



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات
ALJAZEERA CENTER FOR STUDIES

Report

The Changing Dynamics of Boko Haram Terrorism

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Introduction

The mention of Nigeria anywhere in the world increasingly stirs up images of poverty, crime, ethno-religious violence, and terrorism. Indeed, these ascriptions, especially perennial Boko Haram terrorism, serve as a seam that interminably threatens to tear at the core of Nigeria's stability, unity and prosperity as a nation. Since the more violent phase of its campaign erupted in 2009, Boko Haram has instilled widespread insecurity across Nigeria and has increased tensions among ethno-religious groups in the country. The sect has been responsible for a series of deadly attacks on strategic governmental agencies, religious centres, and innocent individuals. It has also attacked key Muslim clerics, politicians, and Christians. But in more recent times, Boko Haram's attacks have been directed selectively at churches -- perhaps an indication not only of its strategic re-direction and focus but also of its desire to implement its own variant of shari'ah law by inflaming religious animosities and violence in Nigeria. Given the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria and the dismal socioeconomic conditions in which many Nigerians live, this report contends that Boko Haram terrorism is calamitous for Nigeria's fragile unity and, indeed, has a net tendency of further polarising Nigerians along religious and regional lines.

The Rise of Boko Haram and its Changing Pattern of Attacks

Boko Haram emerged immediately after 9/11 "wherein longstanding local conflicts were recast within the narrative framework of global jihad".¹ The sect represents at once the most dangerous form of the extremist Islamist agenda seeking to impose the contested shari'ah law in Nigeria. It must be noted at the outset that despite the Boko Haram claim that its call for the implementation of shari'ah law in Nigeria is countenanced by the Quran, the group does not enjoy popular acceptance among mainstream Muslims who maintain that such an interpretation neither suggests the need for the Islamisation of Nigeria nor affirms the non-acceptance of the constitutional provision of the secularity of the state.²

Since its radical operational metamorphosis in 2009, Boko Haram has undergone a number of significant transformations.³ When the group started around 2002, it modelled itself on Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan. After conflicts between the members of the sect and the Yobe state government over the application of unadulterated shari'ah, the Yobe State Council initiated efforts to expel the sect from the state. The sect then relocated to Kanama, a remote village near the border with Niger Republic.⁴ Goaded by the desire for revenge, the group waged a retaliatory attack on the residences of local government heads, regional officials, and divisional police in Yobe State on 24 December 2004. That attack paved the way for subsequent Boko Haram terrorist campaigns against Nigerian government authorities.

In late July 2009, Boko Haram waged destructive attacks on the ethnically mixed state of Bauchi. In the course of the attack, Boko Haram instigated Muslim-Christian violence in Bauchi City, and several hundred Boko Haram militants attacked the police station in which many of their members were detained. On 30 July 2009, following Mohammed Yusuf's declaration that democracy and Western education in Nigeria must change, military forces stormed the home of Boko Haram in Maiduguri and captured Yusuf, its founding leader. Yusuf was later found dead while still in police custody.⁵ The failure to prosecute those security personnel who were responsible for the extra-judicial killing of the Boko Haram leader represents one of the primary grievances of the members of the

¹M. Tanchum (2012) 'Al-Qa'ida's West African Advance: Nigeria's Boko Haram, Mali's Tuareg, and the Spread of Salafi Jihadism'. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* VI (2), pp. 75-90.

²A. Adesoji (2010) 'The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria', *Africa Spectrum*, 45 (2), pp. 95-108.

³O. Uzochina (2011) 'Revisiting Boko Haram: Changing the Rules of Engagement'. *Comments on Africa*, No 10, pp. 1-3.

⁴Tanchum (2012) 'Al-Qa'ida's West African Advance', pp. 75-90.

⁵*Ibid*, p.80.

sect, and can be seen as fanning the embers of the Boko Haram terrorist campaign against Nigerian security forces and authorities.⁶

At the end of the July 2009 uprising, the surviving members of the sect, including the present leader, Abubakar Shekau, fled to Niger Republic and Chad respectively to regroup and mobilise more support. This form of mobilisation “was one of the first indications of Al-Qaeda’s augmentation of Boko Haram’s capabilities as it refurbished itself in exile.”⁷ In January 2010, the head of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Abdelmalek Droukdel, publically offered to train and arm Boko Haram to wage attacks against infidels in Nigeria.⁸

Boko Haram resurfaced in September 2010 with a daring attack on a prison in Bauchi, releasing about 700 prisoners, of whom more than 100 were members. Following the declaration on 18 April 2011 of Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw Christian from the Niger Delta region and the winner of Nigeria’s presidential elections, there was a violent outburst in many northern states, reputedly masterminded by the supporters of General Muhammadu Buhari – the perennial and conservative presidential aspirant who served as Nigeria’s military ruler between 31 December 1983 and 27 August 1985. While Boko Haram’s strategy pre-dated the 2011 general elections, the bitterness and peculiar handling of the electoral results (especially the presidential outcome) by many northern political elites aggravated (Muslim-Christian and north-south) tensions and, it seems, the Boko Haram menace.⁹ The net outcome was that Boko Haram cashed in on the political bitterness by directly attacking Christians and destroying government structures in places like Kaduna, Kano, and Abuja. It is these selective attacks on Christians, Muslims, and even media institutes that this report now turns to.

Boko Haram’s Selective Attacks on Christians, Muslims, and Media Institutes

Boko Haram’s onslaught on Christians began with a series of attacks in Yobe state late 2011, where about 100 people died.¹⁰ On 25 December 2011, Boko Haram carried out a suicide bomb attack on St Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla (near Abuja), in which 44 Christians were killed.¹¹ The sect also claimed responsibility for bomb attacks that killed about 80 people around Jos on 24 December 2011 (Christmas Eve).¹² On 26 February 2012, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for another attack on Christians at Christ Church (COCIN) in Jos, which killed three and injured about 38. On 11 March 2012, it attacked St Finbarr’s Catholic Church also in Jos, killing 19 people.¹³

In addition, about 20 Christian students (and a professor) were attacked and killed by Boko Haram at Ado Bayero University, Kano, on 2 May 2012. In another assault that demonstrates a direct focus on Christians, Boko Haram stormed into a church service in Maiduguri and killed five Christians including the priest. Still in Maiduguri, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was found at St. Michael Church in the Railway Quarters. It was detonated with no casualty before the worshippers congregated for their weekend services.¹⁴ But on 3 June 2012, a Boko Haram suicide bomber drove a car into Harvest

⁶A.J. Omede (2011) ‘Nigeria: Analysing the Security Challenges of the Goodluck Jonathan Administration.’ Canadian Social Science, Vol. 7 No. 5, pp. 90-102.

⁷Ibid, 5.

⁸Ibid, 5.

⁹P. Eyam-Ozung (2012) ‘A Strategic Analysis of Boko Haram’ (2). *The Guardian*.

<http://businessdayonline.com/NG/index.php/analysis/columnists/37711-a-strategic-analysis-of-boko-haram-2> (accessed 5 July 2012), p.1.

¹⁰D. Cook (2012) ‘Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria’. Combating Terrorism Centre. (accessed 12 May 2012), p.1.

¹¹*The Guardian* (2012) ‘Nigeria: Fundamental Issues’. The Guardian 27 January.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/27/boko-haram-nigeria-fundamental-issues> (accessed 3 May 2012), p.1.

¹²BBC (2012) ‘Nigeria Unrest: Suicide Bomb Targets Church in Jos’. BBC, 26 February.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17169935> (accessed 5 May 2012), p.1.

¹³T. Obateru and S. Eyoboka (2012) ‘Tension in Jos as Death Toll Rises to 19’. Vanguard 13 March.

<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/03/tension-in-jos-as-death-toll-rises-to-19/> (accessed 5 May 2012), p.1.

¹⁴G. Ijediogor, N. Musa, C. Akpeji, and H. Habib, (2012) ‘Obasanjo: FG Already Dialoguing with Boko Haram’. *The Guardian*, 12 May 2012.

http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=85888:obasanjo-fg-already-talking-with-boko-haram-&catid=1:national&Itemid=559 (accessed 12 May 2012), p.1.

Field Church of Christ in Bauchi, killing nine people and injuring 35 others. There were also thematic attacks on Christians on 5, 6, 10, 11, and 24 January and 17th June 2012 in Maiduguri, Adamawa, Plateau, and Kaduna states.¹⁵ Together, those targeted bombing acts have created not only a tense national environment in which Christians feel and believe that they have come under Islamist siege but also a growing sense of many observers that Nigeria is poised precariously at the precipice of political and social catastrophe.¹⁶

Despite attacks on churches, Christians are not the only targets of Boko Haram assaults. Boko Haram adherents privilege a version of Islam that regards as transgressors those who do not abide strictly to the teachings of Allah. The net effect is that faithful Muslims are often targets of its wrath.¹⁷ For instance, it assassinated Sheikh Ibrahim Ahmed, a critic of the sect at Gomari Mosque in Maiduguri. According to Hussein Solomon,¹⁸ Senior Professor in Department of Political Science at the University of the Free State in South Africa, Sheikh Ibrahim's assassination was a clear message to other Imams that the only credible interpretation of the Qur'an is the Islamist one. Also, on 13 July 2012, a Boko Haram suicide bomber attempted to kill two prominent Muslims -- the Shehu of Borno and the state's deputy governor -- as they completed their Friday prayer. Both men escaped but ten of Muslims lost their lives.¹⁹ For Boko Haram, Nigeria's national and state governments are run by non-believers. As such, Muslim political elites stand condemned for their cooperation with their Christian counterparts.²⁰ Both groups are targets because they do not subscribe to Boko Haram's ideological commitment to implementing shari'ah law in Nigeria.²¹

An addendum to the foregoing incidents is the simultaneous bomb attacks waged by Boko Haram on the offices of *This Day* newspaper in Abuja and Kaduna on 26 April 2012.²² Boko Haram claimed in a YouTube broadcast that the attacks on *This Day* facilities in Kaduna and Abuja were retributions for insults to Prophet Mohammed²³ by a *This Day* journalist writing about the 2002 Miss World pageant in Abuja. The competition was abandoned following deadly riots in Kaduna that were motivated by the suggestion that Prophet Mohammad would have married one of the Miss World contestants had he been alive. The sect claims that there is no forgiveness for such blasphemy in Islam.²⁴

Overall, the Boko Haram attacks have become important symbols of Nigeria's structural weakness and vulnerability. This is particularly true in the face of the inability of the security agencies to make any meaningful headway in their fight against the sect, which has actually intensified and extended its activities to states outside of its operational base including Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Gombe, and Abuja.²⁵

¹⁵D. Cook (2012) 'Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria', Combating Terrorism Centre. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-haram-escalates-attacks-on-christians-in-northern-nigeria> (accessed 12 May 2012), p.1.

¹⁶K. Maier (2000) 'This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis.' (London: Penguin Books).

¹⁷Haruna, (2011). 'Stemming Nigeria's Descent into a Failed State', 1 December 2011. Available at: <http://dailytrust.com.ng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148772:stemming-nigerias-descent-into-a-failed-state&catid=6:daily-columns&Itemid=6> (accessed 1 December 2011), p.1.

¹⁸H. Solomon (2012). 'Understanding the Phenomenon of Boko Haram'.

<http://www.icsr.info/blog/Understanding-the-Phenomenon-of-Boko-Haram-in-Nigeria> (accessed 26 April 2012), p.1.

¹⁹H. Idris (2012) 'Shehu of Borno, D/Gov escape death as suicide bomber kills 10'. Daily Trust. <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/index.php/other-sections/lead-stories/171777-breaking-news-shehu-of-borno-dgov-escape-death-as-suicide-bomber-kills-10> (accessed 14 July 2012), p.1.

²⁰Tanchum (2012) 'Al-Qa'ida's West African Advance', p. 76.

²¹G. Kenny (2012) 'Will Boko Haram win?'

http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78338:-kenny-can-boko-haram-win1&catid=38:columnists&Itemid=615. (accessed 5 March 2012), p.1.

²²*The Economist* (2012) 'Violence in Nigeria: The Attacks Continue', *The Economist* 30 April

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2012/04/violence-nigeria> (accessed 2 May 2012), 1.

²³W. A. Fawole (2008) 'Militaries, Militias and Mullahs', in A. Adebajo and R. Mustapha, *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press), pp. 96-115.

²⁴*The Economist* (2012) 'Violence in Nigeria',

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2012/04/violence-nigeria> (accessed 2 May 2012).

²⁵J. J. F. Forest (2012) 'Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria', JSOU Report Vol. 2 (5), pp. 1-178.

Table 1: Map of Nigeria showing the operational areas of Boko Haram
Source: (Forest, 2012: 67)



Extraneous and Underlying Factors Conducive to Boko Haram Terrorism

Abimbola Adesoji, Lecturer at the Department of History at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, has shown that various underlying factors such as economic disequilibrium, envy, pervasive poverty and rampant unemployment render many youths willing tools in the hands of patrons. This assertion is corroborated by the fact that states most susceptible to religious violence and terrorism are those that are "poorer, unstable, and have a chronic history of violence." As argued by Jonnie Carson, current U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Boko Haram thrives on "popular frustrations with leaders, poor government service delivery, and the deteriorating living conditions of many northerners. Boko Haram seeks to humiliate and undermine the government and to exploit religious differences in order to create chaos and to make Nigeria ungovernable."

Past Policy Attempts at Extinguishing Boko Haram Terrorism

Under President Goodluck Jonathan, the Nigerian government has persistently used force to respond to the Boko Haram challenge despite growing evidence that security issues have strong socio-political overlay that continue to compromise the government's ability to respond effectively.²⁶ Aside from the reputed support given to the group by prominent northern politicians, the failure to directly address the root causes of the crisis bodes ill for any immediate solution. Reliance on military and police capabilities demonstrates state weakness and largely seems to exacerbate Boko Haram terrorism.²⁷

²⁶O. Obayiwana (2012) 'Nigeria: We don't want to be Another Greece', *New African*, No 515, pp. 58-61.

²⁷A. Walker (2012), 'What is Boko Haram'. (Washington: United States Institute of Peace).

The Nigerian government had also tried to initiate a *modus vivendi* with Boko Haram. But no sooner had the negotiation started than it failed because the middle man – Datti Ahmed, President of the Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria – pulled out, blaming the government of leaking the news to the media and of acting in bad faith.²⁸ Moreover, dialogue with Boko Haram will be much of a herculean task taking into cognizance the fact that some of Boko Haram's stated demands are practically unachievable in a democratic and secular state like Nigeria. For example, Boko Haram insists not only on dividing Nigeria into north and south but also on placing the whole country under the shari'ah law. It has also demanded the conversion of President Jonathan to Islam as *conditio sine qua non* for dialogue and ceasefire. Such demands are not only insensitive and in violation of the constitutional provisions guaranteeing the secularity and multi-religious nature of Nigeria,²⁹ but also counter-productive as new conflicts are triggered from non-Muslim quarters.

Clearly, to ensure sustainable peace and development, the Nigeria government must meaningfully address the range of social, political, and economic challenges facing the country. This will require an urgent focus on improving its governance capacity at all levels through a recourse to the rule of law, interfaith dialogue, credible justice system, reduction of unemployment, creation of useful career opportunities for the youth, provision of social services such as quality health care, quality schools and other social amenities such as roads, potable water and electricity.³⁰

Conclusion

In essence, we have attempted to demonstrate the changing dynamics and context of Boko Haram terrorism, especially its selective onslaught on Christians, Muslims, and the media. The report highlighted the emergence of Boko Haram within the post-9/11 environment when the debate to implement shari'ah law saturated and radicalised the northern landscape in Nigeria. The report also links northern socioeconomic and political grievances not only to the operational success of Boko Haram but also to the continuing inability of the Nigerian state to deal with the challenge to ensure national stability, unity and prosperity effectively. Despite the efforts made by the government to extinguish the Boko Haram menace, innocent citizens continue to be slaughtered on an almost daily basis. In line with "A Climate of fear" by the Nigerian writer and playwright, Wole Soyinka, this report concludes that to see the Nigerian people plunged into a state of helplessness and despair, is a harrowing cautionary tale, a truly tragic daily reminder to never take any political or religious situation for granted, and to never underestimate the focused energy and gravitas of Boko Haram whose instinctive recourse to the rule of fear and terror as a weapon of disintegrating the Nigerian state liquidates not just the government but also paralyses the daily activities and sanguine prospects of a dynamic people.³¹

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²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Obayiuwana (2012) 'Nigeria', *New African*, No 515, pp. 58-61.

³⁰Omede (2011) 'Nigeria'. pp. 100.

³¹Soyinka (2004) 'Climate of Fear'. (London: Profile Books).