

# Boko Haram

## The Rise, Success, and Continued Efficacy of the Insurgency in Nigeria

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While Nigeria is no stranger to violence, it is being torn apart, perhaps irreparably so, by a sophisticated Salafi-Jihadist Muslim group in the north that has managed to exploit longstanding ethnic and religious divisions and bring the fragile democracy to the brink of war. The group, commonly referred to as “Boko Haram,” is officially named “Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal Jihad” or “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad.”<sup>1</sup>The name “Boko Haram” is derived from the combination of the Hausa word for book—“boko”—and the Arabic term “haram,” the designation for all things ungodly or sinful. Thus, “Boko Haram” is not only the group’s common name, but also its slogan to the effect that “Western education (and such product that arises from it) is sacrilege.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite numerous factors that may have suppressed the movement, Boko Haram has managed not only to continue their operations, but to grow and evolve as an organization. What are the

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<sup>1</sup> Adagba Okpaga, Ugwu Sam Chijioke, and Okechukwu Innocent Eme, “Activities of Boko Haram and Insecurity Question in Nigeria” *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 1, no. 9 (2012): 82

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Pham, “Boko Haram’s Evolving Threat” *News Brief: Africa Center for Strategic Studies* 20 (2012): 2

factors behind Boko Haram's rise and continued success in its violent, ideologically-driven campaign that continues to affect Nigeria?

The first section traces the early evolution of what is now Nigeria, and attempts to explain how the fault lines that are today so easily apparent in the social, political and religious fabric of the country, came to be entrenched before independence from Britain. In addition, it highlights longstanding sources of tension over power and prestige within various ethnic groups and how this friction paved the way towards Boko Haram's message taking root.

The second section lays out the ramifications of the political turmoil in the modern state of Nigeria and how, as a result, the separation between north and south came to be institutionalized. The paper addresses the issue of rampant poverty in Nigeria, and how the juxtaposition between the comparatively wealth south and the increasingly poor north provides credence for Boko Haram's message of violent jihad and martyrdom. It assesses the historical antecedent of Boko Haram and attempt to explain just what makes Boko Haram so much more dangerous.

The third section examines the origins and evolution of Boko Haram, from foundation to early setbacks, and then shows the recent development of the group both in terms of leadership and tactics as they became influenced by al-Qaeda.

Fourthly, the paper examines the international ramifications of the group's increasing notoriety, and what the broader implications of an increasingly sophisticated Boko Haram means for regional and global security considerations. The paper concludes by analyzing the role of the Nigerian government in the crisis, and suggests potential steps that must be taken to effectively undermine the insurgency.

## Early Nigerian History

Modern Nigeria was created when the British colonized and combined a diverse group of independent and sometimes hostile nation-states with vast linguistic and cultural differences, organizing them into “perhaps the most artificial of the many administrative units created in the course of the European occupation of Africa.”<sup>3</sup> While the purpose of this paper is not to delineate the complex history and ensuing ethnic tensions that have plagued Nigeria since the British created the country, it is worth noting that Nigeria was initially set up as a Northern and a Southern Protectorate, and that these two areas were later combined.<sup>4</sup> The British directly governed in the southern portion on the Gulf of Guinea, and thus were able to influence the locals, and for the most part, convert them to Christianity. In the landlocked, predominantly Muslim northern part of the country, an autocratic, conservative Islamic hierarchy of Emirs—all owing their allegiance to a Sultan—traditionally ruled. In this area, the British governed indirectly through the traditional Emirs, severely limiting missionaries’ effectiveness and access, while at the same time cementing the indigenous political system.<sup>5</sup> To further complicate matters, there are large ethnic and religious minority groups spread all over the country, something that the British made use of very early on in their governance of Nigeria.<sup>6</sup>

Further, the history of Northern Nigeria and the resulting regional politics also have a direct influence on the strength of Boko Haram. Boko Haram is centered in Borno State, once the heartland of the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which dominated the region from the 11<sup>th</sup> century until its

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<sup>3</sup> William M. Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) 307

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Lugard, "British Policy in Nigeria" *Journal of the International African Institute* 10, no. 4 (1937): 379/80

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum to the American Jewish Congress, "The Tragedy of Biafra"

<sup>6</sup> Lugard, "British Policy in Nigeria": 378

conquest by Usman Dan Fodio in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Dan Fodio, from the western Fulani tribal region, established a Caliphate in the prevailing Sufi tradition, with its capital in Sokoto.<sup>8</sup> With the emergence of the Sokoto Caliphate, the traditional Bornu leaders were marginalized and stripped of their authority. At this time, the Bornu people turned to Mahdism, with its promotion of militancy and opposition to authority; thus “resistance to political masters in Sokoto was vocalized through theological divergence.”<sup>9</sup> When the British took control of the landlocked, predominantly Muslim region of what is now Northern Nigeria, an autocratic, conservative Islamic hierarchy of Emirs—all owing their allegiance to the Sultan in Sokoto—ruled. In this area, the British governed indirectly through the traditional Emirs, severely limiting missionaries’ effectiveness and access.<sup>10</sup> Another consequence of this form of government was the reinforcement of the pre-existing indigenous political system and the perpetuation of the disenfranchisement of the Borno people, who were further marginalized from any form of power. To further complicate matters, there are sizeable ethnic and religious minority groups spread all over the country, something that the British made use of very early on in their governance of Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> Today, the Christian minority living in the north of the country presents an easy target for Boko Haram, who frequently targets churches and the Christian community in their attacks.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Zach Warner, "The Sad Rise of Boko Haram" *New African*, April 1, 2012

<sup>8</sup> John N. Paden, "The Sokoto Caliphate and its Legacies (1804-2004)." DAWODU.COM

<sup>9</sup> Warner, "The Sad Rise of Boko Haram"

<sup>10</sup> Memorandum to the American Jewish Congress, "The Tragedy of Biafra"

<sup>11</sup> Lugard, "British Policy in Nigeria": 378

<sup>12</sup> "3 Church Attacks and Retaliation Rock Nigeria." *The New York Times*, June 17, 2012

## Independence from Britain

When Nigeria first achieved independence in 1960, it was evident that tribal loyalty, not nationality, was of paramount importance.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Nigeria's brief history of independence is characterized by coups, counter-coups, secession, and a civil war in which the various religious and ethnic groups vied for supremacy and a greater distribution of wealth. In addition, Nigeria's military rulers were overly dependent on oil-generated revenues and failed to diversify the country's economy. One of the unexpected outcomes of the violence, and especially the civil war, was the emergence of a relatively strong federal government, which divided Nigeria into increasingly smaller states, aiding the process of centralization. Where there were three states at independence, there are now 36 states that make up the Federal Government. The Federal Government is able to assert itself tremendously because of revenues derived from petroleum.<sup>14</sup> However, the constant ethnic violence is exacerbated by the mobilization of faith-based political identities, which has been "a defining feature of Northern Nigeria for centuries."<sup>15</sup> Recognizing the power of the traditional Sokoto, the military began to slowly lessen its influence by co-opting the Islamic authorities' support for the unpopular regime. They also imprisoned the sultan and ensured that a government-selected candidate would succeed him. Consequently, by the late 1990's, centuries-old social and political hierarchies of Islamic power were "completely smashed."<sup>16</sup>

In May 1999, the military ended its sixteen-year rule of the country and Nigeria returned to civilian, democratic government. Under the military regime, the government was viewed as "a

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<sup>13</sup> Margery Perham, "Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War" *International Affairs* 46, no. 2 (1970): 232

<sup>14</sup> Attahiru Jega, *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*. (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet and Centre for Research, 2000) 50

<sup>15</sup> Warner, "The Sad Rise of Boko Haram"

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

weapon of punishment, harassment, impoverishment, oppression, and intimidation” and many Nigerians viewed it as the major cause of all socioeconomic problems. Nigerians expected that the transition to democracy would be an immediate cure-all,<sup>17</sup> and while such beliefs were obviously overly-optimistic, they contributed to the populace’s deep sense of frustration with the government for failing to live up to expectations. To date, Nigeria is in the longest period of civilian rule in its history, has twice seen a peaceful transfer of power, and has the third strongest level of economic growth in the world. However, widespread ethnic and religious tensions plague Nigeria, and corruption is so rampant that Human Rights Watch has likened public service to a criminal enterprise that reinforces police abuse and other human rights violations.<sup>18</sup> Although systematic reforms have been attempted since 2008, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and poor macroeconomic management hamper progress.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of state and civil society, unlike in the south, the colonial British administration curtailed Western education in the north of Nigeria in an attempt to “insulate the north from modernity.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, the north includes not only a preponderance of Islamic schools, but a culture of contempt and derision for those who attend secular schools. Unfortunately, this has perpetuated the ineffectiveness of northern leaders in matters of civil administration, as they lack the tools necessary to govern the modern state. This has led to an enduring and institutionalized Islamic way of life in Northern Nigeria that is historically incompatible with the civil demands of the Nigerian state, and has a direct influence on the wealth disparity between the north and the

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<sup>17</sup> Oarhe Osumah and Augustine Ikelegbe, "The People’s Democratic Party and Governance in Nigeria" *Journal of Social Science* 19, no. 3 (2009): 185

<sup>18</sup> "Corruption on Trial?" *Human Rights Watch*, August 25, 2011, 2

<sup>19</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. "World Factbook: Nigeria."

<sup>20</sup> Lamido Sanusi, "Politics and Sharia in Northern Nigeria." In *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa* 181

south. In a country that is almost evenly split between Muslim and Christian,<sup>21</sup> this reinforces a duality in Nigeria, wherein Christians are perceived to be oriented towards the West, while the Muslims look to the Arab world.<sup>22</sup> This is of significance when one takes into account a survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2006, where 76 percent of Christians and 91 percent of Muslims said that religion is more important to them than their identity as Africans, Nigerians, or members of an ethnic group.<sup>23</sup> The U.S. War on Terror following 9/11 exacerbated Nigerian Muslims' deep-seated suspicion of the West; in Northern Nigeria today, citizens perceive non-Islamic aid and research as "part of the agenda of Western imperialism."<sup>24</sup> This duality is increasingly evident, demonstrated by twelve northern states adopting sharia law as their supreme rule, superseding civil law. This was a response to the election of a Christian president in Nigeria's first democratic, post-military regime election, in 1999.<sup>25</sup> Of further concern is that Nigerian voting patterns in the 2011 presidential elections correspond almost entirely with sharia and non-sharia enforcing states. The eventual winner, President Goodluck Jonathan, received over 50 percent of the vote in the southern, Christian parts of the country, while his competitor, Muhammadu Buhari, received over 50 percent of the votes in the northern, Muslim-majority areas.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> David Cook, "Boko Haram: A Prognosis" James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy

<sup>22</sup> N D Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The "Maitatsine" and "Boko Haram" Crises in Northern Nigeria." 9

<sup>23</sup> Robert Ruby and Timothy S. Shah, "Nigeria's Presidential Election: The Christian-Muslim Divide" Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

<sup>24</sup> Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The "Maitatsine" and "Boko Haram" Crises in Northern Nigeria." 9

<sup>25</sup> "A Clash of Civilizations in Nigeria" *Der Spiegel*, June 1, 2010

<sup>26</sup> Alex Kireev, "Nigeria. Presidential Election 2011" Electoral Geography

## Rampant Poverty

It is no coincidence that in an article highlighting the many challenges facing Nigeria, John Campbell and Asch Harwood highlighted Boko Haram as, “once an obscure, radical Islamic cult in the North [that] is evolving into an insurrection with support among the impoverished and alienated Northern population.”<sup>27</sup> In Nigeria, wealth is concentrated among very few, and 71 percent of Nigerians live in poverty.<sup>28</sup>

The Research Director of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), Dr. Sope Williams Elegbe states:

“The increasing poverty in Nigeria is accompanied by increasing unemployment. Unemployment is higher in the north than in the south. Mix this situation with radical Islam, which promises a better life for martyrs, and you can understand the growing violence in the north. Government statistics show that the northern states have the highest proportion of uneducated persons. If you link a lack of education and attendant lack of opportunities to a high male youth population, you can imagine that some areas are actually a breeding ground for terrorism.”<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, this assessment has proved accurate, as an investigation into the initial Boko Haram uprising found that all those involved were men between the ages of 18 and 40, almost all of whom were unemployed.<sup>30</sup>

In a 2011 study on the relationship between poverty and terrorism, James A. Piazza suggests that minority economic discrimination is a central factor in domestic terrorism. This study bases its conclusions on the argument that since terrorism is not a mass phenomenon, but rather is

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<sup>27</sup> John Campbell and Asch Harwood "Nigeria's Challenge." *The Atlantic*, June 24, 2011

<sup>28</sup> Paul Rogers, "Nigeria: The Generic Context of the Boko Haram Violence." Oxford Research Group. 3

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” Crises in Northern Nigeria."



undertaken by politically marginal actors with often narrow constituencies, the economic status of subnational groups is a crucial potential predictor of attacks. The empirical results demonstrate that countries that permit their minority communities to be afflicted by economic discrimination make themselves more vulnerable to domestic terrorism in a substantive way.<sup>31</sup> As previously mentioned, there is an absence of both effective civil education and civil administration in the north, and thus the northern, predominantly Muslim states are worse off than the southern states. In the northeastern Borno State, the birthplace of Boko Haram, only two percent of children younger than two years old have been vaccinated, 83 percent of young people are illiterate, and 48.5 percent of children do not go to school.<sup>32</sup> The combination of these factors meets Piazza's criteria for an ideal terrorist breeding ground. Further, since political and economic marginalization and poverty are evident along not only ethnic and geographic lines, but religious ones as well, Nigeria is more prone to acts of violence. Indeed, although poverty is endemic all over Africa, Nigeria's location on the fault line between Christian south and Muslim north means that there is a more receptive audience both domestically and internationally. The greater implication of the Boko Haram insurgency is that although salafi-jihadist groups are engaged in insurrections in various theaters throughout the world, it is in Nigeria that a poor Muslim population is fighting a secular, Christian dominated government in an attempt to restore the dignity of Islam and impose sharia law.

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<sup>31</sup> James A. Piazza "Poverty, minority economic discrimination, and domestic terrorism" *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (2011)

<sup>32</sup> Rogers, "Nigeria: The Generic Context of the Boko Haram Violence."

## The Maitatsine Precedent

Boko Haram did not come into being in a vacuum, but rather as a result of precedent. Although it failed, a debate over a proposed provision for a Federal Sharia Court in the Constituent Assembly in 1977 is recognized as being the first conflict to polarize Nigeria on purely religious grounds,<sup>33</sup> and tension over the religious and secular nature of Nigeria soon became a regular feature of Nigerian life. Indeed, the alienation felt by some Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria manifested itself in a violent insurrection decades before Boko Haram.

The Maitatsine Uprisings, which began in 1979, were the historical antecedent to Boko Haram, and has many parallels with the current state of affairs. The leader of the Maitatsine, Muhammad Marwa, believed that Islam had been corrupted by modernization. He condemned modern innovations such as wristwatches and bicycles, and believed that those who read books other than the Qur'an were "hell-bound pagans."<sup>34</sup> The name "Maitatsine" is a Hausa word meaning "the one who damns," and stemmed from Marwa's frequent cursing and condemnation of the Nigerian state.<sup>35</sup> Similar to the case of Boko Haram, the disaffected northern population was most receptive to Marwa, and although the movement started in other areas, the Maitatsine Uprisings gained a massive following in the north-east of the country,<sup>36</sup> where Boko Haram is most active today. Indeed, the movement's mix of Islamic language and Hausa practices

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<sup>33</sup> Abimbola Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State." *Africa Today* 57, no. 4 (2011): 100

<sup>34</sup> Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The "Maitatsine" and "Boko Haram" Crises in Northern Nigeria." 6

<sup>35</sup> Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State.": 101

<sup>36</sup> Warner, "The Sad Rise of Boko Haram"

“resonated with local traditions of protest” and adherents “grafted this indigenized Islam onto their long-standing revolt against the dominance of the Sokoto elite.”<sup>37</sup>

The two movements’ use of longstanding political disenfranchisement is not their only similarity. The groups’ progressions, from religious preaching and anti-government rhetoric towards the use of violence, are almost identical, as are the preliminary targets of their violent outbursts. In December 1980, police tried to prevent the Maitatsine from preaching, and the situation escalated into violence and rioting. The Maitatsine targeted the police, government establishments, Churches, Christians, and moderate Muslims. The Nigerian army was called in to restore order, and in the course of their efforts, Muhammad Marwa was killed.<sup>38</sup> The initial history of Boko Haram played out almost exactly the same, and will be addressed later.

In addition, poverty is also thought to have been motivating factor in the Maitatsine Uprisings, and the Committee of Inquiry that subsequently investigated the revolt specifically cited the poor economic situation in Nigeria as one of the main reasons the group shifted to violence.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, although their emphases differ, scholars agree on the centrality of economic factors in the outbreak of violence in 1980.<sup>40</sup> While the relationship between poverty and terrorism has already been addressed, it is worth mentioning that the same endemic poverty and widespread wealth discrepancies that are such a central factor in Boko Haram’s existence and indeed, success, were also a motivating factor in a violent rebellion in a similar part of the country, in 1980. Further, the Maitatsine Uprisings were only quashed four years after they began, in 1984, when the government allied with the emirate leaders. Although the threat was “snuffed out” by this

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” Crises in Northern Nigeria." 9

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 16

<sup>40</sup> Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State." 101

partnership,<sup>41</sup> it would only further alienate those already disconnected from the Sokoto leadership, making what was to come all the more inevitable.

There are some key differences between the Maitatsine Uprisings and Boko Haram that make the latter much more dangerous, and much harder to dislodge than the former. First, the proliferation of new technologies, technologies that the group is supposedly against, means that Boko Haram can use cell phones and the internet to coordinate with far-flung members, control its message in the press and on its own websites, raise funds, and access jihadi forums for the latest tactics from around the world.<sup>42</sup> Second, the presence of other groups in the region, with similar goals and aspirations as Boko Haram gives the group a decided advantage and was simply not the case at the time of the Maitatsine. These factors will make Boko Haram significantly harder to tackle than anything that has come before it, and means that the tactics used to deal with the followers of Muhammad Marwa will not necessarily be of use today.

## **Boko Haram**

While the exact date of the Boko Haram's emergence is controversial, a Nigerian military spokesman, Colonel Mohammed Yerima, claims they have existed since at least 1995 under the name of Ahlulsunnawal'jama'ahhijra.<sup>43</sup> Boko Haram is said to have been originally led by Abubakah Lawan, who later left the country to study at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia.<sup>44</sup> What is certain is that the sect subsequently flourished under the leadership of

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<sup>41</sup> Warner, "The Sad Rise of Boko Haram"

<sup>42</sup> Aliyu O. Musa, "Socio-Economic Incentives, New Media and the Boko Haram Campaign of Violence in Northern Nigeria" *Journal of African Media Studies* 4, no. 1 (2012): 116/117

<sup>43</sup> Juliana Taiwo, and Michael Olugbode, "Mohammed Yusuf Killed While in Custody." *This Day*, July 31, 2009

<sup>44</sup> Freedom C. Onuoha, "The Islamist challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis explained." *African Security Review* 19, no. 2 (2012): 55

Muhammad Yusuf, a Salafist who was strongly influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>45</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah lived during one of the early crises of Islam, when the Abbasid Caliphate was conquered by the Mongols; he was not only the source of inspiration for Islamic awakening movements, such as Wahhabism, but was the first to justify violent jihad against Muslim rulers who did not fulfill sharia law by labeling them “takfir” or heretics.<sup>46</sup>

Boko Haram is sometimes disparagingly referred to as “the Nigerian Taliban,” since the group is known to co-opt the symbols of the Taliban in Afghanistan. This includes use of their flag, calling their base “Afghanistan,” and inscribing the word “Taliban” on their vehicles.

Muhammad Yusuf initially sought to emulate the Taliban in Afghanistan by creating an Islamic state in Nigeria.<sup>47</sup> He established a religious complex that included a mosque and an Islamic school where poor Muslim families from across Nigeria and neighboring countries could enroll their children. This school became a mechanism for exposing potential members to their ideology, and subsequently a recruiting center for jihadis to fight the state.<sup>48</sup> Although there are similarities between Boko Haram and the Taliban in Afghanistan, it is widely believed that there are no formal links between the two groups.<sup>49</sup>

Boko Haram first received widespread attention when it launched attacks against police stations and other public buildings late December 2003; after eighteen members of Boko Haram were killed, they fled to a remote base near the border with the Niger to regroup.<sup>50</sup> There, its membership increased as motivated students withdrew from schools to receive Koranic

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<sup>45</sup> Toni Johnson, "Boko Haram." Council on Foreign Relations

<sup>46</sup> Eitan Azani, "The Ideologists." Radical Islamic Ideologies. *IDC Herzliya, Class Lecture*. December 15, 2011

<sup>47</sup> Cook, "Boko Haram: A Prognosis"

<sup>48</sup> Samuel A. Ekanem, Jacob A. Dada, and Bassey J. Ejue, "Boko Haram and Amnesty: A Philo-Legal Appraisal." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 5 (2012): 191

<sup>49</sup> Onuoha, "The Islamist challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis explained," 55

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

instruction. In the middle of 2004, Boko Haram began attacking police stations throughout the north in order to steal arms and ammunition. These attacks continued throughout the next few years and always resulted in police reprisals consisting of raids and arrests to recover the stolen property.<sup>51</sup> The continued success of this campaign and the inability of the government to quell their operations aided Boko Haram's ability to attract new members by demonstrating that it was powerful enough to stand up to the secular government in its fight for the enactment of a traditional Muslim society.

In 2009, this relative calm ended abruptly when Boko Haram members, already furious at the Bauchi State government's recent refusal to allow it to publicly preach and recruit new members,<sup>52</sup> reacted more violently than usual to perceived police brutality when enforcing a motorbike helmet law.<sup>53</sup> The ensuing events were almost an exact repetition of the Maitatsine Uprisings that occurred almost two decades earlier.

Boko Haram's violent reaction sparked five days of fighting and rioting in four states, in which over 700 people died and numerous buildings were destroyed.<sup>54</sup> The uprising was eventually contained by a joint operation of the police and military, called Operation Flush. The culmination of the operation was the bombardment of Muhammad Yusuf's house, and after a two-day standoff, Yusuf was arrested.<sup>55</sup> While in police custody, Yusuf was filmed begging for his life,<sup>56</sup> and was later killed. Although the Nigerian police later claimed that he was killed in an escape attempt, a subsequent investigation found that members of the armed services killed him in an

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<sup>51</sup> Pham, "Boko Haram's Evolving Threat" 2

<sup>52</sup> Onuoha, "The Islamist challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis explained" 58

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, "Boko Haram."

<sup>54</sup> Pham, "Boko Haram's Evolving Threat" 3

<sup>55</sup> Onuoha, "The Islamist challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis explained" 60

<sup>56</sup> "Muhammad Yusuf Interrogation" *Youtube*. August 4, 2009

extra-judicial murder.<sup>57</sup> By the time the uprising was contained, most of Boko Haram's leaders and financial backers, including former government officials, were dead. Many believed that without them—but especially without Yusuf—Boko Haram was finished.<sup>58</sup>

## Group Evolution

Far from destroying the group, the death of Yusuf became a major impetus for the escalation of Boko Haram's insurgency,<sup>59</sup> which itself would become a rallying point for disaffected Muslims. Unlike the Maitatsine Uprisings, there were those ready and willing to take up the mantle of leadership. Further, the death of the group's leader led to fractures within Boko Haram, with new factions forming regularly. In November 2011, it was reported that the group had split into three factions; namely, a hardline ideological sect led by a close associate of Yusuf's named Abubakar Shakau, a second faction that was mostly intent on bringing about political changes in the north, and another that used the Boko Haram brand to further its criminal enterprise.<sup>60</sup>

These factions are not only at odds with each other, as demonstrated by the assassination of a member of one of the more "moderate" factions, who was killed after negotiating with former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo,<sup>61</sup> but also differ in tactics and goals. One sect, calling itself the Yusufiya Islamic Movement, disagrees with the direction Boko Haram has taken since the death of Yusuf, allegedly because of the more radical nature of the group's activities after coming under the influence of Abubakar Shakau. They believe in maintaining the systematic

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<sup>57</sup> "Nigeria killings caught on video." *Al Jazeera*, February 10, 2010. Accessed June 21, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Pham, "Boko Haram's Evolving Threat" 3

<sup>59</sup> Okpaga, Chijioke, and Eme. "Activities of Boko Haram and Insecurity Question in Nigeria" 83

<sup>60</sup> Jennifer Cooke, Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, "Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland" (November 30, 2011)

<sup>61</sup> Jon Gambrell, "Nigeria: Radical Muslim sect grows more dangerous." Associated Press, November 4, 2011

approach that Yusuf introduced, and are thought to be the “older generation” of Yusuf’s followers. In turn, Shakau holds sway with the younger members.<sup>62</sup>

To complicate matters further, another group has emerged named “Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru),” which translates to “Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa.” The group has expressed displeasure with the current direction of Boko Haram’s tactics, especially its willingness to commit violent acts against fellow Muslims.<sup>63</sup> The emergence of a faction from within Boko Haram that rejects a takfiri strategy promoting violence against other Muslims shows that there are those within the organization, and within Boko Haram’s potential pool of recruits, that are more concerned with bringing a degree of dignity and respectability to their daily life than with bringing about the fall of the government.

In addition, while there are many who advocate engaging in dialogue, utilizing the same amnesty programs that have had great success in demilitarizing other groups throughout Nigeria,<sup>64</sup> it is important to note that the religious ideology of Boko Haram makes this impractical. Indeed the salafi-jihadist belief that is central to the group guarantees victory to the faithful and has resulted in a rejection of such a deal in the past. In April 2011, the offer by newly elected governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, was rebuffed, when the group released a statement on a local language radio station because "First we do not believe in the Nigerian constitution and secondly we do not believe in democracy but only in the laws of Allah." Further, Boko Haram presents a wholly new challenge for Nigeria, in that they have the ability to access the assistance of other established jihadist groups and networks from whom they can acquire weapons, knowledge,

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<sup>62</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Can Nigeria Exploit the Split in the Boko Haram Movement?" *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 36 (2011)

<sup>63</sup> "Rift in Boko Haram, 'Ansaru' Splinter Group Emerges, Calls BH 'Inhuman' To Muslims." *Sahara Reporters*, January 31, 2012

<sup>64</sup> Cooke, "Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland"



finance and ideological support.<sup>65</sup> However, the lack of clarity in Boko Haram's structure and ideological goals has made it difficult for the Nigerian government to implement specific policy recommendations.

## **Tactical Evolution**

Yusuf's death also directly affected the tactical evolution of Boko Haram. First, in June 2010, almost a year after Yusuf's death, the leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Abu Mousab Abdel Wadoud announced that his group would provide support, weapons, and training to Boko Haram. While this claim was widely dismissed, shortly afterward Abubakar Shakau, who until this point was missing and presumed dead, surfaced in a video that "might best be described as 'classic al-Qaeda.'"<sup>66</sup> He stated that he was the new head of Boko Haram, and promised to avenge the attacks the previous year and to return to violent jihad.<sup>67</sup> More significantly, he threatened attacks against not only the Nigerian state, but "outposts of Western culture" and later published a manifesto linking Boko Haram's struggle with global jihad, and especially the struggle of "the soldiers of Allah in the Islamic State of Iraq."<sup>68</sup> This display of solidarity with jihadi groups operating outside of Nigeria marked a severe revision of Boko Haram's operational strategy under Yusuf's leadership.

Another manifestation of Boko Haram's tactical evolution is the marked increase in acts aimed to discredit and delegitimize the Nigerian government and expose weaknesses in the security

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<sup>65</sup> James J. Forest, "Community Leadership and Countering Terrorism: The Case of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria" *Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association* (2011): 40

<sup>66</sup> Pham, "Boko Haram's Evolving Threat" 4

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

apparatus with the intention of heightening a general sense of insecurity.<sup>69</sup> In September 2010, Boko Haram militants carried out a prison break and managed to free over 100 Boko Haram members awaiting trial on charges related to the uprising a year earlier. During the course of the raid, they freed more than 750 other prisoners and scattered leaflets promising that more violence was forthcoming.<sup>70</sup> On Christmas Eve of that year, Boko Haram initiated a campaign of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, first targeting Christian Nigerians, and later 2011 election candidates of all ethnicities and religions that it did not accept.<sup>71</sup> The use of IEDs has come to replace targeted shootings from motorbikes as the hallmark of Boko Haram attacks.<sup>72</sup>

Another meaningful tactical development was Boko Haram's shift to the use of suicide attacks. The first of these attacks, and what is believed to be the first suicide attack in Nigerian history, occurred on June 16, 2011 and targeted a police headquarters in Nigeria's capitol city of Abuja. Two days before the event, Boko Haram issued a statement claiming connections to Somalia, stating, "Very soon, we will wage jihad...our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable."<sup>73</sup> Nigerian security personnel managed to intercept the vehicle used for the attack, but weren't able to prevent the explosion, which killed at least two and destroyed dozens of police vehicles parked nearby.

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<sup>69</sup> Lauren Ploch, Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, "Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland" (November 30, 2011)

<sup>70</sup> Pham, "Boko Haram's Evolving Threat" 4

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ploch, "Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland"

<sup>73</sup> Pham, "Boko Haram's Evolving Threat" 4

To date, Boko Haram has continued its attacks across Nigeria, and as of June this year, was responsible for over 1000 deaths in the preceding 18 months.<sup>74</sup> This escalation of violence leaves no doubt that the group has undergone a profound operational evolution. Further, with the sophistication and scope of their attacks grabbing both domestic and international headlines, Boko Haram's leaders appear to have realized the benefits of conducting sophisticated and highly spectacular attacks and the importance they have in providing publicity for their struggle and raising their profile.<sup>75</sup>

### **International Implications**

In August 2011, the group pursued an international objective for the first time, carrying out a suicide attack against the United Nations' headquarters in Abuja.<sup>76</sup> After the attack, which killed 23 and injured 80, videos of the alleged suicide bomber were released. In the videos, the attacker praised Osama bin Laden, who American forces killed three months earlier, and referred to the UN as "a forum of all the global evil."<sup>77</sup> This incident "was much more in line with other globalist takfiri organizations, and is strongly reminiscent of the suicide attack in Baghdad against the United Nations in August 2003, which was one of the opening blows of the Iraqi insurgency."<sup>78</sup> Another international attack occurred in March of this year, when Nigerian forces, with the assistance of British Special Boat Services (SBS) failed in a joint rescue attempt to free

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<sup>74</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Media Note: Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram Commander Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kamar."

<sup>75</sup> Valentina Soria "Global Jihad Sustained Through Africa." *RUSI Terror Analysis* 2 (2012):8

<sup>76</sup> David Cook, "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria." *CTC Sentinel*, September 26, 2011

<sup>77</sup> "Nigeria UN bomb: Video of 'Boko Haram Bomber' Released," BBC, September 18, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Cook, "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria"

to westerners, a British and an Italian citizen, who had both allegedly been held captive since May 2011.<sup>79</sup>

The sum of Boko Haram's tactical evolution points to cooperation with ideologically similar groups that operate throughout Africa. Until they implemented the use of suicide bombings, only al-Shabaab in Somalia (now an al-Qaeda affiliate) and AQIM had used the tactic in Africa.<sup>80</sup>

Suicide attacks are seen as a major obstacle for terror groups to overcome in their radicalization process, but if the case of al-Shabaab is any indication, a necessary precondition before becoming an official al-Qaeda affiliate.<sup>81</sup> This development is of increased importance because

by some accounts Boko Haram's uses of explosives have reportedly grown increasingly sophisticated and bear hallmarks of bomb-making techniques used by Al Qaeda affiliates.<sup>82</sup>

Further, the kidnapping of European citizens was interpreted as a clear sign of Boko Haram's shift to the adoption of classic al-Qaeda-style methods and tactics, and underscores their augmented ideology where they have essentially bought into the latter's narrative and cause.<sup>83</sup>

These occurrences, along with the creation of martyrdom videos and sophisticated, multi-location bombings,<sup>84</sup> as well as AQIM leader Abdel Wadoud's announcement of support, clearly indicate the presence of cross-border and inter-organizational cooperation between al-Qaeda affiliates. Abdel Wadoud stressed that the entire global jihadist movement affiliated with al-Qaeda, and not just AQIM, was committed to markedly expanding presence and operations in sub-Saharan Africa because it provides for "strategic depth that would give [the jihadists] a bigger scope for maneuvers". It believed that it would be impossible for al-Qaeda to operate in

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<sup>79</sup> Soria, "Global Jihad Sustained Through Africa" 2

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Hans Krech, "The Growing Influence of Al-Qaeda on the African Continent" *Africa Spectrum* 46, no. 2 (2010): 133

<sup>82</sup> Ploch, "Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland"

<sup>83</sup> Soria, "Global Jihad Sustained Through Africa" 2

<sup>84</sup> Valerie Thomson, "Boko Haram and Islamic Fundamentalism in Nigeria" *Global Security Studies* 3, no. 3 (2012): 53

West Africa without gaining a solid foothold in Nigeria, the region's leading power, leaving Boko Haram perfectly placed to profit from its increased importance.<sup>85</sup>

These disturbing developments, along with new evidence that Boko Haram is attempting to morph into a regional entity, with members and recruitment efforts across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Mali,<sup>86</sup> are likely a factor in the United States Africa Command's (AFRICOM) decision to include Nigeria in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). This is a U.S. Pan-Sahel Initiative aimed at defeating terrorism,<sup>87</sup> and is especially noteworthy since Nigeria is not in the Sahel. Further, the United States has recently taken preliminary steps to address the threat that Boko Haram poses to international security, by designating three of the group's members, Abubakar Shekau, Abubakar Adam Kamar, and Khalid al-Barnaw as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT).<sup>88</sup> While these measures are short of officially designating Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), there are bills within both the House and Senate aimed at changing this.<sup>89,90</sup>

## **The Role of the Nigerian Government**

The rise of Boko Haram in the north has been called "simply one manifestation of the profound failure of successive Nigerian governments to curb corruption, deliver public services, generate economic opportunity, establish accountable security institutions, and engage communities in

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<sup>85</sup> Yossef Bodansky, "Nigeria's Boko Haram Links with al-Qaida" *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy* 38, no. 8 (2010)

<sup>86</sup> Hussein Solomon "Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Responding to Boko Haram." *RUSI Journal* 157, no. 4 (2012): 8

<sup>87</sup> U.S. Africa Command. "The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership"

<sup>88</sup> Morgan L. Roach, "Boko Haram: Obama Fails to Designate Nigerian Sect a Terrorist Organization," The Heritage Foundation.

<sup>89</sup> *Boko Haram Terrorist Designation Act of 2012*, S Res. 3249, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess.

<sup>90</sup> *Boko Haram Terrorist Designation Act of 2012*, HR Res. 5822, 112<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess.

both the north and south in a more fully national polity.”<sup>91</sup> The severe wealth and infrastructure disparities and the failure of the Nigerian government to enact policies that would enable northerners to better govern themselves have not been properly addressed. Further, lack of foresight, prior intelligence, and perhaps political will by the Nigerian government gave Boko Haram the time it needed to grow from an obscure sect into a veritable national security problem. The government must address its failure to implement a clear strategy to tackle all aspects of Boko Haram’s appeal and success. As U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted on a 2009 visit to Nigeria, “The most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria’s wealth and its poverty is the failure of governance at the federal, state and local levels....Lack of transparency and accountability has eroded the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state.”<sup>92</sup>

One of the problems that the government has faced is that under some interpretations of Nigerian law, Boko Haram could be designated a religious group. Since the Nigerian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the government cannot outlaw membership. This means that Nigerian courts are incapable of convicting based on a defendant’s membership or demonstrable support for Boko Haram. As a result, law enforcement personnel can only at best hold suspects until bail is posted, or until they came to trial. Unfortunately, this has given rise to a tendency by the police and military to shoot, rather than arrest.<sup>93</sup> This erosion of civil liberties is to the detriment of Nigerian democracy, where security concerns are given primacy over the increasingly frustrated citizens’ right to due process.

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<sup>91</sup> Cooke, “Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland”

<sup>92</sup> Danjibo, “Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” Crises in Northern Nigeria”  
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<sup>93</sup> Murray Last, “Who and What Are Boko Haram?” *Royal African Society* (2011)

A 2011 report by the United States Department of State notes that “corruption and lack of capacity hindered the ability of the National Police Force to respond to security and terrorist threats within Nigeria’s borders” and that Nigeria “lacked communications, surveillance, and vehicle support to detect and apprehend terrorists and criminals transiting the country’s borders,” all of which offers Boko Haram a crucial operational advantage.<sup>94</sup> Further, most police stations in Nigeria do not document their work, and there is no database for fingerprints, no culture of forensic investigation, and only two forensic laboratory facilities, with too few staff and an insufficient budget. As a result, 60% of all prosecutions come as a result of confessions, often extracted under torture. This means that despite the arrest of large numbers of supposed Boko Haram members, police activity hardly impacts the group’s ability to carry out fresh operations.<sup>95</sup>

The policy of the Nigerian government towards Boko Haram can be characterized as “carrot and stick,” ostensibly reaching out to the militants, while improving security.<sup>96</sup> Security checkpoints have become the norm all over Northern Nigeria, and there are frequent patrols by heavily armed soldiers in major cities, resulting in the deportation of at least 1000 illegal aliens. The effects of the continued disruption caused by security enforcement, as well as the infringement on the right of northern Nigerians to go about their daily lives in peace will only lead to more frustration and a stronger sense of alienation from their government.

The Nigerian government must be careful not to turn the conflict into a religious war. As Daveed Gartenstein-Ross correctly points out, this would play directly into Boko Haram’s hands, and be reminiscent of Iraq in 2006. As he stated,” it is worth recalling how al-Qaeda in Iraq was able to

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<sup>94</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Terrorism 2010."

<sup>95</sup> Solomon, "Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Responding to Boko Haram" 9

<sup>96</sup> Jonah Fisher, "Why can't Nigeria defeat Boko Haram?" *BBC News*, November 11, 2011

set sectarian violence in motion through its attacks on Shiite targets—and then position itself as a protector of Sunnis. Boko Haram may similarly be able to capitalize on retaliatory attacks directed at Muslims after it strikes at Christians.”<sup>97</sup> Perhaps because of this, implementation of the “carrot” aspect of the Nigerian government’s policy has led to attempts by northern governors to engage in reconciliatory efforts with Boko Haram. This has included attempts at dialogue, as well as monetary compensation.<sup>98</sup> However, members of a peace initiative directed at Boko Haram believe that the government is not interested in any of Boko Haram’s grievances, including justice for the extra-judicial killings of its members, and seeks to solve the conflict through the use force alone.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, one of the first promises of Goodluck Jonathan following his election in 2010 was to expedite passage of anti-terrorism legislation, which would help the state to more effectively address Boko Haram’s continued attacks.<sup>100</sup> The promulgation of the Terrorism Prevention Act, which describes terrorism as “the calculated and extreme use of violence or threatened violence, perpetuated by malice, to cause serious harm or violence against individuals, governments and their assets with the intention to attain political, religious or ideological goals, through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear on civilian population,”<sup>101</sup> makes it easier for the armed forces to label Boko Haram as a terrorist organization.

The naming of Lt.-Gen. (Ret) Aliyu Mohammed as the National Security Advisor to President Goodluck Johnson has been hailed both internationally and in Nigeria as a shrewd step. Gen. Mohammed is reportedly highly respected throughout Africa, the Middle East, the West, and in Asia, for his security expertise and political acumen in a manner not accorded to any other

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<sup>97</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Is Nigeria the Next Front in the War on Terror?" *Foreign Policy*, July 3, 2012

<sup>98</sup> Iro Aghedo and Oarhe Osumah, "The Boko Haram Uprising: how should Nigeria respond?" *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (2012): 866

<sup>99</sup> "Analysis: What will follow Boko Haram?" *United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks*, November 24, 2011

<sup>100</sup> Vera Ekundayo, "Nigerian Terrorism Act: A right step forward" *Punch*, January 2012

<sup>101</sup> Oserogho & Associates, "Nigeria Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011" JD Supra Legal



African military or intelligence leader. Experts and officials consider him the Nigerian senior official most capable of comprehending and tackling this major threat, thus, saving Nigeria and the entire Gulf of Guinea from sliding into a jihadist chaos.<sup>102</sup> In June 2011, he oversaw the creation of a Joint Task Force (JTF) composed of the Nigeria's Armed Forces, Police Force, Department of State Security, Customs Service, Immigration Service, and Defense Intelligence Agency initiated Operation Restore Order to address insecurity in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>103</sup> The creation of the JTF was supposed to allow resources to be pooled, prevent duplications, and allow the free flow of information between the different parts of the security service.<sup>104</sup> However, since neither the police nor the army was particularly experienced in such operations, the de facto policy became "to kill not only anyone who attacks them but also, those whom they suspect may have been 'sheltering' the attackers."<sup>105</sup>

It has become increasingly obvious that the focus on military action as well as the tacit approval and reinforcement of extra-judicial killings only exacerbates Northern Nigerians' sense of alienation from the government. The government has not attempted to address failings in healthcare, education, economic opportunity, or infrastructure that are rampant in this area. Security forces have been as being overly aggressive "in order to be seen to be doing something" resulting in frequent raids of private homes and the death of innocent civilians.<sup>106</sup> Since the bulk of the forces involved in JTF operations are national and not local, they seldom share the same cultural or ethnic background of the inhabitants of the afflicted regions. Their lack of sensitivity

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<sup>102</sup> Bodansky, "Nigeria's Boko Haram Links with al-Qaida"

<sup>103</sup> Sagir Musa, "Nigeria: Understanding JTFs Operation Restore Order in Borno State" *All Africa*, April 2, 2012

<sup>104</sup> Solomon, "Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Responding to Boko Haram" 7

<sup>105</sup> Last, "Who and what are Boko Haram?"

<sup>106</sup> "Salafist Terrorism Goes African." *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy* 39, no. 6/7 (2011)

and ongoing excesses have lead many northerners to feel further alienated from the government and has left them feeling under siege “in an occupation by foreign forces.”<sup>107</sup>

As such, it appears that the government lacks the capacity and nuance to take steps to diminish the allure and the effectiveness of Boko Haram, and is unable to address the factors that helped give rise to the organization in the first place. There is a profound credibility gap between what the government and the people that has festered due to the former’s lack of follow through on its promises. There is an acute absence of professionalism and urgency, reflecting a failure by both the security services and the politicians who sent them north with inadequate intelligence and training.<sup>108</sup> All told, the failure of good governance in Nigeria is “perhaps the most viable explanation for the recurrent violence.”<sup>109</sup>

## **Next Steps**

While the Nigerian government does have the capability to adequately address the many failings that Boko Haram has exploited to garner support, questions remain about their willingness to do so.<sup>110</sup> Further, in order for any significant progress to be made, drastic improvements must be implemented to offset Boko Haram’s appeal to Northern Nigerian Muslims. More specifically, this would require comprehensive measures to ameliorate the profound political, economic and social inequalities in the northern part of the country.

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<sup>107</sup> Solomon, "Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Responding to Boko Haram" 9

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>109</sup> Danjibo, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” Crises in Northern Nigeria."

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<sup>110</sup> Ploch, “Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland”

The most urgent matter that the government must address is the high level of illiteracy throughout the north. This is the foundation of the institutionalized and self-perpetuating poverty rampant in the region. Without the ability to read and write, jobs will remain scarce, and poverty endemic in an area which has already shown itself as prone to bouts of violence and unrest. A dramatic reformulation of the way in which the Nigerian government invests in its population is necessary if it wishes to remain a viable state. This is also an area where nations—such as the United States—that are interested in helping Nigeria, but do not want to contribute militarily, can offer significant assistance in the form of aid and educational infrastructure development.

On a local level, there is room for the traditional Muslim leadership, especially the Sokoto elite, to play a large role. Any headway made by a Christian-led government—in an area where sharia law is preeminent—necessitates the empowerment of Islamic leaders to mediate the religious aspect of Boko Haram’s popularity. Even in the context of the historical grievances against the Sokoto, these leaders are able to address the religious disenfranchisement in northeastern Nigeria and at the very least, are seen as more authoritative and more acceptable to religious Muslims. The secular government should ensure that resources are made available for these leaders in an effort to sap Boko Haram’s support and provide northerners with a suitable alternative.

Nevertheless, security operations are still effective, and can and should continue to take place. While there are concerns about the complicity of local officials in the affairs of Boko Haram,<sup>111</sup> cultural and ethnic tensions can be mitigated by ensuring that there is closer integration with local officials. This would confer some measure of local responsibility, while at the same time, provide national security forces the opportunity to take advantage of local knowledge and

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<sup>111</sup> Ploch, “Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland”

fragment any relationship that might exist between local officials and Boko Haram. Further, there must be accountability for the excesses of the armed forces that take place during any operations. The Nigerian government must ensure that adequate training takes place and that both soldiers and civilians are aware of a legal framework where the professional security apparatus is held responsible for any missteps. This should be true not only on paper, but in practice, and would be a significant step in ending the fragmentation and alienation felt in northern communities. Instilling this accountability in Nigerian forces also has ramifications for the international community, as Nigeria is the largest African contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, with over five-thousand Nigerian military and police personnel deployed in seven United Nations operations.<sup>112</sup> If Nigerian forces cannot maintain discipline within their own country, it raises serious questions about their suitability in other conflict zones. Additionally, given the intention for closer integration among the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),<sup>113</sup> Nigerian security is not just a Nigerian problem, but an ECOWAS problem. The effects of the Boko Haram insurgency are being addressed with neighboring Niger, and the two nations have signed a bilateral agreement on defense and security aimed at curbing the group's activities. As part of the provisions, joint patrols will begin along unspecified portions of the border between the two countries and a communique was issued expressing "concern over the preponderance of terrorism in the region which necessitates the need to jointly tackle the situation which has become a big threat to peace and stability in the West African sub-region."<sup>114</sup> With Niger geographically located between Nigeria and areas of significant jihadist

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<sup>112</sup> Peter J. Pham, Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, "Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland" (November 30, 2011)

<sup>113</sup> ECOWAS. "The Economic Community Of West African States In Brief."

<sup>114</sup> Muhammad Bello, "Boko Haram: Nigeria, Niger Begin Joint Border Patrol" *This Day*, October 18, 2012

activity, like northern Mali, Libya, and Algeria, security cooperation impeding the free movement of personnel and weapons between areas of insurgent activity is crucial.

Lastly, since the United States sees Nigeria as a key strategic partner,<sup>115</sup> American officials could pressure Nigeria both through direct aid and ECOWAS aid. Although the United States will not want to be directly associated with the many excesses perpetrated by the Nigerian security apparatus, investing now in education, infrastructure, and the acquisition of relevant data for security analysis, would enhance the security of the United States, and would cost less than waiting until these trends worsen (as they did previously in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen).<sup>116</sup> According to an unnamed State Department official, the United States has already offered to help Nigeria against smugglers and “can help them develop mechanisms for tracking and determining individuals who are likely to be engaged in supporting Boko Haram actively.”<sup>117</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria’s even split between Muslims in the north and Christians in the south can be viewed as a microcosm of Africa as a whole. Any attempts that the Nigerian government makes to address the Boko Haram insurgency will have widespread ramifications for all of Africa. Although there are some profound differences, as a result of the similarities of ideology and tactics that have manifested in global jihadist movements, Nigeria is facing a similar threat to other nations throughout the world. There are many lessons that can be learned from the successes and failures

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<sup>115</sup> Ploch, “Hearing on Boko Haram – Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland”

<sup>116</sup> Ricardo R. Laremont, Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, “Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al Shabab” (November 30, 2011)

<sup>117</sup> Bello, “Boko Haram: Nigeria, Niger Begin Joint Border Patrol”

of these nations, such as the need for extensive cooperation among both governmental and non-governmental agencies across Nigeria, and the need to protect influential moderates within Nigeria's Muslim community.<sup>118</sup> Any lessons, both positive and negative, that the government learns as a result of the insurgency can and should be used in reference to other ethnic and religious conflicts the continent over.

Further, the advent of alliances between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda affiliates and sympathizers, as well as the recent success of Salafi-Jihadist militants in conquering large swaths of nearby Mali, is a serious source of concern. This is especially true given the readiness of Boko Haram's new leadership to turn Nigeria into an international theater of jihad. A recent assessment raises the worrying prospect of an arc of regional instability encompassing the whole Sahara- Sahel strip and extending through to East Africa, which the now weakened al-Qaeda-core could use in order to "re-group, re-organize and re-invigorate its terrorist campaign against the West." This suggests a new al-Qaeda strategy of 'going native', whereupon the group exploits local grievances by adopting them as its own, and uses them as a means to create new centers of operation in under and un-governed countries.<sup>119</sup>

Beyond instilling a strong sense of alienation from the government, Boko Haram has also succeeded in alienating Nigerian Muslims from Nigerian Christians. The outbreak of violence along religious lines, framed with religious language, has played into Boko Haram's hands and given them the justification and recruits to intensify the conflict and turn it into a religious war. The Nigerian government under President Goodluck Jonathan must ensure that this does not happen. Additionally, the failure of the government to address the socioeconomic and political

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<sup>118</sup> Forest, "Community Leadership and Countering Terrorism: The Case of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria" 41

<sup>119</sup> Soria "Global Jihad Sustained Through Africa" 2

conditions that gave rise to Boko Haram in the first place needs to be urgently reversed. If not, then even if the government does manage to successfully quell Boko Haram, there is no guarantee that a similar group with similar grievances will not arise. Further, the government needs to enforce high levels of discipline when dealing with Boko Haram, as the harsh and sometimes extra-judicial measures that their forces have taken have alienated the populace and emphasized a sense of fragmentation based on ethnic and geographic origin. These acts have greatly benefited Boko Haram and given them a continuous pool of frustrated recruits who are radicalized by the government's actions.

It should be noted that the government has had successes in dealing with Boko Haram and especially in minimizing their effectiveness. The group still operates using hit and run tactics, and they show no signs of being confident enough to directly engage government forces in the type of ambush and assault operations that characterize al-Shabaab's operations Somalia. However, Boko Haram is not al-Shabaab, and they do not have the strength and depth of operational capability that is widespread in Somalia. Even with Boko Haram's regional and international aspirations, as well as their perfect placement to act as a pivot for al-Qaeda's African operation, the group is simply not anywhere near the level of sophistication needed. Every effort must be made to make sure that this remains the case.

When these intentions, as well as the fractures within Boko Haram are taken into account, it is obvious that reconciliation efforts sponsored by the government will be difficult, as the group no qualms over murdering dissenting members. This proves that the government has no choice but to continue on its current trajectory of military victory and make peaceful overtures whenever possible. Beyond these measures, the lack of basic services, infrastructure and adequate education, as well as rampant corruption and the marginalization of some northerners from

political and religious power, has created an atmosphere of intense frustration in Northern Nigeria. This is the root cause of the existence of Boko Haram, and has provided the organization both the motivation and the manpower to carry out attacks. The organization's ability to learn, evolve, and exist, will continue unless dramatic steps are taken to address the failure of government. The Federal Government has failed provide basic services to the people, or show that a system of accountability exists that is both fair and functional. Widespread corruption, excesses on the part of the armed forces, as well as a failure to effectively govern will continue to be used by Boko Haram as justification for their actions, and provide them with unemployed, frustrated recruits. Only by demonstrating that the Federal Government is by and for the people, no matter their ethnic sect or religious belief, will the Nigerian government have any success in ending the Boko Haram insurgency against the state. In the meantime, it should be stressed that Boko Haram has the potential to grow into a significant global threat as salafi-jihadist groups and especially al-Qaeda pursue more arenas in pursuit of global jihad.



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