotiation is necessary. President Goodluck Jonathan claims he cannot engage in dialogue with 'ghosts'.<sup>56</sup> Yet Olusegun Obasanjo had access to the sect in September 2011 and Abubakar Shekau accepted peace talks in January 2012. Members of the group were allegedly ready to negotiate with Ali Bukur Ibrahim, the former governor of Yobe state, and Dr Shettima Ali Mongouno, a respected Borno state elder, politician and diplomat. But the Army immediately violated the truce, attacking Boko Haram youth in Maiduguri and arresting a leader, Abud Darda, who was thought to be the spokesman of the movement, using the pseudonym Abu Qaqa. The negotiation stalled and the President-General of the Supreme Council for Sharia, Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmed, withdrew from discussions in March 2012 and accused the government of being insincere and breaching confidentiality.<sup>57</sup>

In November 2012, Abu Mohammed Ibn Abdulaziz extended an offer for peace talks with five conditions: negotiations were to be held in Saudi Arabia; Nigeria's former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari was to arbitrate discussions; former governor Ali Modu Sheriff had to be arrested; Boko Haram detainees were to be released; and the government was to restore mosques destroyed by the state and pay compensation to victims for the death of family members. But Abubakar Shekau no longer wished to engage in dialogue and dismissed the proposal as a fraud.

Each broken attempt at peace negotiations has pushed the government and Boko Haram further apart, with escalating violence on both sides filling that space. Going forward, any attempt at talks aimed at peace will require clear and decisive signals from both sides, trusted mediators and, possibly, some independent external oversight.

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<sup>55</sup> Usually, African countries prefer to participate in UN peacekeeping operations that are funded and controlled by the international community, instead of paying for controversial military interventions under their own regional mandate. In the 2000s, they contributed 5,000 soldiers a year to African peacekeeping operations, much less than for international peacekeeping operations in Africa. See Coleman, Katharina (December 2011), 'Innovations in "African Solutions to African Problems": The Evolving Practice of Regional Peacekeeping in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, pp. 517–45.

<sup>56</sup> 'Nigeria's president rejects Boko Haram amnesty call', BBC News, March 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21709915>.

<sup>57</sup> Murtada (2013), *Boko Haram in Nigeria*, p. 14.

### Box 4: Timeline of attempted negotiations

#### September 2011

Former president Obasanjo holds talks in Maiduguri with Boko Haram members, in which Shehu Sani is also involved. Boko Haram ceasefire conditions include an end to arrests and killings, compensation for families of members killed by security forces, and prosecution of the police responsible for the death of Mohammed Yusuf.

#### March 2012

Boko Haram pulls out of indirect talks with the government. Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmed, president of the National Supreme Council on Sharia, withdraws as mediator, pointing to a lack of sincerity on the part of the government.

#### June 2012

Another round of talks mediated by Islamic scholar Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi halted owing to 'sabotage' by elements in government and 'cold feet' on the part of Boko Haram, according to media reports.

#### August 2012

Reports of secret negotiations in Saudi Arabia, led by vice-president Namadi Sambo. But Boko Haram spokesman Abu Muhammed claims these were with a 'fake' Boko Haram faction.

#### November 2012

Some alleged members of Boko Haram sets out five conditions for a ceasefire, including naming the mediators for negotiations: Alhaji Shettima Ali Mongunu, General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd), Senator Bukar Abba Ibrahim, Ambassador Gaji Galtimari, Barrister Aisha Wakil (and her husband). Reuben Abati, Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to President Goodluck Jonathan, welcomes the offer as a positive development.

#### April 2013

The president sets up a 26-member committee headed by Special Duties Minister Kabiru Tanimu Turaki to explore the possibility of granting an amnesty to Boko Haram members. The committee's report proposes an Advisory Committee to take dialogue forward with amenable members.

#### July 2013

Claims by Minister Kabiru Turaki that a ceasefire agreement has been reached are refuted by Abubakar Shekau.

#### May 2014

The government considers but rejects the possibility of negotiating with Boko Haram for the return of the Chibok schoolgirls in exchange for the release of Boko Haram detainees.

## Conclusion

The failure of emergency rule to contain and impede Boko Haram violence clearly shows that the military option with an absolute focus on the violent destruction of Boko Haram is not tenable and an alternative must be sought. The offensive failed to neutralize the movement, at the same time damaging and alienating the people, while demoralizing and discrediting the armed forces operating in the region.

For the time being the international community is focused on improving the gathering and sharing of intelligence, training elite units and improving the coordination of security agencies. But corruption and elections threaten to limit progress.

The Nigerian government will need to reassess the role and mandate of the armed forces in the northeast. The international community must encourage a mandate that prioritizes the protection of civilians and witnesses. In the longer term, the government must work towards professionalizing its armed forces appropriate to a democratic context, and in particular its federal police force. But these are deep structural challenges, beyond the reach of the current government.

The National Security Adviser's soft approach to counterterrorism will only be workable when there is effective protection for those imams tasked with the work of deradicalizing the youth. The authorities will need to plan for the demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of insurgents.

Any effort to destroy Boko Haram without complementary strategies for negotiations and sufficient provisions for alternatives to membership of the movement will fail: the sect will simply adapt, move and continue. Going forward, the crisis may take one of three courses. Conflict fatigue coupled with a genuine negotiation effort on both sides may see the movement transform into a small, separate and non-violent sect – the remnants of the current violent extremist force. Alternatively, it could follow the course of the Lord's Resistance Army, which left Uganda to take refuge in the uncharted territory of eastern Central African Republic. In this event, Abubakar Shekau's group would remain a toxic yet weakened organization that could continue attacks from remote rural areas of Borno state or neighbouring countries. At the end of 2013, the emergence of a cultist faction, the so-called 'Slaughterers', demonstrated a further degradation from a religious jihad into a virulently destructive and unpredictable conflict. The third course is that Boko Haram, drawing confidence from external attention that brings outside support, internationalizes and attacks neighbouring countries and international targets in Nigeria, becoming a direct threat to national and regional stability.

Although the worst of Boko Haram-related violence has taken place in Borno state, obscured in Nigeria's northeastern corner, which has suffered the heaviest number of casualties, the crisis is having direct and indirect ramifications elsewhere. From its post-Yusuf re-emergence in 2010 to 2014, Boko Haram was never a significant or cohesive enough organization to truly threaten national stability. But its threat to Nigeria overall has been more oblique, continually eroding a still nascent sense of cohesion and will to accommodate and compromise in such a diverse nation. This has served to legitimize reactive and short-term policy responses to one of the most complex, unique and poorly understood security crises Nigeria has ever faced.

In revisiting its response to this crisis, a process of which there have been signs in some parts of government, there are valuable lessons to be drawn from the brief history of Boko Haram's evolution. Nigeria must avoid a similar turn to violence by other ideologically radical yet hitherto peaceful groups. The handling of such groups by local and state authorities and the police has a significant impact on their behaviour. A trend of escalating clashes with the state with no interruption through judicial procedures allowed grievances to fester, driving the determination for revenge on both sides. The significant use of force and exposure of civilians to sustained violent conflict silenced important voices at the eye of the storm, which not only could offer valuable information and views, but are essential to unravelling the sect and fragmenting its membership. The lack of transparency around the response to the crisis, the resources being used to address it, and conflicting narratives around the shape, size and capacity of the sect have fed conspiracy theories and allowed for denials and accusations around Boko Haram that have no constructive bearing on any policy outcome.

Some of these issues are longer-term structural challenges that will need to be addressed at all levels of government, bridging transitions in civilian authority. Those that were avoidable fell victim to politics, short-termist decision-making and mismanagement; it is these that are within the purview of leaders as they look to the 2015 elections and beyond.



## Annex: List of Key Players

### Mohammed Yusuf

Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, born in Yobe state in 1970, founded the first form of *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* around 2002, published his book *This is our Faith and our Dawah* around 2008, and led the group until his death in 2009. An educated, self-proclaimed Islamic scholar, Yusuf preached the incompatibility of Islam with Nigeria's embrace of Western values and institutions. He gained a following among young people in northern states such as Yobe, Borno and Bauchi, and garnered wider appeal through the sect's provision of some social support. Although this was initially a largely non-violent group, Yusuf's, and therefore Boko Haram's, relations with the state and the dominant Islamic Izala movement became increasingly fraught in the mid- to late 2000s. Yusuf went into self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia in 2004 but returned to Nigeria in 2005. He was said to have been arrested several times prior to 2009 but is believed to have been politically protected at this time. He was killed in ambiguous circumstances while in police custody in Maiduguri in July 2009 and his death served as a catalyst for Boko Haram's transformation into a terrorist network.

### Abubakar Shekau

Believed to have been born in Yobe state around 1970, Abubakar Shekau (also spelt Shiku or Shikwa) was an early follower of Boko Haram. Until 2009, he gave sermons at his own mosque behind the El-Kanemi cinema in the Maidokiri district of Maiduguri. He claims to be fluent in Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and Arabic. A self-proclaimed imam, he is also known as Darul Tawhid, which means an 'expert in the oneness of Allah'. However, he lacked the charisma of his mentor and contemporary Mohammed Yusuf, and was rather perceived to be his factotum, little more than a poorly educated 'area boy'. After the death of Yusuf, Shekau went into hiding but resurfaced in 2010 to take control of Boko Haram with six original members of the group's Shura (Executive Council). Under his leadership, the movement has become increasingly radical and violent. Seeking to cloak his identity, he has been known to use another alias, Abu Muhammad Abu Bakr Bin Muhammad Al Shakwi Al Muslimi Bishku. There is uncertainty over the true identity of Shekau, with claims that he has been killed and replaced by an imposter. He was allegedly injured by the Nigerian military in the Sambisa Forest on 30 June 2013. Whether or not he survived this attack, Shekau remains the most prominent and profiled member of Boko Haram and it is unlikely that his elimination would bring about an end to the insurgency.

### Ali Modu Sheriff

Ali Modu Sheriff was a senator representing Borno Central during the military rule of General Sani Abacha (1993–98). He chaired the Senate Defence Committee, was a contractor for the administration and accumulated significant wealth during this time. Upon Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, Sheriff was initially re-elected as a senator before contesting gubernatorial elections in 2003 for the opposition All Nigeria People's Party, to become the governor of Borno state. In the build-

up to elections Sheriff made use of a private militia, known locally as 'ECOMOG', and in return for its support promised Mohammed Yusuf that his administration would enforce strict adherence to Sharia law in the state. Sheriff is regarded as having been a pivotal actor in events that led to the Boko Haram uprising of 2009. He was close to Colonel Ben Ahanotu, the commander of Operation Flush, a joint security patrol team tasked with reining in rising violent crime in the state. Colonel Ahanotu claimed personal responsibility for the capture of Mohammed Yusuf and his transfer to police custody. There is some speculation that Sheriff ordered the killing of Yusuf, who had information on Sheriff's practices before and during his time as state governor, though there is no available evidence of this. There are also allegations that Sheriff anticipated that the police would execute Yusuf in revenge for the killing of a member of the Nigerian Mobile Police by Boko Haram. In 2014, Sheriff defected to the ruling PDP to lead the Borno state campaign for the re-election of President Goodluck Jonathan in 2015. Sheriff remains close to important power-brokers in Abuja.

### Kashim Shettima

Kashim Shettima succeeded Ali Modu Sheriff as state governor in 2011, elected on the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) ticket. Shettima is an economist and a banker who served under Ali Modu Sheriff as Commissioner of Finance from 2007. He later served variously as Borno State Commissioner of Education, Agriculture, Local Government and Health. After his election, he quickly sought to distance himself from his mentor, who failed in his bid to be elected to the Nigerian Senate in 2011, and the relationship between the two has remained fractious.

### Bugi Foi

Bugi Foi was the primary intermediary between Boko Haram and the Nigerian state. A pious Muslim, he was chairman of the Kaga local government council from 1999 to 2003 and then served as Governor Ali Modu Sheriff's State Commissioner of Religious Affairs. A middleman between the Izala movement and Boko Haram, he eventually joined Mohammed Yusuf and refused to approve state funding for the pilgrimage of indigenous Christians to Jerusalem. He also sought to change the name of his office to the Commission for Islamic Affairs. However, this was opposed by the Bar Association, which insisted on the religious neutrality of the state. Foi was then transferred to agricultural affairs. Sheriff made sweeping changes to his cabinet in 2008 after Foi requested his resignation. Like Mohammed Yusuf, Bugi Foi was killed in police custody in July 2009.

### Goodluck Jonathan

Goodluck Jonathan, a former deputy state governor and then governor of Bayelsa state in the Niger Delta, became President of Nigeria in May 2010 upon the death of incumbent Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Jonathan was the PDP's presidential candidate in the 2011 elections and defeated northern opposition candidate General Muhammadu Buhari. This resulted in an outbreak of post-election violence across northern states. An ethnic Ijaw from Nigeria's predominantly Christian south, and with close ties to the Christian Association of Nigeria, Jonathan has been a particularly divisive figure. His presidency is regarded by many as flouting the PDP's agreement to rotate the office of the president between northern and southern candidates. He has been criticized for his handling of the Boko Haram crisis, and in particular for his slow response to the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls, including his failure to visit the town. Despite sustaining an amnesty in the

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Niger Delta instigated by his predecessor President Yar'Adua, which has brought relative peace to that region, Goodluck Jonathan has thus far been unable to find a lasting solution to the deepening Boko Haram crisis in the northeast. It is anticipated that he will seek a second (full) term in the February 2015 general election.

## About the Author

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