Boko Haram: Context, Ideology and Actors

Abstract: The movement now known as “Boko Haram” began as an offshoot from the Salafi movement known as Ahl al-Sunna in Arabic. Boko Haram’s ideology was perhaps uniquely obscurantist in Islamic philosophy. Boko Haram attacks are often against schools and educational institutions, especially teacher training colleges. Whether or not the Nigerian state will triumph over Boko Haram remains to be seen, but they have been rolled back in the past few years.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Ideology, Salafism, Jihadism, Terrorist Attacks.

Resumen: El grupo hoy conocido por el nombre de “Boko Haram” es una derivación del movimiento salafista llamado en árabe Ahl as-Sunna. Probablemente el obscurantismo de la ideología de Boko Haram tiene su único origen en la filosofía islámica. Sus ataques suelen ser a menudo contra escuelas e instituciones educativas, especialmente las escuelas de formación de maestros. Si bien estos ataques han experimentado cierto retroceso en los últimos años, habrá que ver si el Estado nigeriano logrará triunfar o no contra Boko Haram.

Palabras clave: Boko Haram, ideología, salafismo, jihadismo, ataques terroristas.

I. Background

A. Islam in West Africa

Islam in west Africa is about a thousand years old. It was first spread by traders from across the Sahara. The first kingdoms converted to Islam in the 11th century AD. They were located next to sources of water immediately south of the desert. Among these was the kingdom of Kanem on Lake Chad, which included territory in present day Nigeria, on the southwest side of the lake. From these kingdoms Islam spread out, not only as more kingdoms and individuals converted but also as these kingdoms and others expanded in their wars. Islam as practiced in west Africa was traditionally Sunni, Sufi and followed the Maliki school of law. While some groups of Muslims, such as the Djakhanke, were pacifist traders, others were warriors. Both groups were scholars, since Islam is a religion that prizes literacy and most respects those other religions which have literate traditions, known in Islamic thought as “peoples of the book”.


(Recibido el 22/06/2018. Aceptado el 05/09/2018)
Although the newly converted kingdoms expanded in their wars against other kingdoms, Islam continued to be spread peacefully. Some historians think it actually spread more widely after the collapse of the large empires of the medieval period, since scholars who had been patronized at courts took up work as traveling merchants, or took up residence in smaller towns to sell Qur'anic amulets and open mosque. The peaceful spread of Islam in west Africa continued throughout long centuries of the growth of trade, and scholar traders were the original and main source of its spread. Commerce is honored in Islam, a religion founded by a merchant, and commerce continued to grow in the west African subregion as the economy continued to grow and become more complex. Islam, as a universal religion, was also important to those who traveled between kingdoms and regions, such as merchants. Literacy was also very important to merchants, and may even have been originally invented by merchants as a means of record-keeping.2

The Saifawa dynasty ruling the Kingdom of Kanem later moved to Bornu, on the Nigerian side of Lake Chad. This dynasty had been ruling for an unknown time before their conversion to Islam and is therefore of unknown antiquity, but the Bornu Caliphate they founded was ruled by them into the 19th century before they were eventually supplanted by descendants of Sheikh Al-Amin Al-Kanemi, a scholar from Fezzan in the Libyan Sahara, who had defended Bornu from attacks by the Sokoto Caliphate to the west. Al-Kanemi’s name signifies that his ancestry, like that of the dynasty he replaced, was from the Kanem region in today’s Chad, colonial boundaries having little if anything to do with traditional boundaries and there being much in common among all the peoples around Lake Chad.

The Sokoto Caliphate was a reform movement within Islam, which took shape after revolutions inspired by the preaching of Usuman Danfodiyo (‘Uthman bin Fudi), a Fulani scholar who criticized the oppression and un-Islamic practices of kingdoms in his area. The emirates in this Caliphate were ruled mostly by other Fulani, although not exclusively so. It represented Islamic scholars’ domination of the area, and the demise of dynasties dating to pre-Islamic times, which had converted to Islam but which had continued to practice pre-Islamic ceremonies. Much of the area of its control was in formerly independent Hausa city-states, but it also expanded to include other territories as well. By the time of its conquest by Britain and other colonial powers in the “scramble for Africa” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Sokoto Caliphate was the largest state in tropical Africa, incorporating millions of people into a state run along strict sharia law of the Maliki school as interpreted by Sufis of the Qadiriyya Tariqa. The Sokoto Caliphate and Bornu were in rivalry over control of a wide area and fought a series of wars in the 19th century before they were conquered and divided by colonial powers.3

B. Colonialism and modernization

While Islam in north Africa had been in contact with western Christian civilization and there had been much interchange between them, there was almost no contact between Christian European culture and Islamic west Africa. Even during the era of the Atlantic slave trade it was only along the far west coast, in a short stretch where the savanna reached the Atlantic between the Senegal and Gambia rivers, that direct trade and intellectual exchange with

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3. Although there are many studies of particular aspects of the Sokoto Caliphate, the standard survey history is still *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London; Longmans, Green and Company, 1967) by Murray Last.
Europe took place. The sudden eruption of European powers into the interior of Africa at the end of the 19th century was thus traumatic for local peoples of the African interior, who often tried to isolate themselves culturally and educationally as well as religiously, from their alien conquerers. This was encouraged by the British, who segregated their few colonial administrators from the general population and who actually forbade Christian missionary work, especially schools, in Islamic areas. Hausa was used as a language of administration and was actually imposed on Bornu, despite resistance from the traditional authorities there. The reason for the British colonial administration using an African language was not to promote, much less to modernize, African culture, but rather to avoid the necessity of teaching English to Africans, in order to continue to isolate the area from outside influences. Northern Nigeria has continued to lag in western, English language education to this day, especially among Muslims. This has become an important factor in Nigerian politics and the rivalry between mostly Muslim northern Nigerians and mostly Christian southern Nigerians.

The traditional system of strict Islamic sharia law was also continued under British colonialism in the emirates of Northern Nigeria, although not in adjacent colonies, such as the French or German territories nearby which had also been part of the Sokoto Caliphate. Since both Bornu and Sokoto had been using the Maliki version of Sunni law there was little difference between their Islamic legal practice in the colonial period. Sharia law, especially corporal punishment, was moderated by British colonial administrators, but criminal and civil Sharia law was in effect in British colonial territories that had been part of Bornu or the Sokoto Caliphate right through the colonial period. Civil sharia law was continued for Muslims in post-independence Northern Nigeria, although criminal sharia law was ended with independence. The colonial period in Africa was so short that its end was witnessed by people who could remember its beginning. The reinstitution of criminal Sharia law in many states of northern Nigeria was witnessed by millions of people who could remember the colonial period when criminal sharia law was strictly enforced. The struggle to reintroduce criminal Sharia law in northern Nigeria forms part of the background to the rise of Boko Haram.

Another part of that background consists of the many efforts to come to terms with modernity, and to either reform or modernize Islam in west Africa, as well as in other efforts to reject modernization of Islam and westernization of the culture. Some efforts to modernize Islam have taken place in the traditional Sufi tariqa (plural turuq) where reformed organizations have become common. Other Islamic modernization efforts have been anti-Sufi, such as the ‘Yan Izala movement, or Jama’at ‘Izalat al Bid’a wa Iqamat al-Sunna (Society of Removal of (unauthorized) Innovation and Reestablishment of Orthodoxy), better known as the Izala or ‘Yan Izala, which was founded in 1978 by Sheikh Ismaila Idris in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The organization began basically as a fan club for Sheikh Abubakar Gummi, one of the first Islamic scholars to have also received western education in English. Sheikh Gummi came to oppose the influence of the traditional Sufi brotherhoods in Nigeria. This led to his movement being patronized by Saudi Arabia, although the movement founded by his supporters attracted not only Salafis interested in following the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab but also modernist Muslims looking for teachings more compatible with science and western learning. It is a broad based group that had a split in the 1980s, largely over the question whether Sufis were Muslims or not, but which later reunited. It has no fixed membership rolls or regular dues to be paid, but has become one of the most influential Muslim groups in Nigeria and maintains many mosques, especially in urban areas.
The ‘Yan Izala, through their Saudi connection, was the point for the introduction of Salafism into Nigeria. Salafism, or Wahhabism, claims to be a return to the original Islam of early centuries, but is in fact based on the teachings of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, a preacher from a small oasis village in the middle of what is today Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism is the official sect of Saudi Arabia today and is spread outside the country by Saudi government funded missionary work, as well as by privately funded missionary work outside the control of the Saudi state. Wahhabism preaches that the traditional, Sufi Islam is actually polytheism, that Shi’a Muslims are not Muslims either, and in fact that all who claim to be Muslims but do not adhere to the strict teachings of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab are munafiqun or hypocrites, who are worse than even pagans because they mislead people about the true nature of Islam. Wahhabi scholars have an alliance with the Saudi state in return for their sanctioning the rule of the ibn Saud dynasty, but despite the generous patronage of the Saudi dynasty there is little Saudi control of Wahhabism outside their borders. Wahhabism has thus been a major source of jihadi Muslim movements that attack not only non-Muslims but also other Muslims. It represents the larger category in which various jihadi groups are fringe elements.

A list of the antecedents of Boko Haram would not be complete without mentioning the ‘Yan Tatsine movement of followers of Muhammad Marwa, a preacher from Marwa, Cameroon, where irreconcilable elements opposed to the British conquest of Sokoto settled under the German colonial state before World War I. He was nicknamed “Mai Tatsine” for his habit of damning all who disagreed with him. He led insurrections in Kano City and other parts of northern Nigeria in the 1980s. Mai Tatsine preached total and absolute rejection of western goods, including not only bicycles but also wristwatches, shoes, and any and all other technology or products introduced during the colonial and postcolonial eras. Remarkably, he did not condemn the use of the traditional muskets which Europeans had traded for slaves and which had become common hunting weapons, which are known today as Dane guns because Denmark earned a reputation for making the best guns in the African slave trade. Muhammad Marwa was a charismatic preacher, after all, not a historian. He was also arguably not a Muslim, since his opponents complained that he claimed he was a prophet himself, which would put him outside Islam by almost any definition. However, it is not in question that his education specialized on Qur’an exegesis that he began by preaching a “Qur’an only” form of Islam that rejected the hadith, and that his movement grew out of Islam rather than any other religion.

After the death of the founder his movement splintered and declined. Its revolts became smaller and smaller until they finally faded away. The surviving pieces of the movement were less likely to confront the Nigerian military. Rumor has it that his followers are still to be found around northern Nigeria, but have become peaceful, learning to avoid the state rather than confronting it. They are not likely to stage any more uprisings against the government. Rather they will likely continue their peaceful withdrawal from the modern world, the way many other groups today do, including the pacifist Christian Amish in the United States. Those who wished to confront the postcolonial state chose other means for doing so, including the new group Ahl al-Sunna li-dda’wa wa’l-Jihad, known to its enemies as Boko Haram.

II. Origins and development

The movement now known as “Boko Haram” began as an offshoot from the Salafi movement known as Ahl al-Sunna, or “people of orthodoxy” in Arabic. This is reflected in the official name of the movement nicknamed Boko Haram, Ahl al-Sunna li’l-Da’wa wa’l-Jihad ‘ala Minhaj al-Salaf (People of Orthodoxy for Missionary Work and Armed Struggle, according to the method of Salaf, or allegedly original Islam). The Ahl al-Sunna group had begun as a group of graduates of the Islamic University in Medina, where they had all been trained in Saudi style Wahhabism. That Ustaz (professor) Muhammad Yusuf added both missionary work (da’wa) and armed struggle (jihad) to his group’s name is probably self contradictory, but also points to the direction he wanted to take his group, not only into persuading others to join his sect of Islam but also into violent confrontation with the authorities. In fact it was his rejection of western institutions, including not only the post-colonial Nigerian state but also western education that caused others in Nigeria to give the group the nickname “Boko Haram” meaning “western education is forbidden” in the local Hausa language.

Other members of the Ahl al-Sunna movement had been involved in the movement against polio vaccination in northern Nigeria that resulted in the world’s failure to eliminate polio entirely. Dr. Ibrahim Datti Ahmad was a western educated physician and a member of Ahl al-Sunna. He spearheaded the movement against polio vaccine, arguing that it was a plot by western powers to sterilize Muslim women. The pro-vaccine campaign was led by such traditional Sufi leaders as Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi of the Tijaniyya Sufi Tariqa. Why western educated scholars and even a physician should be so intent on exposing nonexistent western conspiracies, while traditional Islamic scholars on the other hand sought to support vaccination is an interesting question that reveals much about so-called Islamic Fundamentalism, which must be carefully distinguished from traditional Islam. What is more important here is to note that Islamic terrorism grows not out of traditional Islamic values but out of westernized Muslims’ disillusionment with the West. The obviously mistaken approach of the anti vaccine forces also served to discredit them in the eyes of many in Nigeria, and undermined their authority on western civilization as well as on Islamic law.

This rejection of Nigerian government institutions by his group occurred only a few years after the reintroduction of criminal sharia law in many northern states of Nigeria. Thus Boko Haram’s position reflected not only a rejection of the postcolonial state but also a rejection of Muslims’ attempts to work within the postcolonial state structure to peacefully achieve an Islamic state democratically. Many others had become disillusioned with state sharia law and the failure to eradicate corruption that had followed it, so the group had little trouble attracting others to its fold. One group that had previously withdrawn from the main Ahl al-Sunna mosque in Maiduguri to form a utopian community had already attracted the attention of the police under the nickname “Nigerian Taliban” and was wiped out at the end of 2003 by police after reports that they had begun gathering weapons, in an incident reminiscent of the siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas a few years earlier.


The formal creation of Boko Haram as a separate movement came after the destruction of the so-called “Nigerian Taliban” but it has other roots, too. Those roots include Salafi groups opposed to the Saudi dynasty, such as the Al-Muntada Islamic Trust in London. The Al-Muntada Trust in London was set up to sponsor Salafi preaching that was in opposition to the Saudi royal family, and became one of the major funders of Salafi preaching in Nigeria and elsewhere. It is typical of the more extreme types of Wahhabism that are often driven out of Middle Eastern and other Islamic countries, but take root in western Europe where freedom of speech and of religion are more common, a tendency which often leaves Islam as practiced in the west more extremist than Islam as found in Islamic countries, not only in the Middle East but elsewhere in the Muslim world.

In the late 1990s one of the most popular figures in the Salafi movement in Nigeria was Shaykh Ja’far Mahmoud Adam, who not only was active in the Ahl al-Sunna sect but also preached in a mosque in the old city section of Kano which had been built with funding from Al-Muntada Trust. Suspicions were raised that Al-Muntada was using its structures for military training, and a formal accusation to that effect was made by representatives of the two main Sufi orders in Kano to the state governor, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, at the beginning of September, 2002. The governor promised to look into their allegations but urged them to seek peace and tolerance among Muslims. Whether the charge was true or not can, of course, be questioned, but those Sufi leaders were sure enough of the charge to bring it formally in writing to the governor.9 Ja’far Mahmoud had distinguished his own preaching from the evolving position of ‘Izala on Sufism by a stricter adherence to Wahhabism and stronger rejection of Sufism than the ‘Izala organization itself was then prepared to advance.10

In 2004 the Sudanese director of the al-Muntada group in Kano was arrested by Nigerian police on charges of being involved in inter religious violence and funneling funds to terrorist organizations. According to the Nigerian Vanguard newspaper of 21 February:

Sheikh Muhiddeen Abdullahi, Director of the Almuntada al-Islami Trust, was snatched by agents of the State Security Service and has been taken to Abuja for questioning.

The arrest followed the discovery of financial transactions running into millions of naira (tens of thousands of dollars/euros) between Sheikh Muhiddeen and a Kano-based businessman, Alhaji Sharu,” an official said.

In late December last year a group of young Nigerian Muslims launched a small-scale uprising in Yobe State, calling for an Islamic state.

The gang fought a series of clashes with security forces, but was dispersed after about two weeks of fighting left at least two police and more than a dozen rebels dead, and some 47 Islamists in custody.

Security agents swooped on a suspected militant hideout and arrested Sharu, who has since confessed to acting as middleman between the group and Almuntada, the official said. Almuntada al-Islami is a charity reputedly funded by wealthy Saudi individuals.11

Subsequent investigation of the allegations showed that they had begun as a result of an accusation by a disgruntled employee and no confirmed link between the Nigerian Taliban and the Al-Muntada trust was established.\textsuperscript{12}

Allegations of a link between Boko Haram and the London based Trust surfaced in the Nigerian Tribune in 2012.\textsuperscript{13} By this time wild accusations about the movement were so rife that many Nigerians were skeptical of any and all accusations. The allegations were raised in the UK Parliament by Lord Alton of Liverpool and were communicated by the Foreign Office minister to both the Charities Commission and the Metropolitan Police. The Trust insisted its work in Africa was only charitable and that it condemned terrorism in any form whatsoever.\textsuperscript{14} What seems likely is that some persons associated with the Al-Muntada Islamic Trust were associated with Boko Haram in its early years, but there may or may not have been any official connection. In particular Ja’far Mahmoud of the Ahl al-Sunna group seems to have tried to straddle the divide between the dissident Salafis outside Saudi Arabia and the Saudi establishment, even after the 9/11/2001 events made this untenable.

It is clear, however, that whatever his contradictory or at least ambiguous positions not only on international but also on intra-Islamic politics, Ja’far Mahmoud of Ahl al-Sunna never advocated insurrection against the Nigerian federation. He caused a deputy imam of his at the al-Muntada mosque to step down after allegations that he had acted as a recruiter for an unidentified international terrorist organization. It was also about this time that another close associate of his was approached by a visitor from Algeria about joining an international jihadi network. As Ustaz Yusuf’s own preaching became more extreme and more popular, Ja’far Mahmoud decided to confront him directly in public. On 12 April 2007 a questioner in a mosque in Bauchi city asked directly whether it was lawful (halal) to attend government schools or to work for the government. His long, rambling answer was not accepted by those who felt the clear answer should have been no. That evening the car taking him back to Kano was surrounded by a mob that shouted intimidating threats. The next morning, while leading the morning prayers at his mosque in Kano, Ja’far Mahmoud was assassinated by machine gun. Blame was immediately assigned to Ustaz Yusuf by many, and Yusuf was in fact chased out of Ja’far’s memorial service after the burial. Others have thought that the Kano state government might have had a hand in the murder, since Ja’far was killed shortly before gubernatorial elections took place which were alleged to have been rigged.\textsuperscript{15} It may ultimately never be known for sure who ordered Ja’far’s murder.

The reluctance of Ja’far to explicitly condemn the postcolonial Nigerian state had already caused others, led by Ustaz Muhammad Yusuf, to break with him and create their new organization, Ahl al-Sunna li’l-Da’wa wa’l-Jihad ‘ala Minhaj al-Salaf, better known outside the sect as Boko Haram, a jihadi sect first devoted to the overthrow of the Nigerian government and then devoted to global jihad, most recently in its allegiance (bay’a) pledged to the Islamic


\textsuperscript{15} Andrea Brigaglia “A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da’wa in West Africa…”, loc. cit., pp. 16-17.
State as of March 2015. This group had originally split off in 2004 and the tension between its followers and those who had remained supporters of Ja'far Mahmoud in the Ahl al-Sunna was obvious to all.16

Although it may never be known who ordered Ja'far's assassination, suspicion among his followers and others has always centered on Ustaz Yusuf and his followers. The bad blood between their two sects extends further, to the 'Izala sect in general, who have arguably suffered the most among Muslims from the attacks and targeted assassinations of Boko Haram. The 'Izala and Boko Haram recruit largely from western educated young people, trying to convince their potential recruits that their interpretation of Islam is correct. Competition for recruits led to mutual condemnations and eventually to violence.

Boko Haram's ideology was perhaps uniquely obscurantist in Islamic philosophy. In an interview with the BBC Hausa language service, formerly posted to YouTube, its founder Ustaz Muhammad Yusuf claimed that the spherical earth, Darwinian evolution and the water cycle were all contrary to the Qur'an.17 That the spherical earth had been well known in medieval Islamic civilization was apparently not known to him. He also taught that democracy was unbelief in God, who alone should be sovereign. More important, he claimed that modern, westernized education must be replaced with traditional Islamic schools and that all who opposed him must be killed, and non-Muslims must be forced to convert to Islam. In his greatest break with other anti-Western groups in Nigeria, he argued that western technology can lawfully be used to destroy western civilization.

III. Social character

A. Comparison with Aum Shinrikyou

Boko Haram seems to fit a common pattern among many different, unrelated religious extremist groups, including Japan's own Aum Shinrikyou. These movements seem to attract young people, especially men, who have failed in the modern education system and who take refuge in an apparently traditional movement led by a charismatic preacher who will take care of them. These movements begin peacefully enough, but when the great mass of their surrounding society rejects their extreme claims and begins ridiculing them, they turn to extremism and terrorism instead, attempting forcibly to conquer their society, or at least instill enough fear in others that they can control them. The difference is that the social problems in Japan, despite the corruption at the top, the graying of society and failure of many college graduates to obtain good jobs after the collapse of the bubble, are not as serious as the problems of Nigerian society, which is still largely dependent on oil exports and their fluctuating prices, where corruption is some of the most widespread and pervasive in the world, and where increasing numbers of college graduates are competing for fewer and fewer jobs in a shrinking economy. Japanese police also, despite serious lapses in investigations, do not have the reputation for the brutality and corruption that their Nigerian counterparts do, and they were therefore better supported by the public in their investigation and suppression of Aum Shinrikyou. The result is that while Aum Shinrikyou is barely a memory to many today, Boko Haram is still feared, not only in northern Nigeria but in adjacent countries as well.

The parallel between terrorist groups of different ideologies is widely recognized.

“[Aum Shinrikyo] Cult members no longer know the difference between right or wrong,” [Taro] Takimoto says. “It is the same with Islamic State militants — they think they’re doing the right thing by beheading people. Aum members could equally commit murder because of their strong religious beliefs. This is what makes them extremely dangerous.”\(^\text{18}\)

Likewise, the parallels between radicalization of Islamic and ultra rightist, neo-Nazi terrorists in Europe has been noted:

Both had grievances that eroded their self-esteem and made them angry. Both were seduced by a narrative that put them at the center of a greater cause and offered them what they craved most: a sense of belonging and a plan to act on their resentment.\(^\text{19}\)

The exact nature of the radicalization of Boko Haram terrorists still needs to be studied in detail, but so far it seems to fit the same pattern as the other terrorists. One question about Boko Haram is whether they have succeeded in attracting those with only a traditional education (\textit{almajirai} in Hausa) or whether they are still only successful with western educated Muslim youth.

\textbf{B. Local causes}

The situation in Nigeria is much worse because there are far more serious problems in the society, including a much worse situation for school leavers trying to find jobs, and much worse corruption in the government, including the police. This leads the terrorism problem to be much worse in Nigeria than in Japan or Western Europe, if not necessarily the Middle East or North Africa. The fact that the only police force in Nigeria is the federal police is also a factor, since the federal police are required to adhere to “federal character” in all their appointments to reflect the Nigerian nation state as a whole. Thus police posted to areas of terrorist activity, not only the Islamic terrorists in the north but also the ethnic militias in the south, are often unable to speak local languages and have difficulty trying to establish a rapport with the local population. Alleged brutal and corrupt crackdowns by police, including but not limited to massive, violent retaliation, 24 hour curfews and many roadblocks set up to stop for terrorists have been exploited by the terrorists to gain new recruits.

The specific causes of Boko Haram members’ radicalization of course lies in these specific conditions of northern Nigerian society. Although northerners are more numerous than southerners in Nigeria, and also dominate the armed forces, they tend to be poorer and their section of the country is less economically developed and less dynamic that the south. While many southern Nigerians complain that the north dominates the political life of the country, the average northerner gets little benefit from the alleged domination he or she enjoys. Resentments pile up until a poor northerner, with little to show for his expensive western education, and without a great stake in modern Nigerian society, will be easily converted to terrorism by a group that seems to be able to give him the self-respect and sense of belonging that Nigerian society as a whole cannot.


Arguably more effective than the police, or even the Joint Task Force (JTF) combining police and military forces, have been local militias, not only the so-called Civilian JTF, but the actions of local hunters using traditional guns. The local hunters know the terrain and are supported by local people, which they themselves are, better than either the police, or the military, or for that matter the terrorists. The success of the Civilian JTF has led to increased calls for state police to supplement the Federal Nigerian Police, and were a factor in the recently concluded Nigerian presidential elections, where the challenger, president elect Muhammad Buhari, promised to support a Constitutional Amendment allowing states and even local government areas to establish police forces in addition to the Federal Police. Whether Buhari's strategy will be more effective in defeating Boko Haram remains to be seen. Meanwhile Nigeria's crisis has invited foreign intervention as the insurrection threatens neighboring countries and Nigeria seems incapable of containing it. The crisis has thus spread, affecting the entire Chad basin, and other territories formerly in the Kanem Kingdom and its successor Bornu Caliphate, not just northeastern Nigeria.

C. Why Borno?

A constant question with many insufficient answers is why this movement not only arose in Borno state but remains most active in the area around Borno, despite constant moves out of the area and serious attempts to expand its influence. Boko Haram is clearly not some kind of Kanuri ethnic movement. Boko Haram's use of Hausa as its primary language of communication makes clear that it is interested in getting support from around northern Nigeria and adjacent parts of west Africa, where Hausa is a widespread lingua franca from Cote d'Ivoire to Sudan.

Many theories seek to explain the apparent relation between Boko Haram and Bornu. One expatriate researcher who has published on Boko Haram even told me that he had heard frankly racist attacks blaming the group on Fatimid DNA. One Nigerian explained to me that Bornu was where Islam had entered Nigeria and that therefore it was strongest there. I might have dismissed that explanation had it not come from a Muslim. Maiduguri, the Borno state capital, was a major place of competition between Sufi orders and Wahhabi groups and therefore the most militant jihadi Salafis gravitated there and thrrove, according to another explanation.

Mere chance and coincidence is probably the most likely explanation, though. Boko Haram happened to arise in Maiduguri and recruited among the local population. The then Bornu state governor, Ali Modu Sheriff, even patronized the group, as many Nigerian politicians will patronize religious groups in their search for votes. Those persons most affected by the Nigerian police attacks on the group were local Kanuri, who joined Boko Haram and died in the struggle themselves. The group recruited their aggrieved kin and continued expanding through local kinship networks. Relatives of victims of Boko Haram also are caught up in the struggle, but as Boko Haram's opponents, including various vigilante groups. While Boko

20. Buhari's platform on national security and defense promised to "Begin widespread consultations to amend the Constitution to enable States and Local Governments to employ State and Community Police to address the peculiar needs of each community. This would mean setting boundaries for Federal, State and Community Police through new Criminal Justice legislation to replace the Criminal Code, the Penal Code and the Police Act."


Haram has failed in its attempts to spread outside the Kanuri areas of Nigeria, so too the most intense opposition to it is found in the same areas. Other Nigerians generally seem to have less concern with the group as the possibility of its attacks affecting them declines with their distance from Bornu.23

Still, it must be admitted that Bornu has been suspected of harboring potential insurrection against Nigeria since early in the colonial era. The Magumi or Saifawa dynastic clan which ruled Bornu for nearly a millennium before their displacement by the Sheikhs is still important in Africa today and prominent persons belong to it. They were implicated in an official British report investigating Mahdist propaganda in Nigeria, and it was alleged that they had been specifically recruited by Mahdist agents because of not only their sophistication and wide networks of influence, but also because “they have never ceased hoping to regain their kingdom, Bornu.”24

IV. Attacks25

A. Nature, target

Boko Haram’s attacks fall into certain categories, although they have evolved over time. At the end of July, 2009 there were five days of clashes between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces, as well as targeted killings by both sides. More than 800 people were killed in the violence. Twenty nine churches were wholly or partially destroyed. Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf died in police custody. In lieu of any independent investigation into his death many, including Human Rights Watch, assume he was executed summarily. Eyewitness accounts corroborated that explanation, and police accounts contradicted each other. Whatever happened to the founder in police custody, Boko Haram didn’t disappear but launched its jihad against the Nigerian state. It was the beginning of an increasing wave of violence engulfing northeastern Nigeria and adjacent areas.

Boko Haram attacks are often against schools and educational institutions, especially teacher training colleges. Among Christian churches, Catholics seem to be a favored target, probably because they are well-known for providing some of the best western education available, but many other denominations have been attacked as well. Likewise ‘Izala preachers and mosques are common targets of Boko Haram, not only because ‘Izala adherents are often western educated but because ‘Izala preachers are more likely than those of other Muslim sects to denounce Boko Haram, since they recruit from the same disaffected young, western-educated Muslims. Drive-by shootings of those who speak publicly against Boko Haram became so common that motorcycles were banned by the authorities in Maiduguri city. Car bombings, suicide bombings and other improvised explosive devises were adopted by them as they expanded and learned new techniques, whether from training in other countries or

24. G. J. F. Tomlinson, History of Islamic Political Propaganda in Nigeria, London: Waterlow and Sons; August, 1926, p. 18. It should be noted that British paranoia about Mahdism at the time was quite rampant, and not necessarily accurate, although there is much detailed intelligence in the report.
simply from watching the news of attacks that other Jihadi groups staged in other countries. The nature and audacity of their attacks keeps increasing constantly.

B. Timeline of developments

Boko Haram after Yusuf’s death seems to have split into several factions, which were later reunited under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau in 2010. It is difficult to know much about its internal composition and structure. This fact is made worse by the habit of criminal gangs and others using violent means to obtain whatever ends have of imitating Boko Haram's methods in order to avoid detection. At least in the early years of its operations, Boko Haram would contact the Nigerian press, especially the Trust group of newspapers and magazines, to claim responsibility for their acts. Other violence that might seem to have been connected with them would be attributed to “alleged Boko Haram” or “suspected Boko Haram” activity. There is also the problem of suspected Boko Haram infiltration of security services, and furthermore of possible support and patronage from highly placed persons. These suspicions may or may not be justified, but with little to go on in the way of hard facts, who can know? Certainly terror has struck fear into many Nigerian hearts.

Abubakar Shekau’s video claiming to have taken over as Ustaz Yusuf’s successor appeared in June of 2010. The very next month a widespread campaign of violence broke out, characterized by targeted assassinations of police officers and Muslim critics of Boko Haram, took place in northern Nigeria, especially in the northeast. By September the group was bold enough and strong enough to raid a prison in Bauchi, outside of the Kanuri area, and release over 700 inmates, including over 100 of their own members. On Christmas Eve they attacked churches in Maiduguri, killing six persons. Bomb attacks in Christian neighborhoods elsewhere in northern Nigeria killed 33 persons, which started a wave of communal violence that killed hundreds more. The year ended with a bomb in a beer garden next to a military barracks in Abuja that killed at least four more people.

On April 8, 2011 a bomb exploded in the offices of the Nigerian National Electoral Commission in Suleja, Niger State on the western side of Nigeria. Sixteen were killed in that attack. The first recorded suicide bombing in Nigerian history occurred on June 16 of that year when the national police headquarters in Abuja, the federal capital, was attacked. Although the suspected target was the Federal Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Ringim, he escaped. Attacks against churches continued in June and July. An even more dramatic suicide bombing took place on August 26, 2011, when the United Nations headquarters in Abuja was attacked, killing 25 people and injuring more than 100 others. Boko Haram was coming increasingly to the attention of an international audience, not just Nigerians.

Attacks continued. On September 4, 2011 Muslim cleric Malam Dala was shot dead by two Boko Haram members outside his home in the Zinnari area of Maiduguri. During November 2011 Boko Haram attacked security targets, banks, and churches in Damaturu, Yobe State, leaving more than 100 people dead. On Christmas Day, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack outside St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, a suburb of Abuja. Another explosion at a church in Jos killed a police officer. Other attacks in Damaturu and Gadaka in the northeast were targeted at security forces and a church respectively and also killed people, although the military commander allegedly targeted in the former attack escaped. By the end of the year President Goodluck Jonathan had declared a state of emergency in parts of four northern states, including the three northeastern states and Plateau.
The next month Boko Haram began the New Year by issuing an ultimatum ordering southern Nigerians out of the north. Given their history of violence, their unpredictability and the failure of the authorities to counteract them, many southerners were terrified and began an exodus from the north to the south. After the deadline passed many attacks on individual Christians and churches took place. It became unclear whether Boko Haram realized that millions of Christians were indigenous to northern Nigerians while millions of Muslims lived in the south. There was definitely an attempt by the group, though, to create conflict between Muslims and Christians in the hope that Muslims would be forced to choose between being persecuted by Christians who could not tell the difference between them and other kinds of Muslims, and joining Boko Haram. Although inter communal warfare would have been just what Boko Haram needed for its recruitment, most Muslims continued to be alienated from Boko Haram and its terrorist extremism, and a general war between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria remains improbable. In fact a Muslim, Muhammad Buhari, was elected on a promise of taking more vigorous action against Boko Haram than his Christian predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, had.

Boko Haram also continued its relentless attacks. On January 20, 2012 they launched coordinated attacks against police facilities in Kano, a thousand year old city that is the largest traditional city in northern Nigeria. At least 185 people died and the Nigerian government lost control of the city for some time thereafter. In February Boko Haram attacked schools in Maiduguri, destroying at least 12 of them utterly. On April 8, Easter, two churches in Kaduna were damaged by a suicide bomber. Over 40 people eventually died from the attack. On April 26 another suicide car bomb attacked the offices of This Day newspaper in Abuja, killing at least seven people. Boko Haram threatened to attack other media outlets elsewhere in Nigeria. Meanwhile attacks against churches continued into June, sparking more sectarian killing. In September Boko Haram targeted cellphone towers in states across northern Nigeria leaving cellphone customers without means of communication in those states. Since landlines are notoriously unreliable in Africa cellphones were the major means of telecommunications for individuals and businesses, and this was a major hardship for many Nigerians.

On June 17 in Kaduna 19 people were killed following coordinated bomb attacks against three churches in Kaduna. Boko Haram did not claim responsibility but generally people felt they must have been behind the bombings. The death toll eventually rose to 74. Although a 24 hour curfew was imposed in Kaduna State immediately after the bombings, this was soon scaled back to a dusk to dawn curfew.26

On July 28 President Umaru Musa Yar’adua issued a statement ordering “security agencies to take all necessary actions to contain and repel the sad and shocking attacks by extremists on Police posts and public buildings in some states of the Federation.” The president further ordered all security to be placed on full alert and beefed up in neighboring states.27 Unfortunately the conflict between Boko Haram and Nigeria would last throughout President Yar’adua’s tenure in office and that of his successor.

Boko Haram continued its strategy of trying to start a general religious war between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Gunmen attacked a Christian Church in the village of Peri in Yobe State, on Christmas Eve, killing at least six persons including the pastor and then set fire to the church. First Baptist Church in Maiduguri was also attacked and five persons were killed, including the deacon. In neither case did Boko Haram claim responsibility, but there were few others anyone suspected. In February women working to vaccinate children against polio were attacked and killed by men on motorcycles. Again, Boko Haram did not claim responsibility but the attack fit their modus operandi and few others were suspected.

On January 1 a Nigerian Army raid killed 13 Boko Haram members while losing only one of their own soldiers in a raid in Maiduguri, according to their own account carried by CNN. At least 187 were reported killed, mostly civilians, in fighting between the Nigerian military and Boko Haram in the fishing village of Baga. The military accused the insurgents of using civilians as human shields while civilians told reporters that soldiers had deliberately set fire to neighborhoods where they knew civilians were hiding. By this time many Nigerians were unsure whether to be more afraid of the police and military or Boko Haram.

Boko Haram continued its attacks on educational institutions, killing around 50 children, students and teachers as they slept in their beds at the College of Agriculture in Yobe State in September. Classrooms were also destroyed in the attack. While kidnappings of girls, such as the students of Chibok, have captured the world’s attention, it is important to remember that Boko Haram doesn't kidnap boys who want western education. It murders them.

“Gunmen from Islamist group Boko Haram shot or burned to death 59 pupils in a boarding school in northeast Nigeria overnight, a local reporter and security forces said on Tuesday.

“Some of the students’ bodies were burned to ashes,” Police Commissioner Sanusi Rufai said of the attack on the Federal Government college of Buni Yadi, a secondary school in Yobe state, near the state's capital city of Damaturu.

Bala Ajiya, a reporter with the Vanguard newspaper who visited the Specialist Hospital Damaturu, told Reuters by phone the death toll had risen to 59, after counting the bodies as they came in.

“Fresh bodies have been brought in. More bodies were discovered in the bush after the students who had escaped with bullet wounds died from their injuries,” he said.

Rafai, who had given an earlier estimate of 29 killed, said all those killed were boys. He said the school’s 24 buildings, including staff quarters, were completely burned to the ground.”
Fighting between Boko Haram and Nigerian government forces continued throughout 2013 and on into 2014. According to a report by Amnesty International, after a successful Boko Haram raid on Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, over 600 persons, mostly recaptured Boko Haram members, were summarily executed by the Nigerian military. A pattern of summary executions and other atrocities has been reported by multiple independent sources, and is certainly a factor in driving some Nigerians to support Boko Haram against the Nigerian state.

Boko Haram finally caught the attention of not just Nigeria but also the world with its kidnapping of 276 female students from a boarding school in Chibok, Borno State on April 15, 2014. This story probably needs no retelling and there are plenty of other reports about it available in many languages. Suffice it to note that the issue still fester, with no girls having been rescued by anyone. Only a few of the girls have escaped on their own. The issue may have captured the attention of the world at large, but Nigerians, especially northern Nigerians, have been most affected by it, and the issue of the disappearance of the girls and the seeming indifference of the then Nigerian administration became important issues in the presidential election, in which a Muslim general and former military dictator with a reputation for incorruptibility and toughness was chosen over his predecessor. Whether he will be more successful in the fight against Boko Haram remains to be seen, although the world and Nigeria certainly hope to see Boko Haram finally vanquished. The armed struggle has continued and only escalated since the kidnapping, pulling neighboring countries into the fight.

It must not be forgotten that in addition to attacking western education, not only of girls but also of boys, Boko Haram is opposed to the Nigerian government, as well as to the “traditional authorities” that are recognized by it as the successors to precolonial government and the natural rulers of the people. On May 3, 2014 the Emir of Gwoza in Borno State was assassinated by Boko Haram after he spoke out against them shortly before the Chibok girls’ kidnapping. The killing was condemned by traditional and modern authorities as well as the public at large. In July 2014 Boko Haram allegedly staged an assassination attempt on Muhammad Buhari, the former general who was later elected president of Nigeria. Suicide bombers attempted to ram his convoy in a northern suburb of Kaduna. They succeeded in detonating their bombs and destroyed all the cars in his convoy, killing many but not General Buhari. As a politician who made Boko Haram a major issue in his campaign General Buhari is sure to be a continuing target of Boko Haram. That the government felt compelled to delay voting in the election because of the insurgency probably did not help the incumbent when his handling of the war was such a major issue.

At around the same time Boko Haram also tried to assassinate Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi, leader of the Tijaniyya Sufi order in Nigeria, while he was in central Kaduna City. The Sheikh, over 80 years old, had been an outspoken critic of the Boko Haram movement. The attempt on his life involved both guns and a car bomb, and although several passers by were killed, the Sheikh himself was not harmed.

Murders, massacres and suicide bombings continued, as did police and military responses, and raids by Boko Haram on prisons and detention centers not only to free their members but also to gain more recruits. More effective than the Nigerian police and military has probably been the vigilante group sanctioned by Borno State, known by its nickname “Civilian JTF.” These vigilantes and sometimes local hunters have arguably been more effective than Federal Nigerian forces because they know the local people and languages better than military and police forces from other parts of Nigeria. They also take high risks and suffer very high casualties since neither the official arms available to the government nor the illicit arms available to the Boko Haram forces are available to them and they are forced to rely on cutlasses, machetes and traditional muskets.\(^{38}\) Their success was undoubtedly a factor in president-elect Buhari’s campaign promise to allow state and local government bodies to set up their own police forces in addition to the federal police, as noted above. However, as with the police and military forces the Civilian JTF members have also been accused of extrajudicial killings and other crimes. The only thing certain is the generalized suffering of the people of northeastern Nigeria and adjacent areas.

The appearance of the Civilian JTF phenomenon is part of a larger pattern of active Muslim rejection of the Boko Haram movement, its principles and its tactics. The recently appointed Emir of Kano, the largest traditional city in northern Nigeria, Muhammad Sanusi II, denounced the Boko Haram movement in a Friday sermon on November 21 at the central mosque outside his palace and called for Muslims to rise up against them. The very next week the Friday prayers were interrupted by suicide bombers. As worshippers tried to flee, gunmen opened fire on the crowd with automatic weapons. The unarmed but enraged congregation turned into a mob which beat to death four gunmen with their bare hands. At least 64 persons were killed and at least 126 were injured seriously enough to demand attention at local hospitals.\(^{39}\) The emir himself was out of the country at the time, but the Imam of the mosque, Professor Sani Zahraddeen, is a well known advocate of tolerance and mutual understanding between not only different sects of Islam but also between Muslims and Christians.

The war continued to pull in other countries. In December of 2014 Boko Haram attacked villages in northern Cameroon, killing dozens of soldiers and recruiting hundreds into their organization. Cameroon sent thousands of soldiers into the area in response and reportedly killed dozens of Boko Haram fighters in return.\(^{40}\)

The center of the insurgency continued to be Borno State in Nigeria, where Boko Haram was reported to control up to 70% of the territory. Between 3 and 7 January 2015 Boko Haram reportedly destroyed the town of Baga there, killing perhaps thousands of civilians and destroying thousands of homes.\(^{41}\) The town was the site of military cooperation between Nigeria and neighboring countries as well as a center of civilian opposition to the Boko Haram insurgency. Unlike the case in some other alleged Boko Haram attacks, Boko Haram


quickly claimed responsibility for the atrocities and murders in Baga. In addition to troops from neighboring countries Nigeria also recruited foreign mercenaries in its fight with Boko Haram, although it insisted their role was confined to technical training and logistical support. Reports of South Africans and others becoming involved directly in combat were widespread and were difficult for the Nigerian government to deny, if also difficult for outsiders to confirm or deny.

Outside interest in Boko Haram was hardly confined to mercenaries of course. Other jihadi terrorists were attracted to Boko Haram, although the extent of their involvement in training, logistics and supplies, or media propaganda is difficult to ascertain. What is certainly true is that Boko Haram pledged its support to the Islamic State. The ideologies of Boko Haram and the Islamic State are similar though not identical, and they have similarities in both tactics and practices, although they also have different histories. Whether this joining of the movements is a last desperate move for help from a movement driven to despair or an alliance that could spread the most extreme form of jihadi ideology remains to be seen, but the development is definitely worrisome.

The struggle continues. The Nigerian military began rolling back Boko Haram and began actually rescuing some of its prisoners. The trials of soldiers accused of desertion seem to have had an effect. A new, charismatic commander who is liked by his men has also been a factor in improving morale. This new commander, Major-General Lamidi Adeosun, actually leads his men in battle rather than ordering them from a command room in the rear. A corner may have been turned in the struggle. But it is not yet over. Although the territory controlled by Boko Haram has shrunk drastically in recent months, the organization is still strong enough to mount a major assault on Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri city, the largest army base in the area. Although the multinational force has been able to drive the Boko Haram insurgency into the forests, they cannot prevent brazen direct attacks on military bases.

In addition to the unanswered questions about the group’s external support and source of arms there are accusations that have been made about alleged high level support for their activities among Nigerian military and political figures. Rumors of tip-offs from highly placed sympathizers leading to massacres of soldiers by Boko Haram are rife in Nigeria. Not wishing to make wild and unsubstantiated charges myself I will only record a few of the ones that have been made, and hope the Nigerian authorities can not only suppress Boko Haram but get to the bottom of their sponsorship, funding, and training. In December 2014 54 soldiers were

sentenced to die by firing squad for mutiny, for refusing orders to take part in operations against Boko Haram. Many of them argued that they had not been given the necessary equipment to carry out the operation.48 Rumors of military equipment being sold to Boko Haram by corrupt officers are also widespread but impossible to verify.

Even more persistent are rumors linking the Bornu State politician, former governor and former Senator Modu Sheriff to Boko Haram. It is known that Senator Sheriff as a political candidate had patronized the group before they turned violent, but rumors of his continued involvement with them persist, though they are difficult if not impossible to verify. Most recently this accusation surfaced when Steven Davis, an Australian negotiator hired by the Nigerian government to negotiate with Boko Haram, insisted that not only former governor Sheriff but also former Chief of Army Staff, General Onyeabo Azubuike Ihejirika and an unnamed official of the Central Bank of Nigeria were actively funding Boko Haram. His source of information was the Boko Haram members he negotiated with and he presented no corroborating evidence, but he certainly created a stir in Nigeria.49 Nobel Literature Prize winning author Wole Soyinka, world renowned as a writer of fiction, accused incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan of shielding the sponsors of Boko Haram, including former governor Sheriff, for political reasons.50

Since the election of former military Muhammad Buhari the tide seems to have turned dramatically against Boko Haram. Buhari’s first act as president was to order the headquarters of the Nigerian military to Maiduguri at the center of Boko Haram’s insurgency. He announced the decision in his inauguration speech on 29 May, 2015 and the military began carrying it out with immediate effect.51 Buhari’s public commitment to the defeat of Boko Haram was made publicly and clearly not only to Nigerians but also to the international community.52 Stepped up, coordinated attacks by multinational forces began hitting the Boko Haram militants hard and rolling back their control of territory, despite a desperate attack on Maiduguri itself by Boko Haram.53 Although this rollback began at the end of the administration of Buhari’s predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan, it accelerated during Buhari’s administration to the extent that by the end of the year even Boko Haram’s stronghold of the Sambisa Forest was no longer under their control. Buhari declared that Boko Haram had been “technically defeated” because they no longer controlled territory nor were they able to mount conventional attacks against either military forces or population centers, although they could still carry out terrorist attacks.54

And carry out terrorist attacks they did. They continued their conflict with local hunters, attacking and abducting seven of them and killing two others, losing only one of their own fighters. The hunters were armed with only traditional muskets, machetes, bows and arrows, and were attacked in broad daylight.\textsuperscript{55} They even began attacking motorists to seize petrol.\textsuperscript{56} Security continued to be a problem for rural people who reported being attacked on their farms by Boko Haram fighters.\textsuperscript{57} On the evening of July 12, 2016 Boko Haram even attacked the 119 Task Force Battalion in Kangarwa, northern Borno State. The Nigerian Army repelled this attack after a three hour firefight.\textsuperscript{58}

Most recently Boko Haram is reported to be split over their ties to the Islamic State. At his nomination hearing to head the AFRICOM command before the US Senate Armed Services Committee, Lieutenant General Thomas Waldhauser revealed that Abubakar Shekau's failure to adhere to guidance from the Islamic State was causing dissension among his followers. Although about half of the group had split off, the Islamic State was reportedly attempting to mediate between the two factions. The issue in question was apparently Shekau's insistence on use of children as suicide bombers, which even the Islamic State found horrifying.\textsuperscript{59}

The new Boko Haram is said to be under the command of Abu Musab al-Barnawi, whose name signifies that he is from Borno, as was the other faction's leader, Abubakar Shekau. Shekau referred to Nigerian President Muhammad Buhari as a “cow worshiper” in a video, an apparent reference to Buhari's Fulani ethnic origin. Fulani are traditionally nomadic cattle herders who range over a wide area of Africa. The Fulani ruled Sokoto Caliphate was at war with the Kanuri ruled kingdom of Bornu in the 19th century, and there has long been rivalry between the two groups. This may signal an acceptance, at least by the Shekau faction, of a Kanuri ethnic bias to their movement.\textsuperscript{60} Whether the Islamic state is even aware of the ethnic politics of their west African franchise is questionable.

Al-Barnawi is rumored to be a son of Ustaz Yusuf, the original founder of the movement, which suggests they may be trying to set up a new dynasty. The group has staged successful attacks in Niger, north of Nigeria and south of Libya and Algeria. Military operations by both Boko Haram and the coalition of states fighting them seem to have slowed down with the rainy season.\textsuperscript{61} They were expected to pick up again as the rains cease in October. Nigerian Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buarata, said that clandestine support from the IS is a

factor keeping Boko Haram going despite recent setbacks. Many in Africa were worried that the ties of this and other Jihadi groups to the Islamic State would be the cause of more jihadi activity around Africa, and even outside fighters invading African states.

A small number of the girls kidnapped from Chibok were also released amid reports of a trade for senior Boko Haram commanders which was alleged but not proven. It is clear that some sort of negotiated deal was struck, but neither the Nigerian government nor Boko Haram nor any intermediaries would say what the deal involved. Neither was it clear which faction of Boko Haram was involved in the negotiations, the one still allied with the Islamic State or the one still headed by Abubakar Shekau. Shekau had said that his group would not release any girls without the release of Boko Haram fighters in return. President Buhari had previously invited UN mediation of the Chibok girls issue, saying that the internationalization of the conflict, with Boko Haram affiliating to the Islamic State, made UN mediation justified. Others said they would have preferred African organizations as mediators.

The group directed by the Islamic State has shifted from terror attacks aimed against local civilians and toward military attacks on governments in the area and westerners such as humanitarian aid workers and missionaries. This was accompanied by a new sense of purpose and arms and other supplies, often captured from military and medical facilities in the region. The other faction has been reportedly much less well supplied, and increasingly desperate, plagued by desertion and prone to increasing suicide attacks. The IS affiliated faction also decided to concentrate its attacks on Christians more than on Muslims, especially humanitarian and missionary groups. They also continue to use suicide bombers and used one to kill nine people, including a pastor with the Church of Christ in Nigeria, outside a refugee camp in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Nigerian military sources claimed that most of the group’s fighters they had captured were unable to recite the Qur’an, and that some of them were unable even to recite the first surah of the Qur’an. This would mean that they would be unable to say daily prayers in Arabic. It should be noted that in west Africa to be a Muslim does not mean merely to subscribe to the beliefs of Islam but to practice the religion. In Hausa one does not ask “Are you Muslim?” but rather “Do you pray (salla)?” since it is prayer, fasting and the other pillars of the faith that make one a Muslim, not mere profession of belief.

Most Muslims find Jihadiis terrifying and extreme. Most Jihadiis found Al-Qa’ida too horrifying and extreme, at least before the September 11 attacks made them seem heroic to the lunatic

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fringe. The Islamic State was thrown out of al-Qa’ida for being too horrifying and extreme even for them, but the Islamic State finds Boko Haram as run by Abubakar Shekau too horrifying and extreme, even by its own standards. Truly this is the most terrorist of terrorist groups in the world. Although it has split into two factions, neither can be seen as more moderate than the other. Both engage in suicide bombing, and although one continues to attack ordinary Muslims, the other has increased its attacks against Christians. The total carnage wrought by the two groups may turn out to be greater than than wrought by them when they were united.

Whether or not the Nigerian state will triumph over Boko Haram remains to be seen. The brutality of the military and the venality of the vigilantes are factors that suggest that the Nigerian federal authorities may be unable to prevail.\(^70\) An often unrecognized factor is that the Nigerian head of state and government, Muhammad Buhari, although a northern Muslim, is a Fulani who comes from the area of the Sokoto Caliphate, which fought the Kanuri ruled Bornu kingdom for most of the 19th century. The area of Kanem-Bornu, around the Lake Chad basin, was an area of state formation going back many centuries. If the postcolonial states of Africa collapse they will most likely collapse into something resembling the precolonial state system, which had a long evolution behind it, unlike the recently imposed colonial state system. Boko Haram could be part of that evolution into a synthesis of postcolonial and precolonial conditions.

References


