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## Introduction: Terrorism and Counter-terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa

by Joel Busher



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One of the most striking features of the way terrorism and counter-terrorism have evolved in Sub-Saharan Africa during the last 3-5 years has been the apparent resilience of terrorist groups to increasingly large-scale national and international responses. As well as the scaling up of domestic counter-terrorism efforts, the African Union has continued to support counter-terrorism both through the various plans and protocols associated with its Counter-Terrorism Framework (see ACSRT) and through the deployment of African Union peacekeeping forces, such as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). There has also been substantial bilateral and multilateral support for counter-terrorism efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa by the wider international community, most notably the USA (see Stupart, 2013, Waddington, 2013). Yet in spite of this, several of Sub-Saharan Africa's most prominent terrorist groups have thrived, with Boko Haram resurgent even after a large-scale assault on the group by Nigerian security forces succeeded in killing its leader and around 800 Boko Haram members in 2009 (Agbibo, 2013, Zenn, 2013), and with the attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi illustrating only too well that Al Shabaab still has the capability to strike beyond the borders of Somalia.

This points to another striking characteristic of terrorism and counter-terrorism in the region. This is its international nature, and arguably its ongoing internationalisation, of which there are multiple dimensions. Perhaps most obviously, we have seen the incorporation of what were initially national or sub-national terrorist groups into regional and even global networks of terrorists and insurgents, and with this an apparent convergence of collective action frames and strategic goals: Al Shabaab announced its integration into the Al Qaeda network in 2008; although Boko Haram does not appear to have become organisationally integrated with Al Qaeda, its leadership has reached out to other jihadist groups both in Africa and beyond, and its splinter group, Ansaru, cooperates with and comprises at least in part of militants trained by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Roggio, 2013). Other international dimensions of terrorism in this region include the enactment of attacks beyond the boundaries of the countries in which they are based; the specific targeting of foreign (and in particular European or North American) nationals (Zenn, 2013); recruitment among diaspora communities by groups like Al Shabaab (Shinn, 2011, Vidino et al., 2010), a process linked in no small part with the expansion of the online presence of Sub-Saharan African terrorist groups (see Bertram, this volume); the various international flows of financial resources that have supported and sustained these groups (Doukhan, 2013, Vilkkio, 2011); and the spread of violence in the Sahel region through processes of international 'contagion' and 'diffusion' (Shaw, 2013). And as I have already alluded to above, it is not just terrorism activity that has internationalised, but also the counter-terrorism response. Within the international community, the view that has emerged has very much been that which David Cameron articulated after the hostage crisis at the Amenas gas plant, that 'this is a global threat and it will require a global response' (cited in Dowd and Raleigh, 2013).

Yet there are good reasons to be cautious about how the homogenising tendencies of macro-scale analyses of the global terrorism and global responses might shape our understanding of terrorism in the region.



As is the case within any broadly conceived movement, across the myriad jihadist terrorist groups, there are competing interests, ideas, strategic priorities and tactical tastes that can be teased out with detailed empirical analysis. For example, while there may be forms of association and collaboration between groups such as AQIM, Ansar Dine, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa and the Islamic Movement for the Azawad, these groups have articulated different strategic priorities and have adopted subtly different tactical repertoires (Dowd and Raleigh, 2013). And of course, terrorist actions and counter-terrorism responses are also shaped by local, national and regional social, economic and political particularities. If attempts to counter terrorism are to be effective in reducing the risk of terrorist violence and political violence more broadly for the people living in those parts of Sub-Saharan Africa that have been affected by the diffusion of this wave of terrorist activity, it is essential that scholars and policy-makers alike take the time to unpick these 'myths' (*Ibid.*) about global Islamist terrorism, and to examine how these regional and national particularities influence terrorism and the counter-terrorism response (Whitaker, 2008).

Several of the articles in this special edition, as well as wider scholarship on development and security make clear that one of the key elements of these regional particularities in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa concerns the relationship between the state and the citizen, and in particular public perceptions of the efficacy and legitimacy of state power. How does a state maintain its claims to legitimacy when it appears unable to ensure the delivery of basic public services? Even more to the point, how does a state build and sustain its claims to legitimacy when it is perceived, at least by some segments of society, to be actively working to favour particular religious, ethnic or class-based interests; or when the use of discourses of 'terrorism' and 'counter-terrorism' are themselves interpreted by substantial segments of the population as simply a further extension and abuse of state power? Such diffidence in part reflects the fact that it is all too easy to find examples of states, both colonial and post-colonial, both past and present, which have used the rhetoric of maintaining civic order and of countering terrorism to intimidate internal challengers, quash public dissent and oppress rival political factions. That various national liberation movements were branded 'terrorists' by colonial administrations is a fact that has not been erased from the collective memory, helped in no small measure by the fact that even within living memory, Nelson Mandela was still designated a 'terrorist' not only by South Africa's apartheid administration, but also by the governments of various Western states that continued to support the South African regime. Given this historical context, it is entirely unsurprising that African publics might be suspicious of international intervention in their domestic security and legal affairs (Whitaker, 2007). Anxieties about and suspicion of 'counter-terrorism' also derive from abuses of power carried out in the name of public order and counter-terrorism within some contemporary regimes. In spite of the criticisms of contemporary domestic counter-terrorism in democratic western states, and there are plenty of criticisms that can and have been made, these usually pale in comparison alongside, for example, the excesses reported in Kenya in the aftermath of the Westgate attacks (Howden, 2013, BBC, 19/12/2013), or with claims about the arrest of the partners and children of Boko Haram members by Nigerian security forces (Zenn, this volume). As Whitaker observes, at least part of the problem would appear to be that

*For centuries people in democratic countries have argued about the appropriate balance between individual rights and national security. With the spread of anti-terrorism legislation across the globe, this debate between rights and security is also being exported, often to contexts in which the human rights side of the scale has long been neglected. (Whitaker, 2007, 1029)*

In one way or another, each of the articles in this volume offers insights about how the evolution of terrorism and counter-terrorism reflects both these processes of internationalisation and the local, national and regional particularities. Abgbibo's article and Sjah's article both deal with the incorporation of Al Shabaab



within the Al Qaeda network and the implications of this for the group's tactics and strategic goals. In Bertram and Ellison's contribution, they present an analysis of the online presence of terrorist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa and how this can inform our understanding of the changing nature of terrorism and terrorist organisation in the region. The articles by Zenn and Pearson, Maiangwa and Nwankpa all address different aspects of the wave of violence associated with Boko Haram in Nigeria. Maiangwa presents an analysis of religious politicisation and the way religion has become an integral part of political fields of contestation in Nigeria. Nwankpa discusses the politics of amnesty, comparing how the politics of amnesty have played out in the case of the Niger Delta insurgency and the Boko Haram insurgency. Zenn and Pearson's article considers gender based violence in the context of terrorist and counter-terrorist activities associated with Boko Haram and the response of the Nigerian state. These articles are supplemented by two opinion pieces. One is a discussion between Amaliya and Nwankpa about the characterisation of Boko Haram, the nature of the threat posed by the group, and possible responses to the crisis provoked by Boko Haram's activities. The other is a discussion by Rekawek, in which he draws attention to fundamental challenges for the international community as it seeks to support African states in their responses to terrorism.

As a final remark, it is worth also briefly saying something about a couple of topics that are missing from this special edition. The fact that the overwhelming focus of this special edition is on jihadist terrorism is hardly surprising given not only the current distribution of terrorist activities in the region, but also the current international focus on this particular wave of terrorist activity and the way it intersects with the interests of key players within the international community. However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that what might be classed as acts of terrorism have been carried out by groups and individuals who draw from very different ideological wells to those of Al Qaeda affiliates: groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda (Allen and Vlassenroot, 2010), Christian militia groups in countries including the Central African Republic and Nigeria (BBC, 4/12/2013, Borzello, 2004), extreme right wing groups in South Africa (Welsh, 1995), and ethnic militias and so-called 'civil militias' in West, Central and East Africa (Nyabola, 2009, Okumagba, 2009). Indeed, as Amaliya and Nwankpa's discussion helps to elaborate, there are discussions to be had about the categorisation of groups over time, and the way that contests may be infused with different ideological perspectives and reflect shifting strategic aims (Vidino et al., 2010). It is quite possible that what starts out as an ethnic militia comes to operate more as a religiously defined organization and vice versa. What is also largely absent from this special edition is a discussion of definitions of terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of course, the Terrorism Studies literature as a whole is awash with arguments about definitions of terrorism. However, the Sub-Saharan African context would seem to be an especially interesting one in which to examine and return to basic conceptual issues, grounding them in clearly articulated empirical examples. Why is it, after all, that in a context of multiple insurgencies, only certain insurgent groups are identified as terrorist groups? And at what point can we talk about 'state terrorism', and when, if ever, might it be useful to do so?

**About the author:** *Joel Busher is a research fellow at the University of Huddersfield. The main focus of his research is on the escalation and de-escalation of ethnic and/or religious tensions from a predominantly micro-sociological perspective, and how these processes intersect with those of community development. His most recent work addresses the evolution of anti-minority protests in the UK, but prior to that he worked as a researcher and development practitioner with a specialism in Sub-Saharan Africa. He holds a PhD in Development Studies from the University of East Anglia.*



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## Articles

### Sub Saharan African Terrorist Groups' use of the Internet

by Stewart Bertram and Keith Ellison



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#### Introduction

Recent actions by French military forces in Niger and the global prominence of terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab and Boko Haram, have highlighted the growing counter terrorist focus on the countries of Sub Saharan Africa. Additionally in a post Bin Laden world and with the immanent withdrawal of coalition combat troops from Afghanistan, there is the possibility of Africa as a continent becoming the new front in the Global War on Terror (Mben et al., 2013). However, it is a mistake to assume that Africa's story is uniformly one of violence and death. Vibrant cultures and a rugged entrepreneurial spirit have combined with a robust Internet backbone, to create the embryonic emergence of high tech hotspots across Africa. With rising IT literacy levels, more and more Africans are becoming connected to the information super highway on a daily basis (Graham, 2010). A tiny minority of these Africans are terrorists.

Sites such as Al Shabaab's Twitter feed have been highly graphic in their content and both blatant in their promotion of terrorism as a legitimate practise, and notable in how easily accessible they are for the common Internet user. Indeed as of the date of this study the phrase "Al Shabaab Twitter Feed" is one of the suggested searches in the Google search engine when the name Al Shabaab is entered, showing how well trodden in digital terms the path to the Al Shabaab Twitter Site has become.

While the presence of Sub Saharan African terrorist groups on the Internet is obvious, there are many questions that examine the issue on a more granular level that remain unanswered. *Are the terrorist website publishers of Sub Saharan Africa actually resident in Africa? What is the preferred web-publishing technology for terrorist web publishers in Sub Saharan Africa? What is the geographic distribution of terrorist groups publishing in Sub Saharan Africa? Who are the target audience for the terrorist publishers of Sub Saharan Africa?* These are all questions that remain unanswered regarding Sub Saharan African terrorists relationship to the Internet.

The core objectives of this study were threefold. Firstly and most immediately, the research seeks to quantify the web presence of terrorist groups active in Sub Saharan African. Secondly, the study seeks to explore the relationship between web technology availability and adoption by terrorist groups, and if one factor precipitated another i.e. do terrorist groups merely follow the technological trends that surround them or do they use web technologies in a unique way? Thirdly, the study seeks to advance the methodology of terrorist netnography (as defined by Kozinets, 2009) by explicitly differentiating between web publishing technologies and deliberately confining the projects scope to purely Surface Web [1] sites within the Sub Saharan geographic region.

Sub Saharan Africa represents a unique opportunity for terrorist informatics researchers as the Continent is in a unique position of experiencing recent full connection (2012) to the fibre optic backbone of the Internet,





with the contiguous perceived rise of terrorism on the Continent (Perry, 2011, Morocco on the Move, 2013, Sapa-AFP, 2012, Lyman in Harbeson et al. 2013, Pan, 2003). The combination of both these factors presents an opportunity to study the relationship between terrorism and the Internet free from the overwhelming volumes of data associated with Western countries.

## *Literature*

The base line concepts surrounding the use of the Internet by terrorists, is a relationship that has been well explored within the context of previous research. Early works such as Weimann (2006) and a United Nations 2012 study, clearly illustrating the appeal of the Internet to terrorist groups. Additionally the enthusiastic adoption of Web technology by prominent individuals within Al Qaeda such as the late Anwar al-Awlaki, and the role that cyber facilitated networking and indoctrination has played within terrorist plots such as the cases of the Toronto 18 (Wilner, 2010) and Roshonara Choudhry (Carter, 2013), has kept terrorist use of the Internet high on the counter terrorist agendas of many Western countries for the past decade.

Possibly one of the most beneficial features of the research carried out on terrorist use of the Internet thus far, is the firm distinction between terrorists using the Internet in a non-technical manner to spread publicity, as opposed to the primarily theoretical idea of true cyber terrorists using the Internet to perpetrate physical acts of death and destruction (Conway, 2003 and Rid, 2013).

Despite the often-banal content of many terrorist websites (Holbrook *et al.*, 2013) the very presence of a terrorist group on the Surface Web has consistently provoked strong reactions from the public (Sheobat, 2013) and policy makers. With the assumed radicalization and recruitment power of terrorist web sites (Lappin, 2010, Awan, 2007 and Weiner quoted in FoxNews, 2010) many politicians have been critical of Internet service providers lethargy in response to terrorist use of social media [2] platforms (Kendzior, 2013). Following in the wake of cases such as Anders Behring Breivik (Wroe, 2011), negative perception surrounding terrorist use of the Internet has grown to such an extent that the issue is starting to shape the very form that web technology takes, with services such as YouTube offering functionality that allows users to explicit label content as inappropriate due to the materials promotion of terrorism (Kanalley, 2010).

Although, to date, there have been no specific studies investigating Sub Sahara African terrorist groups use of the Internet, Somalia's Al Shabaabs' use of the social media platform Twitter, has drawn large amounts of analysis from both media and policy circle (Pearlman, 2012). Academic studies such as (Kahn et al., 2004) have shown how common and easily accessible terrorist web content such as the Al Shabaab site has become, and just as the Internet tangentially touches many people's lives so, increasingly; many studies of terrorist issues tangentially touch on terrorist use of the Internet. For example, *Stroud's* (2013) study of Anders Breivik's relation to music, references Breivik's use of Massive Multi Player Online Role Playing Games (Deep Web [3] Internet technology) and the role these technologies played as a self gifted 'reward' to Breivik before he committed the attacks he has since become famous for.

There is also a growing body of work that examines terrorist, dissident and criminal use of the Internet as the core focus of the work. Studies such as Cheong *et al.* (2011) examined how the micro blogging site Twitter could be used by security services in the event of a terrorist attack and a growing number of works address social media's role in civil unrest (Khondker, 2011 & Ghonim, 2012). Within the field of criminology a number of significant studies have explicitly segregated malicious activities within the Dark Web [4] (Christin, 2012) from Surface Web [5] activity (Décarry-Hétu *et al.*, 2011) however, to date, the majority of research that has examined cyber terrorism has exclusively examined Dark Web terrorist activity (The



University of Arizona Dark Web Portal being the most prominent). What currently lacks in the literature is a more granular examination of both how various web technology platforms are being used by terrorists and how terrorist web content published to the Surface Web, deep and Dark Webs are connected from the perspective of the user experience.

Currently types of web technology vary vastly, from the ever-evolving catalogue of social media technology that has increasingly come to dominate the web publishing market since 2000, to the more static Hyper Text Mark-up Based (HTML [6]) sites that has been used since the inception of the Internet. Terrorist groups use both HTML sites as well as the full range of social media platforms. However, there have been few studies that have explored how the same group may use different technologies for different purposes.

The importance of making this distinction between technologies is highlighted by both Sagemans' (quoted in Weiman 2006, 118) conclusion that over 60% of terrorists are recruited via network of friends and family and the observation that once a terrorist group has become established the robustness and flexibility of a network form of organization often becomes pivotal in the groups success or failure (Arquilla *et al.*, 2001 & Ronfeldt *et al.*, 1991). Given that social networking technology is similar to the flexibility, redundancy and ease of use of the network form of organization that is so integral to the majority of terrorist groups, it is surprising that more academic work has not explicitly sought to disambiguate terrorist use of social networking technology from more static forms of Internet technology within the scope of the research.

## Method

### *Geographic Scope*

The scope of the research was decided by data held within the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (START, 2012) on terrorist groups active within Sub Saharan African. The decision was made to use the GTD in this way, as this data source provided an authoritative list of the most active and visible terrorist groups in Sub Saharan African and also provided a widely accepted definition of what was considered a terrorist act and by implication a terrorist group (for more background on the GTD consult Bowie *et al* in Schmid, 2013, pp. 295-298).

Currently in regard to the Sub Saharan African region the GTD contains 6401 terrorist events that occurred between 1970 and 2010 that have been attributed to 349 separate terrorist groups spread across 45 of the 47 of the countries in the Sub Saharan region. Of the original 349 terrorist groups listed in the GTD 104 had to be discounted, leaving 245 whose web presence the research team went forward to investigate. Terrorist groups were removed from the original 349 GTD list due to one of two reasons. Firstly, some group descriptions were too generic to yield meaningful results i.e. "Anti Government Rebels," "Islamist Extremist," "Tribal group," "Coup Plotters Against the Government" etc. and secondly, there were a number of examples of former terrorist groups becoming legitimate political parties within a country i.e. the African National Congress (the authors are not contesting that groups that fit into this category did not and do not continue to perpetrate terrorist activities merely, that due to their legitimised status and typically sizable web presence, any results drawn from these groups within the context of this study would be meaningless). While groups that had fully transitioned to political parties were removed, groups that were still engaged in political violence with only a marginal mainstream political presence were left in the study group.



## *Internet Scope*

This initial list of countries and terrorist groups provided the foundation for the research team to begin conducting searches with a specific country's Top Level Domains (TLD [7]). Of the 45 Sub Saharan African countries included in the research after the GTD had been mined, 26 of these countries had a Google search engine specifically optimized for that TLD e.g. Mali's specific Google search engine is <http://www.google.ci/>. If the country did not have a Google specific TLD then Google.com was used as the default search engine. As search engine results can be highly specific according to TLD, the reasoning behind the studies search strategy was that by using regional search engine results in conjunction with the larger Google.com search engine the chances of finding a web site specific to a terrorist search was increased.

The Internet Scope of the research was not only defined by TLD selection but by the strata of cyber space that the research team searched for terrorist web content within i.e. Surface, Deep or Dark Web. The study confined itself to examining Surface and Deep Web sites that were listed on Google with the investigative team never entering the Dark Web. The decision was made not to examine the Dark Web within this study due to the difficulties in searching the Dark Web space in the systematic way used for the Surface and Deep Web searching and the challenges of linking Dark Web sites to specific geographic domains [8].

The date range for the studies data collection phase ran from June 1 2013 to July 30 2013. The research team acknowledges that due to the distribution of the collection of web sites meta data across a date range, there was some inherent disparity between the user generated features of the collected sites, that could have generated errors within later interpretation of the data set e.g. Facebook Site X would have 300 *likes* on June 1, while Facebook Site Y would have 301 *likes* on July 30. In this case Y would appear to be the more liked site however, in the intervening period between X and Y's data collection, X could have gained more likes and hence be more popular than Y. The research team acknowledges this as a shortcoming in the date collection method and as an area for improvement in future studies.

During the search phase of the research, only web sites that could be directly attributed to the terrorist group were included with the collected data set, as such news websites and social media websites merely commenting on a groups activities were not counted within the study. Direct affiliation of a website to a group was based on the qualitative judgement of the research team and features such as declared overt support of a terrorist group, explicit use of a terrorist groups iconography in banner and headlines and tangible evidence of terrorist activities such as images and videos showing terrorist actions. One aspect of the data set that may lead to confusion for those seeking to replicate the results of this study is the exclusion of a large number Facebook sites that are apparently the home pages of terrorist groups. Pages such as <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Janjaweed/114753351875498> are examples of pages automatically generated by Facebook to attract new users, as opposed to original user generated content; as such they have been discarded from the data set.

As an exhaustive search of the Internet for every web site linked to the terrorist groups examined within this study was not possible, the research team made the decision to only view the first page of Google results returned. Search Engine Optimization research shows that over 90% of Internet users do not go beyond the first page of Google results (Toddjensen, 2011), as such the research team reasoned that by only examining the first page of Google results they were accurately modelling the behaviour of the average Internet user looking for information on terrorist groups in Sub Saharan Africa. Efforts were made to adapt Internet searching to the main languages spoken with the country being examined however, due to the large number of spoken languages in the Sub Saharan Africa region and the limitations the research team, searches within each country were only uniformly carried out in English, French and Arabic where applicable.



The specific mechanics of the Google search employed the use of speech marks to enclose terrorist group names [9] with the addition of the terms *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Typically the combination of these searching strategies returned any terrorist themed website that had been published to the Internet within that region. As with the teams focus only on the first page of Google results the team felt that the limited use of search syntax accurately represented the skills of the average Internet user. The variance of these three-search terms consistently yielded different results within which terrorist web content would typically be listed if it existed. The research team acknowledge that although this method was not completely rigorous, it was a consistent and impartial method of conducting Internet searching.

### ***Coding of collected websites***

Once a website linked to terrorist group was identified a number of features were recorded and some simple coding added. Features that were recorded about each websites included number of *likes* [10] (for Facebook pages), number of followers and following [11] (for Twitter pages), number of views (Youtube) and WhoIs [12] data for standard HTML pages. Additionally the date of creation was recorded for all websites.

The most important methodological distinction that the study sought to make was to separate social media based websites from more static web platforms (coded as HTML within the data set).

To conclude the methodology section of this paper, this study should be viewed a primarily qualitative study [13], using standard social science coding methodologies. The software used as part of the study included The Onion Router (TOR) anonymised web browser, Microsoft Excel, Batchgeo for mapping and Google Refine that was used for data cleaning and basic text mining purposes.

Although the technological approach of the study was simple, the study did attempt to adopt a more sophisticated approach to the subject matter by translating a cultural interpretive approach (Geertz in Martin *et al.*, 1994) into a cyber-medium. Pervading the methodology of the study is the researchers attempt to accurately adopt the behaviour of an average Internet user in one of the countries of Sub Saharan Africa. As with the majority of world Internet users it is assumed that most Africans favour Google over other search engines (Sterling, 2013), do not use advanced search syntax (Bray, 2003), do not stray beyond the first page of search results (iProspect, 2006) and are not aware of (or have little interest in) accessing the Dark Web (based on the inverse of Tor Metrics Portal: Users, 2013).

### ***Results – base line stats***

Once the survey phase had finished, key features of the researches data set included

- The research team found 112 websites that were linked to Sub Saharan African terrorist groups.
- Of the 45 Sub Saharan African countries surveyed 18 had evidence of terrorist web sites accessible from their TLD.
- Of the 245 terrorist groups surveyed, 57 had a web presence of some kind
- Of the 57 terrorist groups with a web presence the Ogaden National Liberation Front [14] active in Somalia and Ethiopia, had the greatest number of attributable web sites with 10 distinct sites in total.
- Breaking the 112 discovered websites down by the terrorist group category type showed the following (Figure 1).



<b>Terrorist group category type</b>	<b>Count</b>
Guerrilla / Political Party	72
Militant Islam	16
White Supremacists	8
Radical Environmentalists	6
Civil Rights Direct Action Group	5
Black Nationalist	3
State Sponsored Terrorist	2

*Figure 1: Terrorist category group type mapped to website count*

- The earliest active social media site was the Ogaden National Liberation Front Youtube site (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPJLy7EGuQk>), which was created in 2008.
- The earliest active HTML site was the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (<http://www.unitaangola.com/PT/PrincipNouvP0.awp>), which was created in 1995.
- Linguistic division of the web content was as follows.



Language Web Site Authored In	Count
English	79
French	8
Afrikaans	6
Arabic	5
Mixed (English/ Arabic)	4
Somali	3
Portuguese	2
Mixed (English/ French)	1
Mixed (English/ Afrikaans)	1
Indonesian <sup>5</sup>	1

*Figure 2: Count of web site publishing language*

- Six different types of web publishing technology were seen within the data set, with a full brake down as follows



Web Publishing Platform	Count
Facebook	53
HTML	34
Twitter	20
Forum site	2
Youtube	2
WordPress	1

Figure 3: Count of web publishing platforms

- The Facebook page with the most *likes* was Boko Harams' site (<https://www.facebook.com/NigerianTerrorismNewsArena>) with 6817 likes (as at 5 August 2013)
- The most active twitter feed was the Mujahideen Youth Movement (<https://twitter.com/AMEF3>) with 5056 Tweets (as at 5 August 2013)
- The Twitter account with the most followers was the Al-Qa`ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM) site ([https://twitter.com/Andalus\\_Media](https://twitter.com/Andalus_Media)) with 9929 followers (as at 5 August 2013)
- The Twitter account following the most other Twitter accounts was the Oromo Liberation Front site (<https://twitter.com/marsaabo>) which followed 284 other Twitter accounts (as at 5 August 2013)
- South Africa and Nigeria were the Sub Saharan African countries with the highest number of terrorist web sites associated with them, with 19 individual sites attributable to each. Somalia closely followed in second place with 18 web sites associated with it.
- No data was available for the user traffic that any of the 112 sites received due to the fact that this data is either proprietary or simple unavailable

### Results - qualitative analysis of the data set

One significant initial observation was that in almost all cases, where a search on a terrorist group returned a web site linked to terrorism, within the first page of Google results, and invariable higher on the page than the terrorist website, were pages from Wikipedia, GTD and the wider Start website [15] explicitly describing the group as a terrorist organization. While this result is predictable given that the original list of terrorist groups used in the study was sourced from the GTD, the observation does highlight the fact that it is unlikely that a user could stumble into a terrorist website without being aware of the groups' status as a prescribed organization.

Examining the data in more detail revealed a clear trend in the geographic distribution of terrorist web



sites across the Sub Saharan African region. Shown below in figure 4, is a visualization of the distribution of terrorist website in the region (distribution in this case is not based on the location of the server hosting the site but on the physical location of the terrorist group related to the web site)



*Figure 4: Regional geographic clustering of terrorist groups with an identified web presence*

The obvious trend shown by Figure 4 is that there are clear concentrations of terrorist web publishing activity in the Eastern, Western and Southern regions of the African continent. The nexus of activity in South Africa is possibly to be expected, due to the long established Internet connectivity and high IT literacy rates in the country, however, the clustering of activity in Eastern Africa is more intriguing. The 43 sites that are spread over Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia is an unexpectedly high figure given the very low Internet penetration rate within East Africa (Sudan has the highest with 19% Internet penetration of the population in 2012 (Internet World Stats) and the fact the East Africa was the last part of Africa to be connected to the Internet. Examining the linguistic break down of the 43 web sites associated with East Africa, this shows that 33 are written exclusively in English with 5 others written partly in English with the remainder written in either Arabic (2) or Somali (3). The favouring of English over the indigenous languages of the region is unusual, as although English is widely spoken in Sudan and Eritrea; other languages such as Arabic and Somali have a far higher population base within this region, therefore one would have assumed the terrorist groups would seek to publish in the first language of their host countries if their intention was to focus on indigenous population as their target audience.

Combining the linguistic analysis of the East African cluster of terrorist websites with the additional observation of the dominance of the English language within the wider data set (70 of 112 web sites were





published in English), the obvious question arises concerning who the intended target audience is of the websites collected within the study? As the majority of terrorist groups within the survey are publishing in English (with the notable exception of Far Right groups active in South Africa, who would appear to exclusively publish in Afrikaans) it is a tentative conclusion of this study that the target audience for the majority of terrorist groups of Africa is predominantly Western Anglophones as opposed to groups indigenous to Africa. This conclusion is supported by the findings of other studies that have observed groups such as Al Shabaab using the Internet in its attempts to actively attract Western recruits to African based conflicts (Jihadist Forum Monitor, 2010)

Notable in their divergence from the African norm regarding the intended target audience, are the web sites associated with terrorists published in South Africa. The sites of both South African Right-wing White and radical Black African groups would appear to be addressing their own regionally based constituency rather than seeking to engage the English-speaking West. It would appear that in contrast to other Sub Saharan African sites, whose objective would seem to be to attract support from the West to African causes, the intention of South African group's use of the Internet is to increase social cohesion within the group. The authors of Radical Black African sites such as *The Inkatha Freedom Party* and *AZAP*[16], have created a number of open and closed sub groups for supporters to network in what would appear to be an attempt to promote greater inter-party unity.

In contrast to the assessed 'outward from African' facing nature of the majority of terrorist websites examined within this survey, the collection phase of the research discovered a number of websites that opposed terrorism who appeared to focus on African nationals as the target audience. Sites such as *One-million-somalis-against-Al-Shabaab* (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/One-million-somalis-against-Al-Shabaab/109814322403744>) and *If You hate Al Shabaab Join Us* (<https://www.facebook.com/5Somaliwayn>), communicate a powerful message of opposition to the ideals of terrorist groups, due to the social proof of the tangibility nature of those posting vehement messages of opposition. In all cases these 'counter-terror' websites had received vastly more *likes* than their pro terrorist counterparts. This use of social media by the same diaspora, to both promote and denounce terrorism mirrors Mogadans (2005) staircase of terrorist engagement, within which although many thousands of people may feel a common grievance, those that turn to violent terrorism as a solution make up only a tiny minority of a wider population.

The example of the tangible power of a counter terrorist narrative coming from African nationals, highlight the influence that authentic author attribution can have for either a pro or counter terrorist message. One of the main challenges of the research was dividing web sites that were authored by individuals closely associated with terrorist groups and those authored by publishers who were merely commentating in a supportive manner about terrorist activity, with few tangible relations to the terrorist group. The research team assumed that the former category was more important within the wider context of terrorist use of social media than the latter however, research quickly showed that this division would appear to be arbitrary to many consumers of terrorist social media.

One of the most active generic social media platforms in Nigeria is the forum site *nairaland.com* and it was within this web site that researchers found a discussion on Boko Haram's use of Facebook (<http://www.nairaland.com/1297912/boko-haram-leader-shekau-opens-facebook>). The Facebook site being discussed on *nairaland.com* is purported to be the work of Abubakar Ibn Muhammad Shekau the current leader of Boko Haram.

Despite the fact that a number of postings on the Shekau Facebook page had been made from the Northern Nigerian town of Maiduguri, the current geographic center of gravity for Boko Haram, the research team



assessed that the page was not the work of the real Shekau, due to the banality of the postings and the excessive use of stock photography of Shekau. The mostly negative discussion on *nairaland* about the Shekau Facebook site (which as of the date of this paper has filled five pages) clearly shows that a terrorist web site need not be authentic to be provocative. The Shekau Facebook example highlights the growing importance of social media within Nigerian life and the potential influence that social media driven web content can have on a target audience.

One trend that was not present in the data set was any evidence of terrorist groups making any attempts to transition from the passive use of the Internet to the more destructive use of cyber space outlined by Conway (2005). Indeed of the 112 websites examined in the study only one website (<http://anonymousnigeria.blogspot.ca/2012/01/peoples-liberation-front-press-release.html>) showed an overlap between a conventional terrorist group and computer hacker collective, in this case the People's Liberation Front of Niger and a Nigerian offshoot of the Anonymous collective, a group only tangentially linked to true cyber terrorism under the most broad of definitions. While there were three examples within the data set of terrorist web sites distributing malware, it is incorrect to assume that the author of the malware was the same as the designer of the web site. Most commonly this type of malware is developed by a third party and embedded on a target website due to the websites lax security, rather than any link with the ideology of the web site. As such, based upon the data collected and examined within the study, the research team concluded that there was no firm evidence of a shift towards true cyber terrorism from any of the groups examined within this study in the Sub Saharan African region. Instead it would appear that the objective behind the creation of the web sites examined within this study was to spread the ideology and goals of the specific terrorist group to a wider audience.

### *Results – quantitative analysis of the data set*

Country	Number of Terrorist Attacks (GTD)	Number of active groups	Number of Terrorist related websites
South Africa	1921	8	19
Somalia	766	10	18
Angola	482	2	2
Nigeria	397	11	19

*Figure 5: Country, mapped to number of terrorist attacks, groups and websites*

The above table shows that while there is no relation between number of active groups and number of terrorist attacks or associated websites, there is a suggestion of a relationship between the number of terrorist attacks within a country and the number of terrorist related websites within that territory. Although there is only enough data to suggest a trend, the data does imply the presence in Sub Saharan Africa of the symbiotic links between terrorism and media production that has been previously observed in other parts of the world (Biernatzki, 2002).

Examining the data a step further it was obvious from the base line statistics that the overwhelming majority of the studies web sites (72 of 112), were linked to quasi legitimate guerrilla groups engaged in nationalist / separatist causes. These groups were relatively evenly geographically distributed across Sub Saharan Africa. In contrast, the Militant Islamic groups with a web presence (16 of 112) were concentrated into East Africa



(Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya) and West Africa (Nigeria and Niger).

Examining in more detail, some of the data points specific to Islamic Extremist web sites reveals more insight into this subgroup of and the unique way they are using the Internet. Shown below in Figure 6, is a scatter plot showing the number of webs sites created each year, but with the web sites for Islamic extremist groups broken out and represented separately.

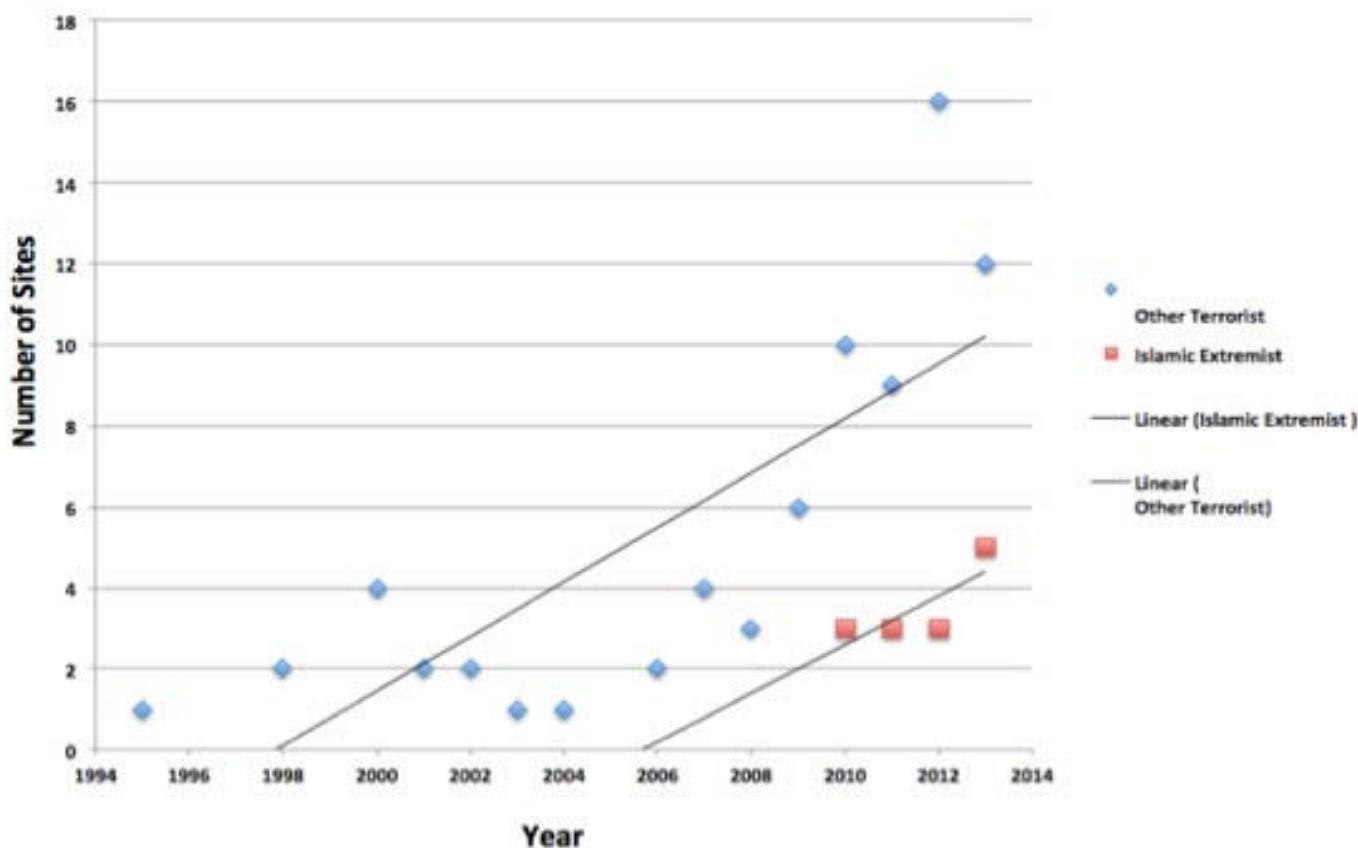


Figure 6: Count of terrorist web site mapped against creation date (red squares represent Islamic Extremist sites; blue diamond's represent all other terrorist category types)

Figure 6 shows that web sites associated with Militant Islamic groups a relatively recent (2009) addition to the collection of Sub Saharan Africa's terrorist web sites. Additionally Figure 6 also shows the start of a trend in the increase in the number of web sites associated with Islamic extremist groups, a trend that is following almost exactly the rising trend in terrorist web site publishing in the Sub Saharan African region.

Another unique point concerning Militant Islamic websites that is not represented in Figure 6, is that all the web sites associated with Militant Islamic groups were published exclusively via social media technology, with no examples of an Islamic Extremists website published in HTML (of all the terrorist actor categories within this study, Islamic extremists are the only group exclusively publishing to the Internet using social media).

Looking at social media adoption across all Sub Saharan African terrorist groups, revealed a strong trend within the data of the rapid adoption levels that social networking technology has enjoyed within the terrorist user group of this region. Shown below in Figure 7 is a graph showing the creation date for both HTML and social media sites mapped against year and number of sites created.

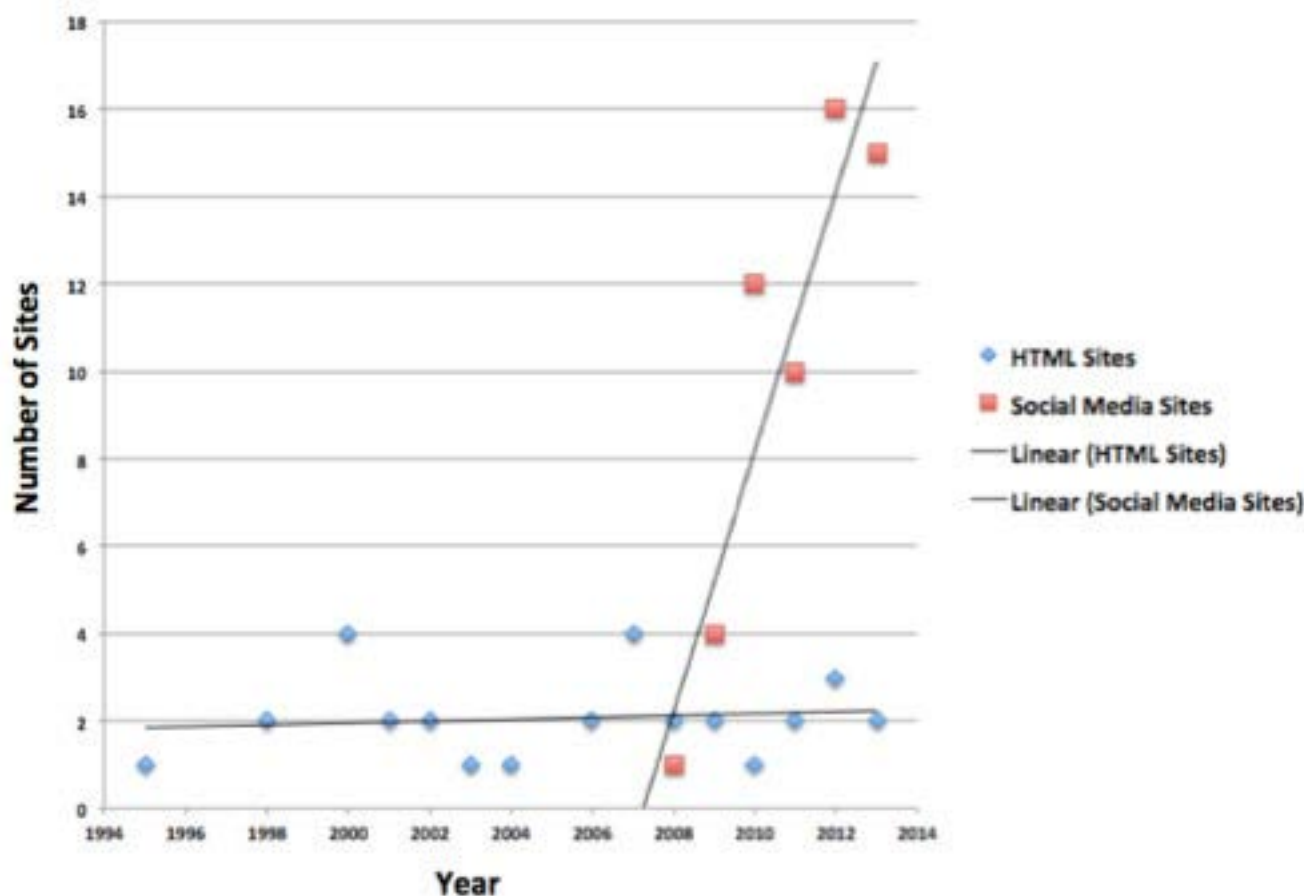


Figure 7: Number of HTML and Social Media sites created from 1994 to 2013

Within Figure 7 the trend lines are almost superfluous, with the creation rate for HTML sites only rising slightly since 1994, but the creation rate for social media sites rapidly rising in 2008. With such a strong trend in relation to social media adoption evident within the data, it is apparent that the overall rise in terrorist web site publication that started in 2007 (shown earlier in Figure 6) was facilitated largely by the arrival of social media technology.

While the authors of this paper are in no way insinuating that social media creates terrorism, the data quantitatively demonstrates what many have suspected for some time: that social media technology is playing a major role in facilitating the spread of terrorist messaging onto the Internet.

Accounting for the appeal of social media platforms to terrorists, are the technological properties inherent to platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media requires no programming skills to publish rich multimedia content, reaches a global audience separated from the vagaries of Search Engine Optimisation and completely free to the user. Additionally the inbuilt security settings of social media fulfil the unique user requirements of terrorist groups in that, social media platforms are resistant to Denial of Services attacks due to their highly robust technical infrastructure. In effect when any terrorist uses social media they sit behind a digital battlement that protects their sites from hacking attacks that regularly knock HTML websites offline. Additionally the defences of social media technology are not only technical, but legal also. With groups such as Al Qaeda finding their HTML sites increasingly being taken offline (Awan *et al.*, 2009), the legal protection that is afforded a group by default when they use a service from a social media giant like Twitter is considerable. The example of Anwar al-Awlakis' YouTube videos, highlights the legal umbrella that social



media membership affords, with the body of al-Awlakis' videos only being taken down after a direct request to YouTube from US Congress (The Guardian, 2010).

Based on the data represented in Figure 7 it is a fair assessment to make that social media will continue to be the dominant web publishing technology for terrorist publishers in Sub Saharan African for the foreseeable future.

In 2013 Facebook users reached over 1 billion users globally and while terrorist groups may have been caught in the huge tide of social media adoption, analysis of the studies data set shows that the way terrorist use social media could be markedly different from the average user. Aside from the content of the posts, one difference from an average user, inherent to almost all the terrorist Twitter feeds examined within the study was the ratio of Following to Followers. Quantitative studies by social media statisticians (Boris, 2010) shows that the average ratio between Following to Followers is approximately a one-to-one ratio however, of the 20 Twitter sites found in the study only 6 site came close to the standard one-to-one ration with a further 6 sites having no followers at all with the remaining sites showing very low Following to Followers ratios.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (<https://twitter.com/mendnigerdelta>) and the Al-Shabaab (<https://twitter.com/HSMPRESS1>) Twitter feeds typify the use of the social media platform by the terrorists within this study; following few or no other account and very few or no re-Tweets of others messages or hash tags. In the Twitter sphere, were success of an account is typically based on levels of engagement, the use of the service in this way is unusual and turns the platform from a tool for discourse and debate into merely a platform for broadcast. With one of the core concepts of Twitter being that new traffic is attracted to an account by the levels of engagement of that account, it is obvious that low engagement terrorist social media sites such as the MEND feed, rely on other mechanism such as traditional media to attract new traffic to their feed.

When the likes and follower counts of the studies 73 Facebook and Twitter accounts are added together a combined figure of 88623 is derived. Given that within both Facebook and Titter's functionality an account can only like or follow another account once, the figure of 88623 is an reasonable accurate representation [17] of the number of individual who have engaged with one of the terrorist accounts. This figure is in itself a surprising indicator of how widely social media technology allows terrorists to distribute their message, free from the constraint of having to attract the attention of the mainstream media. Given the fact that large scale use of Facebook and Twitter are relatively recent additions to the terrorists array of web publishing mediums (figure 7) and the fact that of the remaining 47 sites (user numbers unavailable) have been online since at least 1995 it is possible that the 112 sites examined within this study have reached an audience of hundreds of thousands.

One theory that is consistently prevalent within media and policy thinking in regard to terrorist use of the Internet, is that Surface Web sites such as the ones being examined by this study act as a gateway into more extreme Internet forums within the Deep and the Dark Web (Noveau, 2010, Lappin, 2010). With this theory in mind the research team examined the content of a number of the most active and extreme web sites, in and effort to find any links onto yet more extreme material on other Internet platforms or within deeper layers of the web.

Downloading all Tweets from the two main Al Shabaab Twitter Feeds (<https://twitter.com/hsmmpress123>, <https://twitter.com/HSMPRESS1>) on the 1 August 2013 collectively yielded 506 separate Tweets. When the text was searched for links to other websites 6 links to .info websites were fond, 1 to a .net site, 65 to various .com sites and 173 links to other Twitter feeds (using the hash tag (#) internal URL posting method used in



Twitter). Significantly, there was no link to Al Shabaabs far more radical forum *alqimmah.info* [18] within any of the 506 tweets and the websites and Twitter accounts that the Al Shabaab Twitter sites did point to were predominantly open source news agencies and far less radical in content than the seed Al Shabaab Twitter feed.

Based on these observations it becomes difficult to see how a would be terrorist convert would move from terrorist Surface Web sites, to more extreme Deep and Dark Web material. Possible accounting for this lack of explicit links to extremist media is the notion that the introduction to more extreme web sites such as *alqimmah.info* is done within private messaging, making the transit mechanism from Surface Web to Deep Web less visible.

The final quantitative point that can be drawn from the data set is the registered location (WhoIs) data of the HTML websites (social media sites do not have WhoIs records). Of the 34 HTML sites only 12 were deliberately using registration obfuscation services where no registration details could be seen. Of the remaining web sites 11 were hosted in the USA, 4 in Great Britain and South Africa (respectively) and 1 in Australia and Switzerland (respectively). Aside from South African Far Right groups, it would appear that terrorist web site publishers in Sub Saharan Africa prefer to host their sites outside of the African continent. Given that reliable Web Hosting [19] services have been available out of South Africa since at least the late 1990s, the registration of terrorist HTML sites outside of Africa suggests that the authors of the sites are not resident in Africa [20] and highlights the international nature of the African terrorism.

One of the main unanswered questions left open by this study is how tangibly linked the authors of the studies' web sites are to the terrorist groups core operatives conducting the 'bomb and bullet' (Hoffman, 1998) activities of the groups. Based on this studies data alone it is almost impossible to discern this relationship with any degree of certainty. It would appear that all the content of the 112 web sites examined within the study could have been collected from the open source media and re-published by enthusiastic supporters with little or no connection to the terrorist organization other than an ideological alignment. There was one notable exception to this trend and that was the Twitter account of Boko Haram (<https://twitter.com/BOKOHARAM2012>).

Although purely anecdotal it would appear that the Boko Haram Twitter account had a far closer connection to core terrorist operatives than any of the other sites examined within this study. A particularly compelling aspect of the Boko Haram site that would support this assertion was the photographs that were posted to the account. While there were a number of graphic images of conflict and death the vast majority of images posted to the account showed Boko Haram members engaging in community work such as aid distribution and community conflict resolution. The content of the Boko Haram site reflected a sophisticated understating of classic insurgency techniques such as an attempt to supplant the traditional rule of government and social work that would curry favour for Boko Haram within the target population (it is notable that the Boko Haram site examined by this study is in fact the third iteration of the site after Twitter suspended the first two accounts (Guardian, 2013)). Although the second iteration of the Boko Haram Twitter account fell outside of the collection date range of this study, the account is particularly significant in that it was suspended when it displayed graphic images of a dead French Special Forces soldier (Gordts, 2013). This incident supported the theory that the account's author had an intimate connection to Boko Haram operatives due to the fact that the multiple images displayed on the account were obviously from a primary source [21] and predated open source news reporting by at least 12 hours.



## Conclusion

The most significant conclusion of this study is the observation of the strong adoption trend by terrorist web publishers of social media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. The trend was so strong that the study concludes that this adoption of social media technology (within the terrorist web publishing diaspora) has been the main factor in facilitating the overall rise of the terrorist web presence in Sub Saharan Africa.

While social media undoubtedly gives a voice to terrorists, this study has shown that the technology also gives voice to the 'every man' citizen that would oppose the use of violence to achieve political objectives. The examples of emotive, first person narratives with high *like* counts that the studies researchers observed, manifestly demonstrates that terrorist often do not represent the views of the wider countries population. With an almost consensus perception within academic and professional circles that terrorist use of the Internet is uniformly a negative phenomenon, this study challenges this perception and raises the possibility that discourse facilitated via social media has the potential to counter terrorism more effectively than more conventional forms of counter terrorist messaging.

The results of the WhoIs record searches and the fact that that the majority of the Sub Saharan African terrorist web sites are hosted outside of Africa, combined with the heavy Anglophone trend of the websites content, highlight the increasingly international nature of terrorism in Africa (Shinn, 2010).

Terrorist web site publishing in the study region consistently bucked the local Internet usage trends, both in terms of choice of language the sites was published in typically English (79 of the 112) and the greater than expected density of publishing activity for a minority interest group within a developing Internet region. Both of these factors are clear indicators that the use of the Internet is becoming an integral and most likely pre planned, part of many Sub Saharan African terrorist groups media engagement strategy. The issue of how successful terrorist web sites are at achieving an organization's objectives remains a matter of debate (Jenkins, 2011). This study found no evidence of a direct link between a terrorist's web presence and any tangible material benefits that groups may derive from Internet publicity [22].

In regard to the methodological goals of the study the research team concluded that the study highlighted the need to develop frameworks to compare the Meta data associated with different social media technology platforms. As one example of the issues that a lack of a unified framework creates, Facebook has the ability to *like* a page were as Twitter does not, conversely Twitter accounts have a follower and following count, a function that Facebook lacks. Using this example, is a Facebook like the same as a reciprocated following relationship in Twitter? Different social media platforms have different types of functionality, that dually create different data points, without a robust framework a meaningful comparison of the increasingly technologically mixed medium that terrorist web content inhabits will become a challenge.

The importance of this area of terrorist study has become particularly germane in light of the recent attack by al-Shabaab on the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi, during which terrorist used social media during the attack to give updates of their actions to the public as they carried out their actions. While social media has been seen to be used to support terrorist operation in real time in the past (the Mumbai attacks by Lashkar-e-Taiba in 2008 (Kilcullen, 2013) the al-Shabaab Westgate incident is an example of the real time, direct to target audience propaganda that social media facilitates. Cast within this light the question of how closely a terrorist web site publisher is connected to a groups core operational personnel becomes particularly relevant as this knowledge could be used in the future to preminent incident such as the Westgate attack.

Clearly automation software if configured correctly, would facilitate a full enumeration of Sub Saharan African terrorist groups presence on the Internet. One particularly intriguing possibility is that the trend



regarding the adoption of social media technology by Islamic Extremist groups may be continued on a global scale. Illustrating this theory is the observation that the Afghanistan based Taliban's Twitter feed (<https://twitter.com/alemarahweb>) was created in 2011, around the same time that the Boko Haram and Al Shabbab Twitter sites were created. Whether the author of the Taliban's Tweeter feed drew inspiration from the media exposure of the al-Shabab Twitter feed, or if two separate authors merely arrived at the same conclusion at the same time remains opaque. This and other many other fundamental questions remain about terrorist's relationship to the Internet and only further research will examine theories such as these to the depth that they require.

## **About the authors**

*The authors wish to thank James Ball for his assistance with content analysis*

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## **Notes**

[1] Surface Web – defined as a layer of the Internet that is easily accessible via mainstream search engines such as Google. Sites on the Surface Web can be either HTML or social media based however, all have the common feature that they have been designed so that they can be easily found by an Internet user with basic skill levels

[2] Social Media – characterized by highly malleable, user created content. Web services such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube are all examples of social media web sites.

[3] Deep Web – defined as a layer of the Internet that is not listed (indexed) within a Google search due to





technological incompatibility. Deep Web sites are not deliberately hidden by the creators rather their inner content is opaque to most main stream search engines i.e. a Google search for “Barack Obama Twitter,” will return a link to Obamas’ Twitter account (Surface Web), but will not list the content of any of the posting (Deep Web) within the account in the search results.

[4] Dark Web – a layer of the Internet that is deliberately hidden and is not accessible by any search engine. Accessing a Dark Web site requires specific technology and explicit knowledge regarding the location of the site the user wishes to visit. Dark Web content is typically illegal in nature.

[5] Surface Web – defined as a layer of the Internet that is easily accessible via mainstream search engines such as Google. Sites on the Surface Web can be either HTML or social media based however, all have the common feature that they have been designed so that they can be easily found by an Internet user with basic skill levels.

[6] Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML) – a basic programming language used to code a web page. The term is used within the scope of this study to describe a web site that has no functionality to allow users to interact or otherwise edit the content.

[7] Top Level Domain (TLD) – shown as the suffix after a web address i.e. *www.XYZ.co.uk*, TLDs provide regional and thematic specific division of the Internet. TLDs are not necessarily hosted in their target geography they merely suggested a thematic relation to a geographic region.

[8] The Dark Web does not use an indexing system in the same way that the Surface Web does, with the affect that the space cannot be searched in the same way as the Surface Web. Within the Dark Web a user has to know the exact address of the web site they wish to visit, thus making the search method used within this study ineffective within this space.

[9] Encapsulating text within speech marks signals to the Google search engine that the search term is a phrase and typically returns a more accurate result than a search that does not use speech marks

[10] A like is a function of Facebook and other social media platforms that gives users the option to demonstrate a favorable opinion towards another user. One Facebook user can like either a posting or whole profile of another user. Likes are displayed as a number (how many people have liked page or resource) next to a ‘thumbs up’ sign on the user profile page.

[11] A following relationship on the Twitter social media platform is created when one account holder (A) decides to actively follow (button click action) another (B) and hence A joins B’s ‘follower list’ and B is displayed on A’s ‘following list.’ Following is different from a like on Facebook as a follower does not by default support the view of the account that is being followed for example, the official CIA Twitter account could be observed following the Boko Haram Twitter site before the later was taken offline. Although a reciprocated following / follower relationship is considered a sign of mutual admiration, within the context of this study the follower count is considered a rough metric of how widely observed the Twitter profile is within the wider Twitter user community.

[12] WhoIs data is derived from the registration details that are provided when an individual registers a website with a domain registrar. This data can be recovered by a specialist web search termed a WhoIs search. There is little data validity checking on the part of the most domain providers. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook do not have WhoIs data it is only more static HTML websites that have WhoIs records

[13] Although quantitative methods are used on the studies data set the research team felt that due to the



subjective nature of the data collection phase, overall, that study should be considered qualitative in nature

[14] The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is a rebel group founded in 1984, fighting to make the Ogaden region (approximately 400 000 kilometers) of Ethiopia an independent state.

[15] <http://www.start.umd.edu/>

[16] Both the Inkatha Freedom Party and AZAPO are legitimate political parties in South African however, the sites collected within this study were seen to be the work of the most extreme elements of these groups

[17] It is possible to fake like and follower counts by a single user creating numerous accounts and then liking or following the target account. This practice is common within marketing campaigns hence the caveat placed around the figure of 88623 individual users within the context of this study

[18] Active 3 August 2013

[19] Web Hosting – once any web site is created it must be placed on a web server connected to the Internet backbone, from where Internet users can access it. Site hosting can be in one physical location or hosted across multiple distributed locations (so called Cloud hosting)

[20] WhoIs searches on the HTML web sites revealed the identities of a number of individuals based outside of Africa, investigation into these individuals revealed no obvious links to terrorist groupings

[21] The posing of the body and equipment, combined with the multiple photographic angles was almost forensically detailed in nature

[22] To be explicit this study is not challenging the idea that there may be a link between factors such as terrorist web presence and recruitment, merely that there was no indication of these factors within the studies data.

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## Terrorism without Borders: Somalia's Al-Shabaab and the global jihad network

by Daniel E. Agbibo



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### Abstract

*This article sets out to explore the evolution, operational strategy and transnational dimensions of Harakat Al-Shabab al-Mujahideen (aka Al-Shabab), the Somali-based Islamist terrorist group. The article argues that Al-Shabab's latest Westgate attack in Kenya should be understood in the light of the group's deepening ties with Al-Qaeda and its global jihad, especially since 2009 when Al-Shabab formally pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda and welcomed the organisation's core members into its leadership.*

**Key words:** Al-Shabab, Westgate Attack; Al-Qaeda; Global Jihad; Kenya; Somalia.

### Introduction

**O**n 21 September 2013, the world watched with horror as a group of Islamist gunmen stormed Kenya's high-end Westgate Mall in Nairobi and fired at weekend shoppers, killing over 80 people. The gunmen reportedly shouted in Swahili that Muslims would be allowed to leave while all others were subjected to their bloodletting (Agbibo, 2013a). Countries like France, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Ghana, among others, all confirmed that their citizens were among those affected. The renowned Ghanaian Poet, Kofi Awoonor, was also confirmed dead in the attack (Mamdani, 2013).

The Somali-based and Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamist terrorist group, Harakat Al-Shabab al-Mujahideen or, more commonly, Al-Shabab – “the youth” in Arabic – have since claimed responsibility for the horrific attack through its Twitter account. In one tweet, the Islamist group said: “The Mujahideen entered #Westgate Mall today at around noon and are still inside the mall, fighting the #Kenyan Kuffar inside their own turf.” In another tweet they stated their refusal to negotiate and later on said, “For long we have waged war against the Kenyans in our land, now its time to shift the battleground and take the war to their land” (Edmund and Richard, Reuters, September 21 2013; Agbibo 2013b).

The above tweets suggest that Al-Shabab's Westgate attack was retribution for Kenya's military operations against the Islamist group in Somalia. Kenya has about 4,000 troops in southern Somalia. They intervened in 2011 following attacks and kidnappings in northern Kenya near the Somali border. The Kenyans were subsequently incorporated into a larger African Union (AU) force of 17,000 peacekeepers with a United Nations (UN) mandate to protect the weak Somali government. This mandate put the AU forces and Al-Shabab Islamists at daggers drawn (Onuoha, 2013).

This article sets out to explore the evolution, operational strategy and transnational dimensions of the Somali-based Islamist terrorist group, Al-Shabab. The article argues that Al-Shabab's latest Westgate attack



should be understood in the light of the group's deepening ties with Al-Qaeda and its global jihad, especially since 2009 when Al-Shabab formally pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda and welcomed the organisation's core members into its leadership.

The article begins by exploring the evolution of Somalia's Al-Shabab, as well as its growing friendship with Al-Qaeda which has transformed the group into one that perpetrates the kind of coordinated attack we recently witnessed at the Westgate mall in Kenya. It then provides a brief explanation of the main objectives and unifying ideology of Al-Qaeda's global jihad, as well as expectations from Islamist groups, like Al-Shabab, that claim loyalty to the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation. The conclusion summarises the key arguments of the article and outlines key knowledge requirements for more effective anti-terrorism measures.

### *The Evolution and Transformation of Al-Shabab*

Al-Shabab was formed as a radical offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which, in 2006, controlled Mogadishu (Fergusson, 2013). The Islamist group, which controls about half of south-central Somalia, is estimated to have between 7,000 to 9,000 fighters, mainly recruited within Somalia but also from Western countries (BBC News Africa, 2013). Al-Shabab originally emerged as a remnant of al Itihaad al Islamiya (AIAI)—a Wahhabi Islamist terrorist organisation which arose in Somalia in the 1980s with the intention of replacing the regime of Mohammed Said Barre with an Islamic state. In 2000, AIAI remnants – mostly young members – reformed into Al-Shabab and were incorporated into the ICU as its radical youth militia.

The Ethiopian invasion [1] of Somalia in December 2006 marked a watershed in the development and radicalisation of Al-Shabab. First, it provided Al-Shabab with the opportunity to draw on deep-seated Somali hostility towards Ethiopia to recruit thousands of nationalist volunteers (Wise, 2011). Second, the invasion forced Al-Shabab to adopt an effective guerrilla-style operational strategy as a means of resisting Ethiopian advance into the South (Menkhaus and Boucek, 2010). Third, “by forcing the Islamic Courts Union leaders who had exerted a level of moderating influence on Al-Shabab to flee Somalia, the invasion allowed the group to become even more radical, while at the same time severing its ties to other Somali organisations” (Wise, 2011: 2). Although the Ethiopian invasion succeeded in routing the ICU and pushing Al-Shabab to the south of the country, it failed to end Islamic radicalism in Somalia; in fact, it was a primary factor in the ultra-radical turn of Al-Shabab, “transforming the group from a small, relatively unimportant part of a more moderate Islamic movement into the most powerful and radical armed faction in the country” (Wise, 2011: 4). In 2009 Ethiopia withdrew its troops from Somalia, replaced by the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) composed of thousands of Ugandan and Burundian peacekeeping forces.

Since 2008, Al-Shabab has demonstrated that it has the operational capability to launch deadly attacks against outposts of the West and perceived enemies outside Somalia. In October 2008, Al-Shabab coordinated five suicide bomb attacks that hit the UN Development Programme compound, the Ethiopian consulate and various government offices, killing several dozen (Ali Noor, 2008). In September 2009, Al-Shabab bombed the African Union peacekeeping mission in Mogadishu, killing more than 20 people and damaging the offices of a U.S. firm that was purportedly providing support to peacekeepers (Agbiboa, 2013b). In July 11, 2010, Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for suicide bombing of two groups of fans watching the World Cup in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, which killed more than 70 people, including one American citizen. The Ugandan attacks, according to Al-Shabab, were launched to punish the country for its role in assisting AMISOM forces in Somalia (Onuoha, 2013), in the same way that the recent Westgate attack was launched to punish Kenya for its military operations in Somalia since August 2011.



The argument that I make in this article is that to understand the transformation of Al-Shabab, one has to consider how the group came to be incorporated within a global jihadist movement led by Al-Qaeda.

### *Forging ties between Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab*

Al-Qaeda operated in Sudan in the early 1990s as host of the Islamist regimes of Omar al Bashir and Hassan al Turabi (Lorenzo *et al.* 2010: 218). However, the organisation soon set its sights on war-torn Somalia when it learnt that American troops were going to be deployed into it in order to restore order and provide supplies to the local population. Addressing a core group of Al-Qaeda members in late 1993, Bin Laden declared: “The American army now they came [sic] to the Horn of Africa, and we have to stop the head of the snake... the snake is America, and we have to stop them. We have to cut the head and stop them” (cited in Lorenzo *et al.* 2010: 218). Following discussions between Al-Qaeda’s military wing commander Abu Hafs al Masri and AIAI’s military wing commander Shaykh Hassan Awey’s, four Al-Qaeda instructors were sent to Somalia to “train other Somalis” linked to the AIAI in advanced combat tactics and weapons. According to the Al-Shabab Media Foundation, Al-Qaeda’s official propaganda wing, these instructors taught Somali Islamists “the tactics of guerrilla warfare, in addition to taking part in a number of combat operations against the Americans” (Lorenzo *et al.* 2010: 218).

The relationship between Al-Qaeda and the AIAI leadership continued after the US withdrew from Somalia. In 1996, Al-Qaeda moved its base to the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, where Bin Laden forged a close relationship with the Taliban (CNN, February 5, 2002). A number of key members of the AIAI leadership travelled with Al-Qaeda to Afghanistan to receive training in Al-Qaeda’s combat strategy, including suicide attacks and simultaneous bombings of different targets. One of them was Aden Hashi Farah Ayrow, a senior AIAI military commander. Propaganda materials released by Al-Shabab suggest that Ayrow grew “fond of the way Al-Qaeda worked and admired its doctrine, its strategy to change the Islamic world, and its call for jihad against Christians. Ayrow met many mujahedeen brothers in various positions within the organisation, and he also met Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, may Allah preserve him” (Lorenzo *et al.* 2010: 219). The report further noted that at the end of this first tour of Afghanistan, Ayro had become “a military encyclopaedia – he was unparallel in the Horn of Africa region... He took Shaykh Usama’s advice and returned to Somalia in order to spread the idea of global jihad and the path of Al-Qaeda – confronting the Christian world” (Ibid). Starting in late 2001 the US war on terror in Afghanistan dispersed the organisation and forced it underground as its personnel were attacked and its bases and training camps destroyed (Hoffman, 2006).

Since 2009, Al-Shabab’s deepening ties with Al-Qaeda has had profound effects on its structure and operational strategy. First, Al-Shabab’s affiliation with Al-Qaeda significantly altered its leadership component. After the death of its leader, Aden Hashi Ayro, in May 2008, Al-Shabab’s command structure welcomed a number of Al-Qaeda core members into top leadership roles (Roggio, 2010). Second, until 2008, Al-Shabab made use of relatively conventional guerrilla tactics in its attacks against the invading Ethiopian forces. However, the group’s increasing ties with Al-Qaeda has led it down the path of suicide attacks as a means of achieving its ends. Reflecting a shift largely driven by its growing friendship with Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab has emphasized the development of training camps for suicide bombers across Somalia and beyond (Wise, 2011). In fact, Al-Shabab has been linked to the training of Nigeria’s Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram – “Western education is unlawful” in Hausa – which has killed over 10,000 people since its founding in 2002 (Agbibo, 2013c, 2013d). In August 2011, General Carter Ham, Commander of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) claimed that Boko Haram is financially sponsored by Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab. He also alleged that both jihadist groups shared training and fighters with Boko Haram. He described that as





“the most dangerous thing to happen not only to the Africans, but to us as well” (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2011: 3).

It is instructive to note that the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) has enhanced the recent transformation of Al-Shabab, enabling the group not only to stay in contact with the extended jihadist family, but also attract and recruit foreign fighters (Saltman, 2008; Agbibo, 2013b). ICT has also allowed Al-Shabab to tap into wealthy Salafi networks keen on supporting Al-Qaeda’s global jihad campaign. In August 2009, Al-Shabab launched an online fundraising forum that raised 40,000 USD from members of the Somali Diaspora for the transnational jihadist cause (UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, 2010).

### *Understanding the Transnational Jihadism of Al-Qaeda*

Al-Shabab’s recent Westgate attack in Kenya should be understood in the light of the global jihadist campaign of the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation—“a rather loose association of radical Salafist Islamist groups operating in many countries around the world that revere foundational members such as Saudi-born Osama Bin Laden, Egyptian-born Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the late Jordanian/Palestinian figure Abdullah Azzam and led by a transnational coterie of veterans of Islamist struggles around the world” (Piazza, 2009: 66). The organisation initially emerged from a network of Arab volunteers who, in the 1980s, fought in Afghanistan under the banner of Islam against Soviet Communism (BBC News, 20 July, 2004). The name “Al-Qaeda” itself etymologically derives from an Arabic word for “foundation” or “basis.” Bin Laden explained the origin of the term in a videotape interview with Al Jazeera in October 2001: “The name ‘Al-Qaeda’ was established long time ago by mere chance. The late Abu Ebeida El-Banashiri established the training camps for our mujahedeen against Russia’s terrorism. We used to call the training camp Al-Qaeda. The name stayed” (CNN, February 5, 2002).

Al-Qaeda’s agenda is ideological, religious and political in nature, including (a) “unifying the Islamic world under a puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam,” (b) “the rejection of both secular rule and the institution of the nation-state in the Muslim world leading to the overthrow of all existing Muslim countries and the integration of all Muslim societies into a Caliphate,” and (c) “the liberation of Muslim territories from foreign occupation, and the use of holy war (lesser jihad) to bind Muslims together and lead them through a ‘clash of civilization’ that will rid the Muslim world of non-Muslim cultural and political influence” (Piazza, 2009: 66).

In a bid to build a coherent ideology (*manhaj*) that will unify all Islamists terrorist groups, Al-Qaeda leaders drew from *takfiri* thoughts, which justifies attacking corrupt governments in Muslim lands, and draws on materials that not only stress the need for militant groups to amalgamate, but also outline the Muslim requirement to target the global enemy (typically the US and the West). Subsequently, “the hybrid ideology that emerged makes little distinction between targeting local enemies and targeting global ones and have a one-size-fits-all solution—jihad” (Farall, 2011: 132). In other words, Al-Qaeda subsidiaries like Al-Shabab are only required to expand their focus, not abandon their own local agenda. The development of a coherent ideology helped Al-Qaeda acquire franchises which are crucial for projecting the organisation’s power and gaining traction for its cause.

### *Al-Qaeda Franchises*

The Al-Qaeda organisation founded a regional branch in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and acquired franchises in Iraq (AQI) and the Maghreb (AQIM), reinforcing the organisation’s ability to present itself as the leading Islamist militant group. Even as they pursued local agendas, the franchises were required to



undertake some attacks against Western interests, and leaders of groups like Al-Shabab joining Al-Qaeda had to be willing to “present a united front, stay on message, and be seen to fall under Al-Qaeda’s authority” (Farall, 2011: 132). Not surprising, Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups have all attacked Western interests in their respective regions.

AQAP has been looking to expand its terrorist attacks beyond Yemen and Saudi Arabia, as demonstrated by the botched attempt to explode a bomb on a flight over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009 and, in October 2010, the abortive plot to bomb cargo plane. AQI was allegedly involved in London and Glasgow bomb plots that occurred in June 2007. In Pakistan, the Taliban has extended its attack targets beyond Pakistan’s borders to include Europe and the United States. The 2008 Mumbai attacks was clear evidence that Al-Qaeda’s idea of attacking Islam’s global enemies has found a fertile ground among Pakistan’s Islamist militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, which in the past focused only on Indian targets (Bergen et al. 2011: 74). In 2010, Nigeria’s Boko Haram launched a suicide car bombing of the UN building in the capital, Abuja (Agbiboa, 2013e). Following the attack, Boko Haram released a statement that read: “All over the world, the UN is a global partner in the oppression of believers. We are at war against infidels. In Nigeria, the Federal Government tries to perpetuate the agenda of the United Nations... We have told everyone that the UN is the bastion of the global oppression of Muslims all over the world” (The Punch, September 2, 2011).

To what degree does Al-Qaeda exercise command and control over its dispersed structure and subsidiaries like Al-Shabab? Al-Qaeda is not a hierarchical organisation with full control over its franchises. Rather, the organisation operates as “a devolved network hierarchy in which levels of command authority are not always clear; personal ties between militants carry weight, and at times, transcend the command structure between core, branch and franchises” (Farall, 2011: 133). Due to the already existing unifying ideology, Al-Qaeda need only provide “strategic leadership” rather than “day-to-day oversight” (Ibid). Nevertheless, before launching any attack, all Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups are required to seek approval from the central Al-Qaeda leadership. The aim is to ensure that attacks, like the Westgate attack, reinforce, not undermine, Al-Qaeda’s strategic objectives (Agbiboa, 2013c).

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored the evolution and transformation of Somalia’s Al-Shabab. The article argued that Al-Shabab’s latest Westgate attack should be understood in the light of the group’s deepening ties with Al-Qaeda which has radically altered the group’s ideology and operational strategy. Clearly, Al-Shabab’s continued terrorist activity is not detached from that of other jihadist groups in Africa – including Boko Haram, Ansaru, and Al-Qaeda’s North African wing – and beyond. It should be recalled that in 2012 the US military officials warned that these jihadist outfits were increasingly joining forces to coordinate and make more sophisticated their violent attacks. Military crackdowns on these groups in recent years – the Nigerian military on Boko Haram; the French attack on Al-Qaeda affiliates in Mali; the Ethiopian and AU routing of Al-Shabab from Somalia – have been incendiary and counterproductive, failing to stamp out Islamist terrorism.

Processes of globalisation have facilitated the spread of terrorism that extends across and beyond national borders – as the recent Westgate attack demonstrates – blurring the distinction between domestic and transnational terrorism. This holds at least two significant implications for how we think about and prepare responses to terrorist groups like Al-Shabab. One implication is the urgent need to better understand their power, command and control relationships with the global jihad network. Another implication is the need for countries fighting terror, like Somalia, to be assisted in strengthening their intelligence and civilian



institutions, promoting the rule of law, and addressing the underlying existential and ideological conditions that radicalises Islamist groups and fuel terrorism without borders.

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## Notes

[1] Ethiopia shares a long history of animosity with Somalia.

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## Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al Qaeda in Somalia (2008)

by Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah



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### Abstract [1]

*Al Shabaab, a Somali insurgent with predominantly nationalistic causes (alongside transnational [global Jihad] and Islamic goals) made the choice to fight on behalf of Al Qaeda in 2008. The decision to do so contrasted with Al Shabaab's previous behaviour of actively denying cooperation and distancing itself from Al Qaeda. This study aims to uncover factors that contributed to Al Shabaab's decision through the use of process-tracing. The results show that Al Shabaab's declaration of cooperation with Al Qaeda in August 2008 was brought about by a series of events that traced back to four factors: public reactions to the implementation of a Salafi ideology, the shift to a radical leadership, Al Shabaab's inability to maintain stability in areas under its control and its increasing attacks by Al Shabaab on the Somali public. Al Shabaab pursued cooperation with Al Qaeda after realizing that their nationalistic preference was no longer achievable in the near future.*

**Keyword(s):** process-tracing, rational choice theory, preferences, nationalistic, transnational, Al Shabaab, global jihad, Somalia

In the realm of security studies, terrorists are conceived of as strategic actors that deploy a rational political strategy Crenshaw (1998). The choice to use violence is a conscious one, made by an organization for strategic and political reasons. Al Shabaab is one such actor who has shown the strategic rationale in their actions. If the assumption of Islamic ideological rationalization as the core basis of Al Shabaab's operations is correct, then the whole of Al Shabaab strategy should have shown Al Shabaab's complete opposition towards the West and wholehearted support to Al Qaeda's global jihad network. However Al Shabaab's history indicates otherwise. Al Shabaab initially had locally-focused operations in Mogadishu and Southern Somalia (Ploch, 2010), and were even willing to cooperate with Western humanitarian aid workers (Burton, 2010), presumably to gain local support and wealth. In 2008, one of Al Shabaab's cell commanders stated in an interview that although Al Shabaab deems Al Qaeda as brothers in Islam, there were no links between Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda (BBC, 2008). However, since August 2008, Al Shabaab has been one of the 5 main affiliate groups of Al Qaeda (Byman, 2012) and was also named by McConnell (2012) as the strongest, most dangerous, and expansive terrorist group in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This article analyzes the rational process that went into making the decision to openly declare allegiance to Al Qaeda. The article begins by pinpointing the critical period of change in Al Shabaab, followed by the theory and methodology employed, and lastly analyzing the factors that influenced Al Shabaab's decision making in that period. The hypothesis of this article is that Al Shabaab pursued cooperation with Al Qaeda after realizing that their nationalistic preference was no longer achievable in the near future.

Al Shabaab's initial starting point as an organization is unclear. The group's founding could be dated back to



early 2000s as it was a descendant of the Islamic groups al Itihaad al Islamiya (AIAI) and the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). However, Al Shabaab became a discreet collective actor in 2006, when it became the military wing of UIC. During the period of 2006-2008, Al Shabaab underwent changes that further integrated it into the global Jihad framework and, as the *de facto* Somali extension of Al Qaeda. There is a clear progression of changes in the organization from being the military wing of UIC, through being an independent militant organization with national ambitions to a (self-defined) 'Jihad' organization with global ambitions (see table 1).

**Table 1: Al Shabaab's Transformation (2006-2008)**

Period	Organization type	Closeness to international terrorist networks
Jan-Dec 2006	Military wing of UIC	UIC publicly denounces terrorism and Al Qaeda (Dagne, 2011).
Jan – Mid 2007	Independent organization	Al Shabaab releases first public video, stating that the enemy is the 'apostate government' (of Somalia) and Ethiopian armies (Harnisch, 2011). Al Qaeda approaches Somali Jihadists (not Al Shabaab in particular) (Ploch, 2010).
Mid 2007 – Feb 2008	Independent 'Jihad' organization	Al Shabaab shows global tendencies by repositioning itself as a jihad organization in mid-2007 (Hansen, 2012), and stating that they "will move in the quest for the resurrection of a worldwide caliphate[2]" (Ali, 2010).
Feb – Aug 2008	Independent 'Global Jihad' organization	Al Shabaab is designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States. Al Shabaab embraces its international organization status with the release of "Declaration of a New 'Praiseworthy Terrorism' Campaign in Response to the Tyrant America", in which it rallies all foreign terrorist organizations to unite against the United States and its allies.
Aug 2008 onwards	Self-proclaimed affiliate of Al Qaeda	Al Shabaab declares obedience to bin Laden and Al Qaeda with the following statement:  "We are now negotiating to unite as one. We will take our orders from Sheik Osama Bin Laden because we are his students once we end the holy war in Somalia, we will take it to any government that participated in the fighting against Somalia or gave assistance to those attacking us" (Ploch, 2010).

The pinnacle of the changes was the declaration of the 'New Praiseworthy Terrorism Campaign' on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2008, where Al Shabaab stated that their enemies were no longer confined to local warlords, apostate governments, or neighbouring states, but had branched out to the United States and its alliance of 'crusaders' (Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement, 2008). The striking thing is that in March 2008 – when Al Shabaab was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) – they were still denying the existence of cooperation



between Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda in more than one instance by Ali Mukhtar Roobow, the spokesperson of Al Shabaab, and other members (Harper, 2008). This is contradictory in nature to their goals at the time, when their appeal for help from other FTOs could have benefited from an alliance with Al Qaeda. It can be inferred that Al Shabaab's decision to cooperate with Al Qaeda could not be sufficiently explained by the evolution of its characteristics over time until April 2008. Therefore, there was a watershed moment in time when Al Shabaab decided to fully embrace the Al Qaeda mantra between late March 2008 (when Al Shabaab publicly denied cooperation) and August 2008 (when Al Shabaab publicly declared obedience to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden).

### *Tracing Al Shabaab's strategic preferences*

In order to better understand this watershed moment, it's necessary first to trace the strategic preferences of Al Shabaab. In doing this, the author uses the framework of Rational Choice Theory. Rational Choice Theory assumes that actors have preferences based on their estimation of outcomes, each of which yields different levels of well-being. The rational actor chooses a particular course of action because (s)he believes it will ultimately yield the greatest amount of utility for themselves, within existing environmental constraints (Bray, 2009). In this context, utility is defined as this set of preferences, in which the higher the preference rank of a situation, the more utility it brings to the actor.

An actor's decisions rely on the value the actor places on the expected outcomes of the choices made and these valued outcomes can be material (objects) or non-material benefits (*e.g.*, political, moral or psychological). Because an actor seeks to achieve the best possible outcome, Rational Choice Theory concludes that individuals will act in a systematic, predictable way, consistent with their preferences (Bray, 2009).

According to Anderton and Carter (2004) and Caplan (2006), the principle of rationality also exists in the mind of terrorists. Bray's explanation on individual rationality is applicable to group or organizational situations, including terrorist groups. With this approach, terrorism is indicative of collective rationality; radical political organizations become the key actor in analysis. Consistent with Bray, Crenshaw (1998) explains that organizations have a set of preferences or values and will choose to conduct terrorism when it is the best way to maximise preferences in comparison to alternative form of actions. It would follow, therefore, that Islamic militant organizations such as Al Shabaab have a set of preferences in the conditions they face, and that decisions about how to act are made to maximize their attainment of the organization's preferred outcomes.

In the case of Al Shabaab, these preferences can be derived from their historical statements and actions prior to the August 2008 since, according to Bennett and Checkel (2012), the identification of an actor's preferences for applying process tracing to rational choice theory should be performed in the periods before the outcome of the case happened. Newer preferences are given a higher rank because they are more relevant to the watershed decision we seek to explain. In other words, they are closer to the point in time when Al Shabaab made its decision to publicly declare cooperation with the transnational-jihad organisation that is Al Qaeda rather than retreat to the insular position that was its historical roots. The outcome is a set of preferences shown in Table 2.





**Table 2: Al Shabaab's rank and type of preferences**

Preferences	Type	Basis and characteristics
1. Conquering Somalia	Nationalistic	Roobow's statement in August 2008, in which he stated that Al Shabaab will finish the war in Somalia <i>first</i> , then continue the struggle elsewhere (Harnisch, 2010). It is also the goal most frequently stated in 2006-2008.
2. Successful irredentism – regaining control over Muslim regions conquered by Ethiopia	Nationalistic	Objective stated in 2003 (Dagne, 2011). Part of the success of the 1 <sup>st</sup> preference.
3. Establishing an Islamic state with Sharia law	Sharia	Objective stated in 2003 (Dagne, 2011). Dependent upon gaining control over Somalia.
4. Establishing 'Greater Somalia'	Nationalistic	Objective stated in 2003 (Dagne, 2011). Is dependent on the success of the 1 <sup>st</sup> preference, as 'Greater Somalia' refers to the unification of all regions populated by Somalis, consisting of countries Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.
5. Attacking foreign targets in Somalia.	Transnational	Objective stated in 2003 (Harnisch, 2010). Connected to the 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> preference.
6. Fighting warlords supported by the US in Somalia.	Transnational	Objective stated in 2005, yet explicitly stated to be less important than conquering Somalia in the New 'Praiseworthy Terrorism' Campaign in 2008. Connected to the 5 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> preference.
7. Fighting third parties who assisted those who attacked Somalia.	Transnational	Objective also stated in the New Campaign in 2008 to be pursued after conquering Somalia. Connected to the 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> preference.
8. Providing a safe haven for Al Qaeda in East Africa.	Transnational	Objective stated in early 2000s, and was only the preference of Aweys and Ayro only. Since the early 2000s, this preference was never reiterated, unlike all other preferences above.

Based on the Table 2, it can be ascertained that Al Shabaab had 3 main preferences: (1) Nationalistic, which relates to the internal struggles in Somalia, (2) Sharia, which correlated with the application of Sharia law, and (3) Transnational, which involved fighting foreign targets which were not directly related to winning the war in Somalia. This set of preferences will be further used to deduce how Al Shabaab's decision to change its stance on Al Qaeda maximized its utility at the time, in line with the framework of Rational Choice Theory. In an ideal condition, Al Shabaab's actions should cater to its nationalistic preferences first and foremost, then its sharia preferences, and finally its transnational preferences. Fulfilment of the secondary and tertiary preferences should not contradict achievement of the first preference.



## *Analyzing the events in April-August 2008: The losing battle for nationalistic preferences*

Having identified these preferences, it is possible to use process tracing to analyze how Al Shabaab's declaration of unification with Al Qaeda relates to their organizational preferences. For an ideal fit with their organizational preferences, the declaration of affiliation with Al Qaeda should have helped Al Shabaab maximize the outcomes for its primary, nationalistic preference – to conquer Somalia and establish Al Shabaab's control nationally. However, the declaration of allegiance to Al Qaeda would appear to be counterproductive in relation to the aim to achieve control over Somalia. Achieving stable control over the country requires support from the public, yet there are strong anti-foreign sentiments in the Somali society (Byman, 2012). These anti-foreign sentiments include antagonism towards Al Qaeda, caused in part by Al Qaeda's trademark strategy of using suicide bombing, which is considered a taboo in the Somali society. (USCIRF, 2009). Indeed, their declaration of unification with Al Qaeda would only be consistent with their organizational preferences if the following conditions would need to be met: (1) Al Shabaab had difficulties in achieving its nationalistic preference and would have achieved more utility by pursuing its transnational target, and (2) These difficulties arose in the period of March – August 2008, and (3) Al Shabaab perceived that affiliating with Al Qaeda would increase Al Shabaab's capacity to strike foreign targets. The hypothesis of this article is that Al Shabaab pursued cooperation with Al Qaeda after realizing that their nationalistic preference was no longer achievable in the near future. In what follows, I argue that Al Shabaab was struggling to meet its nationalistic preferences due to the movement's legitimacy being increasingly questioned by the Somali public.

The support of the public is a necessity in Al Shabaab's quest to conquer Somalia; Being a small organization of only 3000-6000 members (McConnell, 2010), Al Shabaab would logically need to have public support to secure its hold on regions and the whole country. During 2006-2007, Al Shabaab initially had strong support from the public, as it was perceived to be an organization that could bring stability to Southern Somalia, and more importantly, was the only belligerent organization left in Somalia after Ethiopia's invasion which incapacitated the UIC (Wise, 2011). This support can be seen by how the communities of Jowhar and Beledweyne provided Al Shabaab with food and cooperated on security matters in mid-June 2006 (Dagne, 2011). Ali Mukhtar Roobow's public speeches on behalf of Al Shabaab in Dinsoor also received positive responses from the society in March 2007 (Reuters, 2007). However, it was reported that by the end of 2007, public support for Al Shabaab had decreased drastically in the regions it controlled (Le Sage, 2010). Local communities were distressed with Al Shabaab's style of governance, and started to form opposition towards the organization (Mulaj, 2010).

I argue that the downfall in legitimacy was brought about by 4 main reasons: (1) Al Shabaab's basic nature as a Salafi organization, (2) The change of leadership from Aden Hashi Ayro to Godane on 1 May 2008, (3) Al Shabaab's inability to maintain stability in the region in the period of March-May 2008, and (4) the increasing number of Al Shabaab attacks targeted at civilians.

Firstly, how did the Salafi character of Al Shabaab impact its operations? At first, the Salafi character of Al Shabaab did not cause problems in Somalia. However, near the end of 2008, new challenges emerged in opposition to this Salafi ideology. One of those challenges was the transformation of Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa (ASWJ), a purely political organization prior to July 2008. ASWJ had militarized themselves and engaged in conflict with Al Shabaab in areas where Al Shabaab was banning Sufi religious practices (ICG, 2010) – the ideological basis of ASWJ. The Salafi ideology which proclaimed that other interpretations of Islam should be outlawed in practice caused Al Shabaab to start interdicting Sufi believers, and ban other mainstream cultural practices such as watching football matches or going to the movies because they were deemed



“Western” (Wise, 2011). Al Shabaab’s implementation of the Salafi ideology in governance was realized in mid-2008, when Al Shabaab started to directly administer the regions they controlled (Mulaj, 2010). This became a problem in Somalia, as the majority of Somali people follow the Sunni-Sufi branches of Islam (US Department of State, 2009).

This in turn caused the uproar of ASWJ members and moved them to start actively defending their Sufi communities. ASWJ was quite a big threat to Al Shabaab, as ASWJ had great access to the troops from clans’ militias (Hassan, 2009), and was also reported to be receiving military support from Ethiopia (Bradbury & Healy, 2010). In the clashes in 2008, ASWJ seemed to gain the upper hand from Al Shabaab. The presence of ASWJ in Somalia to defend Sufi communities and act against Salafi practices in general became a new source of protection for the Somali community. In contrast, Al Shabaab was becoming more and more like the enemy of the Somali society instead of the protector. The development took away Al Shabaab’s initially strong legitimacy, founded in its status as the sole fighter on behalf of the Somali society at the start of 2007. Here was ASWJ, an actor that had the military capacity to provide stability but would not be restrictive in its ideology. If Al Shabaab had not been Salafi in nature and practiced these policies, ASWJ might not have militarized against Al Shabaab.

The second factor that contributed to this decision is the change of leadership in Al Shabaab. After Aden Hashi Ayro was killed by a US airstrike on 1 May 2008, the position of leader was given to Ahmed Abdi Aw-Mohamed Godane. (Westcott, 2011) Compared to Ayro who balanced nationalistic and transnational preferences quite well, Godane was a figure who was very much in favour of transnational aims and cared less about the local condition in Al Shabaab. Their difference in global jihad intentions could be seen by the public statements released during their eras. Under Ayro, Al Shabaab’s statements emphasized nationalistic and anti-Ethiopian objectives. Ayro never mentioned Al Qaeda or bin Laden specifically in his speeches. However, under Godane, Al Shabaab was directly mentioned as an ‘integral part of global jihad’ (Kohlmann, 2009), and Godane personally declared allegiance to Osama bin Laden and other al Qaeda operatives (Horadam, 2011), before finally declaring group allegiance to bin Laden in August 2008.

With his priority on global Jihad, Godane paid much less attention to maintaining national support. This can be seen by the type of policies that Godane implemented, which usually restricted the majority of society from doing their daily habits. Godane was the prominent actor in enacting Sharia principles, even when other Al Shabaab leaders such as Roobow were against the implementation. This resulted in a significant change in public approval of Al Shabaab. In 2007, Al Shabaab was still received well by the Somali society, but in 2008, it was reported that the local society was becoming restless with how the Al Shabaab conducted governance. Thus, the Salafi basis of Al Shabaab was significantly worsened by the rise of a radical leader – Godane – who implemented the Sharia law in a very strict interpretation.

These two factors by themselves were not enough to create change in Al Shabaab’s legitimacy. The third factor, that is Al Shabaab’s inability to maintain stability in Somalia, also played a role. With the many conflicts that happened in 2008 – both conflicts between Al Shabaab and other organizations, and also conflicts between other actors in the society – Al Shabaab’s legitimacy as the bringer of stability and order (Wise, 2011) in Somalia was diminishing. Even though the reason behind Al Shabaab’s failure to maintain stability was not clear, it is evident that 2008 was the year of the most intense conflict in Somalia during the last few decades – a condition that is very contrary to the stability and order that was Al Shabaab’s trademark.

A 4th factor that also played a role in decreasing legitimacy is how Somali people were increasingly becoming the target of Al Shabaab attacks. Based on the Global Terrorism Database, Al Shabaab’s most hit target in attacks had shifted. Between October 2007 and February 2008, military personnel and location (African



Union, Ethiopian and TFG) were the primary targets in 7 out of 9 attacks. However, between April 2008 and August 2008, private citizens and property were the most attacked, with 5 out of 12 attacks [4]. This resulted in open condemnation of Al Shabaab which could be heard in local statements in April 2008, “We condemn the artillery use on civilians, and we condemn the opposition groups who are fighting in the midst of society and using civilians as human shields” (Gilbert, 2008).

These four factors created difficult local conditions to achieve Al Shabaab’s nationalistic preference. The nationalistic preference to conquer Somalia necessitated cooperation and trust from local society to be successful, especially considering existing support for other rulers in Somalia’s fractured regions in South and Central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland. In addition to the challenges of another organization, as well as the challenge towards Al Shabaab’s legitimacy, made conquering Somalia a quite unreachable target.

Compared with other preferences which do not require occupation of territory (i.e. attacking foreign targets and establishing Sharia law in the regions it control), transnational goals are easier to achieve as they only require Al Shabaab to maintain attacks towards infidels such as Ethiopia and the United States. At that point, Al Shabaab was struggling to achieve transnational preferences, which is indicated by how Roobow complained of the lack of foreign fighters. However, the problem of foreign fighters is a an easier problem to deal with compared to re-establishing legitimacy in a country, as there is a global community of Mujahideen sympathetic to global Jihad causes. The Somali society, on the other hand, would be very hard to persuade as they have already experienced suffering under the governance of Al Shabaab. It was these circumstances that pushed Al Shabaab to let go of its nationalistic goals for the time being and pursue transnational preferences instead, which would boost its standing as an organization in an easier way.

### *The benefits of declaring affiliation with Al Qaeda*

What is also clear is that publicly announcing affiliation with Al Qaeda could have been perceived to have significant benefits for Al Shabaab in terms of achieving their Sharia and transnational goals. These benefits relate to (a) battle tactics training, (b) funding, and (c) branding and recruitment.

According to Westcott (2011), there was a significant difference in the battle tactics of Al Shabaab after foreign influence, ranging from Al Qaeda to other foreign militant Islamist movements in Africa. Previously, the majority of Al Shabaab tactics relied on assassination (as part of an overall guerrilla strategy) when facing an enemy. However, after foreign influence, there were 2 new elements in Al Shabaab’s tactics. The first is the use of suicide bombings, which up till 2006 was not known in Somalia (USCIRF, 2009). The second element is the widespread use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and roadside bombs. Actors in Somalia had used IEDs before Al Shabaab received foreign influence and affiliated with Al Qaeda, but this method of attack became prevalent in 2010-2011, when Al Shabaab conducted 137 IED attacks in Somalia. Previous data shows that during October 2007-December 2008, there were only a total of 18 attacks using explosives/bombs/dynamites (Global Terrorism Database, 2013). After affiliation with Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab’s attacks became more coordinated, with targets of a higher profile than previously. Additionally, Al Shabaab’s sniper activity to AMISOM and TFG also increased significantly (Westcott, 2011). It is logical to assume that Al Shabaab expected to receive information on combat tactics, especially on suicide bombings and IEDs as these were the dominant tactics of Al Qaeda. Moreover, one of Al Shabaab’s former leaders, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, was a senior leader of AIAI (Ali, 2010), who cooperated with Al Qaeda in the 1990s and would know of this benefit.

A second perceived benefit was an increase of Al Shabaab’s funding. Compared to other Jihadist



organizations, Al Qaeda can be categorized as well-financed (Byman, 2012). Al Qaeda had access to Arab networks, and had long been sponsoring the struggle of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) in Egypt, Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat*, or GSPC) in Iraq, and Chechen foreign fighters (Byman, 2012). Allying with Al Qaeda meant potentially receiving a funding benefit.

The final perceived benefit of Al Qaeda affiliation was that it would be easier for Al Shabaab to recruit foreign fighters. Ali Mukhtar Roobow has spoken about the need for more foreign fighters in the battle in Somalia, and Al Shabaab has aspired to unite the global Jihad and the Jihad in Somalia (Kohlmann, 2009). Al Shabaab's growing prominence in Islamic radical forums, in an effort to be noticed and to reach out to the international Islamic militant community can also be seen as a reason, among other interests, to recruit more foreign fighters. The declaration of affiliation with Al Qaeda made Al Shabaab more attractive, as supporting Al Shabaab would also be supporting the Global Jihad. Al Qaeda also had a much wider network, with the ability to reach out to various cultures and languages, which would increase the publicity of a group (Byman, 2012). This branding not only helped with recruiting, but also gave credibility to Al Shabaab and enhanced its global reputation (Byman, 2012).

Al Shabaab could confidently believe affiliation with Al Qaeda would enhance their recruitment capabilities based on their experience in February 2007. At that time, the As-Sahab Media Foundation of Al Qaeda released a video entitled "To the Army of Distress in Somalia", in which Sheikh Abu Yahya al-Liby, acting as Al Qaeda's representative, sent a message to the Somali society to not easily surrender and give up in fighting the infidels (Kohlmann, 2009). Even though this message did not specifically identify Al Shabaab, Abu Az-Zubeyr Godane, who replaced Ayro as leader in May 2008, gave a specific thanks to Abu Yahya al-Liby for helping mobilize more than 1000 mujahidin in the battle in Somalia (Kohlmann, 2009). From this experience, it can be concluded that Al Shabaab believed there would be positive impacts gained from Al Qaeda affiliation and Al Qaeda branding.

Meanwhile, recruiting more individuals in the battle in Somalia became of utmost importance in Somalia in mid 2008. Since March, Al Shabaab was experiencing attacks from the United States, firstly unsuccessfully targeting Hassan Turki (Harnisch, 2010), and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan (Ploch, 2010), both senior leaders of Al Shabaab. This turn of events led Roobow to conduct an interview with the Global Islamic Media Front, in which he complained that there was a lack of non-Somali 'brothers' in the battle in Somalia, and Al Shabaab has aspired to unite the global Jihad and the Jihad in Somalia (Kohlmann, 2009). In an arena of battle like Somalia, the number of troops is the most important factor, as military power indicated political significance of the organization (ICG, 2010). On the other hand, the global mujahideens who did move to Somalia were very clear about their intentions to support global jihad, and not Somali interests. One Somali who moved back to the country stated "O' my people, know that I am not doing this martyrdom operation only for the sake of Allah and his religion...not for *nationalism*, tribe, and money or fame" (Kohlmann, 2009). Thus it can be seen that foreign recruitment would mostly benefit transnational causes of the Al Shabaab insurgency. However, as argued previously, at this point in time, it was a benefit that best maximized Al Shabaab's utility as nationalistic preferences would be much harder to obtain. Since the nationalistic preference of Al Shabaab was in jeopardy, pursuing global credibility would have better maximised Al Shabaab's utility. It is for this reason that Al Shabaab chose the path of affiliation with Al Qaeda to boost its organization's existence and operations for the future.



## Conclusion

This article is driven by the urge to answer the question, “why did Al Shabaab experience a change of decision to declare cooperation with Al Qaeda in 2008?” In order to answer that question, I have used Rational Choice Theory as a framework and the model of process tracing to identify the factors that most contributed to the change of decision in August 2008.

Al Shabaab’s decision to declare cooperation with Al Qaeda in 2008 was motivated by the constricting environment it faced domestically. Al Shabaab had been losing legitimacy in Somalia in the period of March-August 2008, and as a result Al Shabaab had to find a way to reinvigorate its status. The most achievable way to do that was by declaring unification with Al Qaeda in August 2008, which gave Al Shabaab credibility in its commitment to global Jihad and provided Al Shabaab access to many benefits of recruitment and increased striking capacity to bolster its transnational objective. The significantly more achievable goal of gaining legitimacy internationally compared to re-establishing Al Shabaab nationally is the reason why Al Shabaab chose transnational preferences in maximizing its utility. Al Shabaab’s attack in Westgate in September 2013 may be motivated by similar conditions. Only through studying Al Shabaab’s preferences and conditions can we understand, and effectively counter, the actions of one of the strongest terrorist group in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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## Notes

- [1] The author would like to thank Dr. Joel Busher and the anonymous reviewers for generous written comments, as well as Dr. Andi Widjajanto and Darang Sahdana Candra for their guidance and feedback.
- [2] “Caliphate” is a term meaning the political-religious state comprising the Muslim community and the lands and peoples under its dominion in the centuries following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. See <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/89739/Caliphate>
- [3] The use of this database was further supplemented by the author’s findings.
- [4] In contrast, there were 4 attacks to Government and 0 attacks to military personnel and location.

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## Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram

by Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson



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### Abstract

*This article addresses an under-researched aspect of Boko Haram's activities: gender-based violence (GBV) and its targeting of women. It argues that 2013 marked a significant evolution in Boko Haram's tactics, with a series of kidnappings, in which one of the main features was the instrumental use of women. This was in response to corresponding tactics by the Nigerian security forces. Additionally the analysis provides evidence of a shift by Boko Haram to include women in its operations, in response to increased pressure on male operatives. It also considers the gendered rationale for instrumentalizing women within the framework of Boko Haram's ideology and culture, arguing for a greater appreciation of how gender factors in the group's violence.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria; Boko Haram; Terrorism; Gender; Women; Radicalisation; Tactics; Kidnapping

### Introduction

The Islamist terrorist group known as Boko Haram, but whose formal name in Arabic is *Jamā'a Ahl al-sunnah li-da'wa wa al-jihād* (Sunni Group for Preaching and Jihad), has been active in Nigeria since 2002, when it was founded by Muhammed Yusuf (Tonwe & Eke 2013: 234). Translated from Hausa, 'Boko Haram' means 'Western Education is Sinful', and this reflects the group's two main aims: the opposition of what it considers to be the secular westernisation of Nigeria, especially co-educational learning and democratic elections; and the creation of an Islamic state in Nigeria, or at least in the country's majority Muslim northern states (Ibid: 235).

The Nigerian government has violently opposed Boko Haram, and in July 2009 successfully, but only temporarily, quashed an uprising by the group across north-eastern Nigeria (Adesoji 2010: 98). The uprising led to the deaths of 800 Boko Haram members, including Yusuf. The extra-judicial killing of Yusuf was recorded on cell phones and the footage became widely accessible on the Internet, which only increased his "martyrdom" status in the eyes of his followers (IRIN News, 18 July 2011). One year later, in July 2010, Boko Haram's new leader, Yusuf's former second-in-command, Abubakar Shekau emerged from hiding and announced in a statement released to journalists that "jihad has begun" (Zenn 2013).

Since July 2010 Nigeria has experienced both a resurgence in Boko Haram militancy and an evolution to more sophisticated attacks and jihadist ideology, modelled on al-Qaeda (Pham 2012: 3-6). More than 3,500 people have been killed in the conflict since 2010, and after more than four years of Shekau's leadership, the violence shows no signs of abating (Agbibo 2014: 41). Shekau has called out to other jihadist groups, including Al-Qaeda leaders, such as Ayman al-Zawahri and the late Abu Musa'ab al-Zarqawi, as well as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Shabaab. Boko Haram's international links are however not as developed as those of its splinter group of mostly AQIM-trained militants, Ansaru, which has closer operational ties to the global Al-Qaeda network (Long War Journal, 13 November 2013).



The increasingly international character of Boko Haram has become a focus of analysis ever since Boko Haram's suicide car bombing attack on the UN Headquarters in Abuja in August 2011. This article, however, addresses a less-researched aspect of Boko Haram's activities: gender-based violence (GBV) and Boko Haram's instrumentalization of women in its operations, culture and ideology (Barkindo et al 2013: 4).

## ***GBV in Context***

GBV is defined by the UN as '*physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*' (World Health Organization). The term, however, also applies to violence specifically targeted against men and boys (UNFPA 2012: 3). 'Gender' is understood as socially constructed norms and roles both limiting, and permitting, the actions and expectations of men and women (Butler 1999: 6; Mu'Azu & Uzoechi 2010: 122).

Within Nigeria, GBV transcends region, religion and ethnicity, with physical and sexual abuse affecting as many as 35.1% of Igbo women and 34.3% of Hausa-Fulani women (Oladepo et al 2011). Nigerian cultural traditions have included female genital mutilation, forced marriage and widowhood practices, including hair-shaving and restriction to the home (Ifemeje 2012: 138). Nigerian law is also infused with discriminatory practices against women, including an implied legal backing to the assault of a wife in Section 55 of the penal code, and, in Section 6 of the criminal code, a lack of legal recognition for rape within marriage (Ibid.: 143) [1]. GBV also affects men in Nigeria and sexual violence has been a tactic of government forces against men in detention in order to humiliate and disempower them (Peel 2004: 65).

This analysis will specifically focus however on Boko Haram and gender, arguing that there is evidence that gender is now an increasingly significant component of Boko Haram's tactics, messaging, and violence.

The first section explores Boko Haram's recent campaign of gender-based abductions in its escalating conflict with the security forces. The second section explores tactics, and provides evidence of Boko Haram's shift to include women in its operations and the extensive targeting of Christian women. The final section considers the rationale for instrumentalizing women within the framework of Boko Haram's ideology and culture.

## ***Instrumentality: Women as Pawns***

2013 marked a significant evolution in Boko Haram's tactics. Boko Haram carried out a series of kidnappings, in which one of the main features was the instrumental use of women, in response to corresponding tactics by the Nigerian government. Kidnapping is a recent development for the group and the first suggestions of this tactic emerged in Boko Haram statements in January 2012. It was then that the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau, issued a video message threatening to kidnap the wives of government officials in response to the government imprisoning the wives of Boko Haram members (Associated Press, 27 January 2012).

However, Boko Haram's first actual kidnapping operation was carried out one year later in February 2013, with the abduction of a seven-member French family in northern Cameroon, then brought back to Nigeria (The Guardian, 19 April 2013). The family group included four children (Ibid.). Between February 2013 and May 2013, the kidnapping strategy was brought directly to Nigerian soil, with the abductions of more than a dozen government officials and their families in Boko Haram's main base of Borno State. In May 2013, Boko Haram carried out a mass assault on a police barracks in Bama, Borno State in which militants captured 12



Christian women and children (Agence France-Presse, 13 May 2013). This was a prolonged attack, and the abductions followed a fierce battle with security forces in which more than 100 people were killed. On May 7, 2013, Shekau claimed the kidnappings of these 12 women and children in Boko Haram's name. In another video message, he then promised to make these hostages his 'servants' if certain conditions, such as the release of Boko Haram members and their wives from prison, were not met (Agence France-Presse, video, 13 May 2013).

Shekau's statement related to the Nigerian government's arrest in 2012 of the wives and children of several Boko Haram leaders, for which the Bama kidnappings were a response. More than 100 women and children had been detained, among them Shekau's own wives. Also arrested were the wife and children of the commander for Kano, Suleiman Muhammed; the pregnant wife of the commander for Sokoto, Kabiru Sokoto, who gave birth while in prison; and the wife of the suicide-bomber who attacked the 'This Day' media house in Abuja in April 2012 (Barkindo et al 2013: 22). These arrests were not unusual in themselves. The targeting of suspects' family and friends is a common policing practice in Nigeria, according to Nigerian security experts (Interview with Beegeagle, 2013). The significance was the deliberate deployment of such practices to strike at the heart of Boko Haram through Boko Haram's female family members, which in turn has had a significant impact on Boko Haram's strategy.

This capture of Boko Haram militants' family members was cited as a grievance in almost all Shekau's video statements in 2012 and 2013. In his first statement after the mass detentions, Shekau explicitly accused the government of "kidnapping" women (YouTube, 11 January 2012). Subsequent video messages reiterated this theme, with complaints of a sustained government strategy of arrests of Boko Haram family members. When in mid-September 2012 the government detained a further ten women associated with Boko Haram, Shekau responded with his fifth video message. In this video, which was made public on September 30, 2012, Shekau threatened revenge on wives of government officials. He also speculated on the possible sexual abuse of the Boko Haram family members by security forces, when he said '*...they have continued capturing our women... In fact, they are even having sex with one of them. Allah, Allah, see us and what we are going through*' (YouTube, 30 September 2012). He made clear the intention to target 'enemy' women in return, '*Since you are now holding our women, (laughs) just wait and see what will happen to your own women.. to your own wives according to Sharia law*' (Ibid). These events demonstrate an established cycle of government detentions of women related to Boko Haram, and the group's retaliatory abduction of Christian women.

All these women were targeted for instrumental purposes, as none of those captured on either side had any direct involvement in the conflict. The women abducted by Boko Haram at Bama, for example, were visiting relatives working at the police station (Al-Jazeera, 26 May 2013). After they were released several weeks later in exchange for the release of the wives of Boko Haram members, the women were interviewed by Al-Jazeera. They said that the Boko Haram members told them explicitly that their abduction was a response to the government's detention of their own wives and children. They had been in 'the wrong place at the wrong time' (Ibid.).

Correspondingly, there is no evidence that the female relatives of Boko Haram members who were arrested by the government had any direct involvement in the group's activities. While Boko Haram has in the past paid young boys to carry out operations, such as arson attacks and intelligence gathering, there is no indication that women have been carrying out such activities (Punch News, 30 November 2013). Nor, according to a leading Nigerian security expert, is it probable that female relatives of Boko Haram operatives would be informed if their husband were an active Boko Haram member (Anonymous, Interviewed by Jacob Zenn, May 2013). In one case in 2012, for example, a pregnant Cameroonian woman and child were found



in a Kano flat that also served as a Boko Haram hide-out. She appeared entirely ignorant that her husband was suspected of planning an attack on a church that killed at least twenty people (PM News Nigeria, 1 May 2012).

### *Evolving Conflict, Evolving Tactics*

The cycle of gender-based abduction and detention and increased violence in Nigeria is evolving, and has expanded since Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan announced a State of Emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States in May 2013 (CNN, 14 May 2013). Since 2013, the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) has joined security forces in employing new methods against Boko Haram, such as the mass arrest of male suspects in the early hours of the morning, the disappearance of suspects, and the use of young teenage men, fluent in the local Kanuri language and culture to operate checkpoints (Human Rights Watch News, 29 November 2013). Male supporters of Boko Haram have therefore become uniquely vulnerable to detention and abuse, particularly by the Civilian JTF, which is essentially staffed by volunteers.

Since then, a series of unusual arrests in Maiduguri, Borno state, suggests an immediate and gendered responsive shift in Boko Haram tactics. In June 2013, an AK-47, a pistol and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were found in the garments of two 'shivering' veiled women in Maiduguri (Vanguard News, 30 June 2013). Two months later, two women hiding rifles in their clothing were among five suspected Boko Haram militants who were arrested by the security forces (The Guardian Nigeria, August 2013). Also in August 2013, a woman was detained alongside a 35-year old male Boko Haram suspect (Vanguard News, 17 August 2013). Additionally, male Boko Haram members have reportedly disguised themselves as women in veils in order to evade arrest. In one case, in July 2013, three men dressed as veiled women were killed, and around twenty others arrested, in an attempted attack on a police station (Daily Trust, 6 July 2013).

This mirrors a pattern seen in the adaptive responses of other terrorist organisations in times of unique pressure on men (Cunningham 2003: 172; Ortobals & Poloni-Staudinger 2013: 44). In Iraq, for example, women were similarly deployed to smuggle arms and execute suicide bombings, during a clamp-down on Al-Qaeda in the mid-2000s (Sjoberg & Gentry 2011: 15; Bloom 2011: 210). A direct order from the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, this capitalised on women's superior ability to evade security checks, cache weapons in clothing, and attract less suspicion as suicide bombers (Ibid.: 210-4). His intention was also to shame men into action (Ibid.), although there is as yet no indication of this aim within Boko Haram.

The tactical use of women due to the lesser suspicion they arouse has also been evident in Islamist violence in Pakistan and Indonesia; and within the conflict in Israel and Palestine (Ibid: 177). Historically, it is a pattern seen in liberation campaigns such as the Algerian resistance against the French, in which women were initially ordered to smuggle weapons; later, recognising the vital role they could play, female supporters of the resistance became willing volunteers for such tasks (Minne & Clarke 2007: 344), (Horne 2002:124).

### *Targeting and Abusing Christian Women*

The State of Emergency has manifested in other Boko Haram activities involving women, with a reported increase in GBV against Christian women in northern areas of Nigeria, and increasing levels of sexual violence including rape, torture and also murder. A recent study for Nigeria's Political Violence Research Network suggests that more than 45% of those killed by Boko Haram are Christian women and children (Barkindo et al 2013: 17-22). This, too, appears to be connected to the increased government pressure on Boko Haram in strongholds in northeastern Nigeria, with insurgents abducting Christian women as they



flee the security forces. The Christian Association of Nigeria has been reporting the abduction of Christian teenagers since July 2013 (Agenzia Fides, 23 July 2013). Researchers speaking to women in the northeastern regions have uncovered a picture of violence and intimidation, with women increasingly targeted with kidnap, forced marriage and compulsory conversion to Islam (Barkindo et al 2013:17-29).

Some of this GBV appears tactical. In one widely reported case from November 2013, a Christian teenager told how she was abducted by Boko Haram from a rural region of Gwoza, Borno State, and forced to cook and clean for the group. This 19-year old girl, Hajja, was held for three months, during which time she was also forced to convert to Islam, set to be married to one of the group, and pressured to carry out operational tasks for the fourteen-strong team of men who took her. Hajja was made to lure government soldiers into positions where they could be targeted, and to watch as their throats were slit by Boko Haram members after they were captured—killings in which the Muslim wife of the Boko Haram cell leader reportedly participated (The Blaze, 19 November 2013). A Gwoza official estimates more than a dozen other Christian women remain in captivity in similar circumstances (Reuters, 17 November 2013), and young girls are particularly targeted (Wall St Journal, 14 January 2014).

Such practices are reminiscent of the behaviour of rebel movements in conflict zones in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, in tactically exploiting women. Civil conflicts in Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Rwanda have all witnessed GBV in the abduction, sexual violence and forced marriage and conscription of enemy women into insurgent groups (Mazurana & McKay 2003: 11-17; Turshen 2001: 5; Coulter et al 2008: 9-12). In Uganda, soldiers with Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) were routinely engaged in the sale and 'transfer' of women (Amnesty International 1997: 17; Turshen 2000: 811-2). In these cases women were targeted both for their assets, and as 'assets' in themselves. Their value was reproductive, and productive, providing skills such as cooking and cleaning, necessary to a wartime labour force (Turshen 2001: 1). Unlike earlier civil African conflicts such as those in Eritrea or Mozambique, in which women's rights were part of the insurgent ideology, these later conflicts have predominantly only objectified and exploited women (Coulter et al 2008: 9-17).

If the abduction of women by Boko Haram is tactical, other violence against Christian women appears primarily punitive. In Maiduguri, in August 2013, a Christian student reported an attack by Boko Haram on her university accommodation: the men were murdered, the women segregated into Muslim and non-Muslims, and the Christian women systematically raped (Barkindo et al 2013: 23). Such attacks on Christian women by Boko Haram can be regarded as an extension of other institutionalised and long-term discriminatory practices against them in northern regions (Onapajo & Uzodike 2012: 32). Women have faced broad discriminatory practices in both the professional and domestic spheres. They have been targeted in acid-attacks for 'un-Islamic' practices, such as a failure to wear the hijab, or for taking a job (Turaki 2010). Women are also often accused of 'dishonouring Islam'. In 2006, riots ensued in which more than 50 Christians were killed, mostly women and children, after a Christian female teacher confiscated a Qur'an from a student in Bauchi (Alao 2009: 40). This generic culture of discrimination against Christians has enabled the escalation in recent violence.

### ***Gender in Boko Haram's Ideology and Culture***

There have been no explicit calls in Boko Haram's ideology for this level of violence against Christian women, or women in general (Barkindo et al 2013: 5). However, Boko Haram's command to Jihad often features exhortations to terrorise Christian communities or, in its words, a "War on Christians", and the victimisation of women is a tactic within this strategy (Punch News, 11 July 2012; Coulter et al 2008: 13).



Shariah law is also a factor. Boko Haram's emphasis on the forced imposition of Shariah facilitates GBV through rigidly gendered ideological structures (Onuoha 2010: 57). The rise of Boko Haram coincided with the adoption of Shariah in 12 northern states, and was to some extent a by-product of this (Akanji 2009: 55-60). The version of Shariah law supported by Shekau and Boko Haram promotes narrow gender roles for men and women, enforcing strict rules on women's dress and sexual conduct and instituting other discriminatory and abusive practices against women. These range from the enforced segregation of school-children, to the public flogging of women for fornication (BBC, 7 January 2003). Gendered norms have been adopted by Boko Haram's leaders, who have listed among the values to be opposed, '*..the rights and privileges of Women, the idea of homosexuality, lesbianism.. rape of infants.. blue films, prostitution..*' and beauty pageants, all associated with Western ideals (Zenn 2013b; World Stage, 18 March 2012).

Boko Haram's ideology casts men in hyper-masculine combat roles, their duty to violently oppose the west. By contrast, '*..unarmed men, youths, women, cripple and even under age..*' are exempt from battle and constitute illegitimate targets (Sahara Reporters, 22 January 2012). Muslim women – in contrast to Christian women – have customarily been spared, even where Boko Haram has targeted Muslim men, as in an attack on a college in Yobe in September 2013. All male students were killed, but female students were not (International Business Times, 29 September 2013). This binary understanding of gender norms permits GBV to serve as a display of power (Solangon & Patel 2012: 425). Abuses of Christian women both serve to mark their difference from Muslim women, and strike at Christian men, by demonstrating their inability to protect 'their' women.

This combative ideological masculinity appears to have specific resonance with a section of disenfranchised Nigerian men. It was predominantly such men who gathered to watch Boko Haram's founder, Muhammed Yusuf, when he spoke in television interviews, or simply led Friday prayers. Yusuf's appeal was to a population dominated by unemployed, poor males (Onuoha 2010: 57-8). These men were angry and frustrated over the perceived corruption of the Nigerian government, on which Yusuf lectured, and mass unemployment (IRIN News, 18 July 2011).

Globalisation can be regarded as a factor in such violence and feelings of grievance, with the fracturing of men's traditional identities impacting on their willingness to turn to extremist groups (Connell 2005: 73; Maalouf 1996: 90-93). In the face of social change, the reform of traditional gendered practices and the gradual adoption of 'Western' values, gender-based violence and binary gender norms can perform as a source of self-worth (Barker & Ricardo 2005: v; Kimmel 2003: 603-620). These norms are not a necessary characteristic of Islamist groups. Nigeria's earlier Islamist movement Yan Izala, established in 1978, in fact promoted an emancipatory programme of rights for women, when compared with some other Salafist movements (Loimeier 2012: 141).

The impact of grievances, globalisation and poverty on Nigerian violence suggests that ideology is one of a number of possible factors in GBV committed by Boko Haram members and supporters. Indeed, Alao proposes that Nigerian radicalisation predominantly concerns matters of ethnicity, commercial rivalries and power (Alao 2009: 22). Agbiboa also cites local disputes, poverty, corruption and long-term injustices committed without police action as drivers for religious and ethnic violence (Agbiboa 2014: 50).

Criminal motives may also play a role. In Maiduguri, six Christian women were abducted and repeatedly raped by insurgents who claimed this as sexual 'jizya', a tax paid by Christians under Islamic law. However, the surname of one of the women distinguished the group as ethnic Berom, who are perceived by Boko Haram as "immigrants" to northern Islamic lands. The rape therefore effectively served as a punishment, and a threat to leave (Barkindo et al 2013: 23). In other sexual attacks against women, the victims' perception



has been that the assaults were driven by an essentially 'criminal' element of the group (Ibid. p.29). Indeed, ideology is unlikely to drive all Boko Haram members, as some are undoubtedly coerced into joining the group (AOV & NWGOV 2013: 43). The level of control of Boko Haram leadership over the activities of such elements is questionable, and has as yet not been pronounced upon by Shekau.

## *Conclusion*

This article focused on Boko Haram, with the aim of shedding light on a neglected but developing aspect of the group's operations: gender-based changes in Boko Haram's tactics and its instrumental use of women, resulting in increasing GBV targeted at Christians. It outlined the instrumental use of women by both Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces in a cycle of abductions and detentions dating from 2012. Three conclusions can be drawn from these retaliatory actions.

Firstly, as implied by Shekau's video messages, abductions of women have since 2012 come to constitute a semi-official Boko Haram tactic, in response to similar tactics by government. Secondly, it seems clear that the recent violence and ensuing state of emergency is causing Boko Haram to evolve tactically, engaging women in support roles in the group, disguising men as women to avoid arrest, and abducting Christian women. Thirdly, women are being targeted by both sides in Nigeria's conflict, for purely instrumental reasons. They do not yet appear to be actively and willingly participating in violence to a significant extent.

The article also briefly explored the complex factors in the evolution of Boko Haram's tactics. Shariah law, at the heart of Boko Haram, and with a strict control and restriction of women's liberty is implicated in GBV, but other factors emerge. Local grievances and frustrations drive men towards Boko Haram, and a sense of security in its gender norms; perhaps also to GBV. Women victims themselves suggest criminality is a factor in GBV, with women stripped of assets, or raped as an end in itself. Additionally, GBV by Boko Haram is contextualised by an institutionalisation of broader discriminatory practices within Nigeria, but also by the similar sexual targeting of women in other civil conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, where women are constructed as assets, and exploited as such, and by similar tactical developments in other terrorist groups when under extreme pressure.

It is also important to note that, although this piece focused on Boko Haram, the group does not have a monopoly on violence against women in Nigeria. Government troops have also been accused of looting, theft, murder and rape (IRIN News, 18 July 2011). It is hard to envisage an end to Boko Haram's violence, while government forces employ violence with impunity. Nor while discriminatory practices remain to some extent endemic. This is not to discount the activities of the many proactive Nigerian women; Nigerian women's groups have indeed been a powerful voice in protesting violence (Patch 2008: 40).

This analysis is still limited by the lack of research carried out with women supporters of Boko Haram. More research is needed with women in Boko Haram strongholds to ascertain their views. However, the strict gender norms of Boko Haram suggest that if women do carry out operations for the group, this is unlikely to constitute more than an emergency measure, and will not affect women's status organisationally. This is consistent with current trends in other terrorist groups (Global Observatory, 21 August 2013).

It is hoped that this piece has made clear that gender norms do figure in the Nigerian conflict, and within Boko Haram's culture, activities and ideology specifically. This article aims to provide an introduction to the importance of a further exploration of gender within the group, as a path to understanding, and ultimately preventing, Nigeria's ongoing and escalating violence.



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## Notes

[1] The criminal code was enacted in 1945, the penal code in 1960

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## ‘Soldiers of God or Allah’: Religious Politicization and the Boko Haram Crisis in Nigeria

by Benjamin Maiangwa



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### Abstract

*Several works on Boko Haram have underscored the issues of state weakness and bad governance in Nigeria as the major problematic fuelling the group’s violent activities. While the state fragility argument is indispensable, this paper argues that the religious dimension is also critical to any attempt to understand the Boko Haram crisis. To this end, the paper will examine how the historical and contemporary processes of religious politicization in Nigeria have contributed to the rise and radicalization of Boko Haram.*

**Keywords:** religious politicization, state weakness, bad governance, Boko Haram, terrorism, northern Nigeria

### Introduction

Since its radical uprising in July 2009, *Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad* (Association for propagating the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad), commonly called Boko Haram (Western education/civilization is profane) has become an embodiment of insecurity, fear, and suicide bombings in Nigeria. The group has emerged as the most violent of the religious sects bent at imposing Sharia law in Nigeria (Salifu, 2012). Together with alleged killings by the Nigerian security forces, Boko Haram’s attacks have left more than 4,000 people dead with attendant consequences on the economy and political stability of Nigeria (*Aljazeera* 13 August, 2013).

Several theories have been put forward to explain the rise and radicalization of Boko Haram. The Economist Magazine (cited in Mustapha, 2012) reports that Boko Haram represents the attempt by disenfranchised youths in northern Nigeria to demand for similar kind of amnesty fund and opportunities given to the Niger-Delta militants by the late President Yar’adua Administration. The prevailing view in southern Nigeria is that Boko Haram is the proxy of northern politicians who are geared towards discrediting the government of a southern-Christian President (Mustapha, 2012). On his part, Onuoha (2010: 65) notes that the Boko Haram terrorism is simply a symptom of the failings of the Nigerian state. Admittedly, the experience of most Nigerians has not led to a deep level of trust between the government and the governed. This, in turn, has contributed to an environment in which Islamist militant ideologies resonate. And then there is the issue of poverty and unemployment, both widespread in Nigeria, but pervasive in the northern region and particularly in the north-east state of Borno - Boko Haram’s geographic centre of gravity, where social welfare indicators on health, employment, and education are generally weak. Within such an impoverished environment, Castells (2004) observes that the appeal of religious fundamentalism could easily come together with social and economic reform.

Whilst the dismal socio-economic conditions in some parts of northern Nigeria do not fully account for the rise and radicalization of Boko Haram, such conditions, nevertheless, provided the group’s initial leader – late Mohammed Yusuf – with the favourable atmosphere to establish the Boko Haram movement. Yet, one of the



noticeable characteristics of the Boko Haram phenomenon is its religiosity, which has largely been woven into its fabric by political processes in Nigeria. In this sense, it is important to elaborate on and understand the processes of religious politicization in Nigeria as they relate to the rise of Boko Haram. To this end, part one of the paper offers some theoretical insights on religious politicization. Part two explains how religion has become an integral part of political fields of contestation in Nigeria. Here also, the rise of Boko Haram and other forms of religious extremism in Nigeria is contextualized within the processes of religious politicization. Part three reflects on some possible recommendations that could help to manage the Boko Haram crisis and other related issues in Nigeria.

### **Religious Politicisation**

*All religions reek with the blood of human carnage, not because God is blood thirsty but because in the primordial irony, man [sic] created a god limited by man's own weaknesses; lust for a political power base, and economic dominance (Ibrahim, 1991: 129-30).*

Historically, religion has been used as an instrument of social cohesion in many societies. At the same time, however, religion has also been adroitly contrived into an instrument of violence, “hence its indication in some literature as a double-edged sword” (Sampson, 2012: 104). At the turn of the twentieth century, Karl Marx and Max Weber predicted the demise of religion and the imminence of secularism. But events in the 21st century, especially the spates of religious violence in many societies around the world, suggest the continued pre-eminence, perpetuity and persistence of religion (Jefferis, 2010: 1). This is further demonstrated in such religious-based wars as the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the altercations between the Muslims and the Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the festering war in Sudan, the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Sunni-Shi'a war in Iraq, the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Arab Spring (Agbiboa, 2012: 207). Additionally, Hoffman (1998: 89) argues that the ethos of self-sacrifice and suicidal martyrdom carried out in the name of God can be seen in many religious terrorist organizations, and have grown exponentially in recent times with considerably higher levels of casualties. For instance, Hoffman (1999: 17) observes that groups motivated in part or in whole by religious ideology committed some of the high-profile terrorist attacks that were documented in 1996. These include:

*The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, responsible for three incidents (which killed 56 persons); the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front for two (killing 37); a shadowy Saudi Arabian dissident group for two (causing 30 fatalities); the Egyptian al-Gama'a al-Islamiya for one (18 persons died); unspecified Kashmiri rebels for another incident (where eight persons died); and the Turkish Islamic Jihad for the remaining one (in which 17 persons perished) (Hoffman, 1999: 17).*

The foregoing events demonstrate that while it is instrumental for communal harmony, religion could also be utilized in the achievement of certain political and other established needs and interests (Sampson, 2012: 104). As Baylis and Smith (2001: 495) argue, religion could be turned into a doctrine of action and hatred, where spiritual achievement occurs through destruction rather than personal enlightenment.

In a study undertaken in Spain, it is reported that societies divided along religious lines are more susceptible to intense conflicts than those divided by political, territorial and ethnic differentiations (Sampson, 2012: 104). In Nigeria, the political, territorial, and ethnic differences are all important sources of conflicts. But, perhaps, the religious factor has predominated and as such, explains the prolonged nature and dimension that religious violence had assumed in the country. The rest of the paper will show that while other conflict multipliers in Nigeria such as ethnicity and the prevailing socio-political, economic, and cultural issues,



are important in understanding violent conflicts in the country, the religious dimension, especially its politicization, is worth looking into when trying to provide a nuanced understanding of the Boko Haram phenomenon.

### ***Religious Politicization and the Emergence of Violent Extremist Groups in Nigeria***

Since the time of Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad in the 19th century, differences in religious belief in Nigeria have been sighted as categories of exclusion and violent conflicts. In 1802, Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817), a religious and political leader of Fulani descent, launched a jihad in order to reform what he regarded as ungodly practices of the Hausa rulers and aristocrats whom he considered as anti-Islamic (Maier, 2000: 150). He criticised them for what he perceived as their unjust rule, which included manslaughter, violating their honour, and devouring their wealth; and enforced upon them the Sharia law as the basis for ethical and principled leadership (Levitson, 2000: 85). At their refusal, he overthrew them and established the Sokoto Caliphate – a federation of emirates comprising the states of Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Adamawa, Niger, Kwara, and some parts of Plateau (Paden, 1981: 24; Kenny, 1996: 339). By establishing the Caliphate system, Dan Fodio's jihad laid the foundation for the dominance and politicization of Islam in northern Nigeria. Although the Sokoto Caliphate eventually lost its legitimacy during the colonial occupation of Nigeria, the British colonialists, somehow, still maintained a mutually beneficial relationship with the local Muslim rulers by establishing an Anglo-Hausa/Fulani hegemony in what is regarded as the Indirect Rule system (Mu'azzam and Ibrahim, 2000: 79).

The Indirect Rule system, which was basically a system of colonial administration in Northern Nigeria that administered governance through the use of the region's traditional chiefs, vested the Muslim aristocrats with the political authority, which privileged them over non-Muslims living in the region (Haynes, 1996: 38). The British also integrated the pre-colonial Sharia Courts into the new colonial state. With such a religiously-laden legal system, it was impossible to resolve conflicts or adjudicate on criminal offences without observing some of the tenets of the Sharia law. Christian religious personnel may have been unhappy with this arrangement, but generally lacked the political clout to attempt any changes to the system. In fact, in some occasions, Haynes (1996: 38) argues that Christian proselytizing was barred in Northern Nigeria at the behest of Muslim traditional chiefs. It was little wonder that at the end of colonialism, many Muslim elites found themselves in positions of political and religious influence to the chagrin of the Christians. According to Ibrahim (1991: 116), this led to the evolution of political strains and conflicts between the proponents of the two rival universal religions that the Middle East has bequeathed to Nigeria and the world over.

Following the attainment of political independence on 1 October 1960, many of the country's divisive and distorted colonial structures remained intact: "No consensual normative code governed expectations and behaviours in Nigerian post-independence politics, and even electoral victories were only expected to confirm the North's 'predetermined' right to rule; when they did not, they were rejected and subjected to reversal" (Gboyega, 1997: 150). This reality, coupled with the corruption and mismanagement of resources by the political elites, set the scene for the staging of bloody military coups in Nigeria. When the military first staged a coup on 15 January 1966 to 'intervene' in the political crisis of the time, their targets were the political class, particularly the dominant northern political elites like the Prime Minister (Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa), and the premiers of the Northern (Sir Ahmadu Bello) and Western (Samuel Akintola) regions. Since most of the coup plotters were of Igbo extraction, and the victims were all – except for Akintola – Muslim northerners, the inference drawn by many northerners was that the coup was a deliberate attempt by the southerners to obliterate northern politicians from the public space. This suspicion was



heightened by the fact that the then commanding officer of the Nigerian Army, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi (himself an Igbo) did nothing to assuage the grief of the northerners. Worst still, Ironsi's decree introducing a unitary system of government in Nigeria left many northerners, especially the army chiefs, seething with anger (Gboyega, 1997: 165). At this stage, the signals for another coup, and possibly a war, were clear. Unsurprisingly, on 29 July 1966, Ironsi was toppled and killed, alongside his subordinates and many Igbo traders living in the north. This incident ignited the move for secession by the Igbos – the Biafran secession – which metastasized into the Nigerian civil war (1967-70) (Ikelegbe, 2005: 77).

With the war over in 1970, the Yakubu Gowon Administration instituted many programs geared at promoting national unity and reconciliation. Poignantly, these curative programmes were impeded by the problem of absorbing the former supporters of State secession into the wider Nigerian society - since the stereotypes, resentments, and prejudices that had developed prior to and during the war period were still rife among the different ethnic and religious groups in the country (Falola & Njoku, 2010: 333). The mismanagement of the reconciliation process led to a phase of identity-based clashes as aggrieved groups, parties, and individuals sought the restructuring of the country along religious and ethnic lines. Nowhere was this more obtrusive than at the constitutional conference (1977-78), where the issue of the Sharia law was heatedly debated (Gboyega, 1997: 156). According to Mu'azzam and Ibrahim (2000: 64), it was this heated Sharia debate that dragged the issue of politics and religion to the centre stage in Nigeria.

During the course of the Sharia debate, northern Muslims raised the issue of elevating the status of Sharia courts from the state level in the northern region to federal courts across the country. Liman (1977: 16 cited in Mu'azzam and Ibrahim, 2000: 64) was even more emphatic in recommending that “a Muslim vigilante group should be formed at the national level to alert the nation whenever they feel that Islamic interest in any place and at any level is being violated or sacrificed”. The issue of establishing a federal court of appeal for Sharia cases was eventually dismissed and instead, a constitutional assembly reached a consensus – although frowned upon by the northern delegates – under which three Islamic law judges, while still being part of the Federal Court of Appeal, but not independent from it, could hear cases referred from the Sharia courts (Cook, 2011: 5). While the issue was being negotiated, the leaders of the Christian community in Nigeria also embarked on a campaign for the recognition of the Canon Law in the Nigerian constitution (Ibrahim, 1989: 77). Such debates and agitations, from both sides, constituted a major threat to the tenuous unity of the Nigerian state and also contributed to the rise and proliferation of “new forms of consciousness and militancy structured along religious lines” (Hunwick 1992: 149).

The religious movements that emerged during this period sought the reform and purification of the Nigerian society, “especially in the context of the class polarization in Nigeria during the oil-boom years of the 1970s and early 1980s” (Haynes, 1996: 218). This phase, which gained impetus with the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s, saw the rise of extreme religious groups like the Yan Izala, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim Student Society (MSS), the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), the Dawa group, and several other Islamic splinter groups (Adesoji, 2010: 4). The Iranian revolution gave radical Muslims in Nigeria two significant examples; on the one hand, it gave them an immediately recognizable radical program for their own societies, and on the other hand, it offered them a political platform from which to launch attacks on incumbent Muslim elites, associated with some form of corruption or economic mismanagement (Haynes, 1996: 239). This kind of globalized religious solidarity reiterates the view in the field of political Islam, that militancy in the Muslim world is primarily a response to the desire to establish a global Islamic order as a religious duty, which is also driven by the belief in the notion that the West is at war with Islam (Neuman, 2013: 882). Other key international developments that evoked radical Islamic reactions in Nigeria during this period are the





developments in the Middle East where views often expressed are in support of the Palestinians in what is seen as their struggle against Israel. In recent times, it is the United States' war against terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan that have added to the creation of anti-Western animosity on the one hand, and the violent radicalization of certain Muslim groups in Nigeria on the other (Alao, 2009: 39).

Furthermore, the appeal of Islamic hegemony contributed to the manifestations of religious militancy among some groups that appear throughout the late 1970s in Nigeria, whose members remained committed to Islamic religious purity and anti-democratic/capitalist/Westernized objectives (Forest, 2012: 76). One example of these movements is the Maitatsine (the one who curses). According to Adesoji (2010: 1), the Maitatsine uprisings of 1980 in Kano, 1982 in Kaduna and Bulumkutu, 1984 in Yola and 1985 in Bauchi, represent the first violent attempts at imposing a strict version of religious ideology on a pluralistic, independent Nigeria by extreme religious movements. The Maitatsine uprising and the subsequent rise of extreme religious groups in Nigeria, has been associated with an unprecedented politicization of identity-based conflicts on the one hand (Ikelegbe, 2005: 77), and the erosion of a sense of common citizenship fostered by state contraction and popular disillusionment with local politics on the other (Hutchful and Aning, 2004: 203). Incidentally, many of the factors – such as socio-economic grievances, widespread elite corruption, and religious politicization – that were adduced for the Maitatsine uprisings are still present in Nigeria and are implicated in the ontology of the Boko Haram crisis (Adesoji, 2010: 100).

The religious and political waters were muddied when the Nigerian government made a surreptitious decision in 1986 to join the 45-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), “within which Saudi Arabia and Iran – with their contending visions of Islamic society – strive for political dominance” (Haynes, 1996: 213). Many Christians in the country believe that the OIC was an organization that promotes the religion of Islam, which requires member countries to be headed by Muslims and encourages the implementation of Islamic legal and social norms (Hunwick, 1992: 150). Thus, they fear that the inclusion of Nigeria in the OIC will inevitably lead to the Islamization of the country; a situation that may render them insignificant in the Nigerian public space. Given this dissent, the OIC issue was eventually shelved. That notwithstanding, bouts of religious violence raged on in the country. A prime example was the 1987 religious violence between Christian and Muslim students at the College of Education, Kafanchan. What is more, the religious crisis which broke out in Katsina on 27 March 1991, the Kano uprising of 26 December 1994, and the kidnapping of a Christian preacher by a Muslim group in Kafanchan on 6 September 1996 (Mu'azzam and Ibrahim, 2000: 70), demonstrate rather starkly the degree to which religion has become a pliable tool for violent conflicts in Nigeria. Sometimes, as in February and April 1992 in the Zangon-Kataf crisis, “the conflict was communal – fought over land – but found expression in a religious differentiation” (Gboyega, 1997: 192). Whatever form they took, these crises sowed the seeds of bitter rivalry, suspicion, and discord between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria from the 1990s onwards.

With the historic return to democratic rule in 1999 there were hopes that the new dispensation would pave the way for national cohesion and provide multifaceted outlets for political energies in Nigeria (Hunwick, 1992: 155). But this hope was dashed as about 8 months following the commencement of Nigeria's fourth republic in May 1999, the governor (Ahmed Yerima) of one of the northern states (Zamfara) adopted Sharia law in January 2000. Given the waves of Sharia implementation and enforcement in Zamfara State, eleven other northern States followed suit. According to Afrobarometer (2009: 4), the use of Sharia law by some northern politicians in the year 2000 was a strategy allegedly geared at reclaiming their lost political power which they had hitherto benefited immensely from during the colonial era and the decades in which Nigeria was ruled by northern politicians and generals. However, Ahmed Bello Mahmud, the then-Commissioner



of Justice in Zamfara State, justified the adoption and implementation of Sharia law during this period thus: The adoption of the Sharia law by any State that professes the true Islamic faith is not a matter of choice; it is compulsory given the advent of democracy, constitutionalism, and a federal system of government that provides the perfect setting (Mahmud, 2000: 175). Whatever the merits of these two claims, events that preceded the implementation of Sharia law in the twelve religiously mixed northern States revealed the dangers and repercussions of imposing religious laws in a pluralistic country like Nigeria. According to Ibrahim (1991: 130), the outcomes of such religious decisions,

*Sets in motion a process of brinkmanship that poses serious threats to the unity of Nigeria, as complex, multiple, and overlapping divisions and contradictions are reduced to two mutually exclusive primordial camps. Nigerians who in their real lives combine their Christianity or their Islam with 'pagan practices', and who are ideologically 'progressives' or 'conservatives', 'fundamentalists' or even 'atheists', are all pushed into two neat and opposed camps – soldiers of either God or Allah.*

The net effects is that the mobilization of religion for political purposes and its resulting violence and intolerance laid the foundation for the “Talibanization of Nigeria” (Afrobarometer 2009: 1), which in recent times, has manifested violently in the Boko Haram crisis. In other words, the demand for the implementation of Sharia law by some Nigerian politicians, combined with the long history of religious politicization, fundamentalism, and revivalism in Nigeria to spawn the rise and radicalization of Boko Haram.

### ***Implications and Consequences***

Faced with considerable pressure, the Jonathan Administration recently moved to grant amnesty to Boko Haram despite pleas and criticism from civil society groups and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). These groups argue that, besides being insensitive to the victims of Boko Haram violence, offering amnesty to Boko Haram will only infuse a culture of sheer impunity and senseless violence in the country. As it turns out, Boko Haram rejected the proposed amnesty plan, claiming that it had committed no wrong. Where the ‘amnesty strategy’, seemed to have ‘worked’ in the case of the Niger Delta militants, the religious objectives of Boko Haram are, in every practical sense, impossible to realize in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. There is also no guarantee that even if the sect were to be granted amnesty, it would give up on its demands for the implementation of Sharia law across the country. Additionally, the fact that Boko Haram has split into factions in recent times, makes the possibility of an amnesty offer unlikely to address the crisis as there might be a faction of the sect that remains moderate and open to negotiation, while another remains violent and interested in the nationwide implementation of Sharia law (Forest, 2012: 2).

With the proposed amnesty plan debunked by Boko Haram, the prevailing strategy used by the Nigerian government to curb the crisis is the declaration of a ‘State of Emergency’ and its attendant deployment of the military and other state security forces to the flashpoints of the group’s activities. However, given the escalation of Boko Haram’s violent activities, Salkida (2012) argues that the military strategy is utterly undefined and seems unlikely to address the issue, which will require much deeper and sophisticated political engagement. This paper does not claim to have a grand strategy for addressing religious politicization and the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria. However, a number of points that could manage the crisis and other forms of identity fragmentations in Nigeria are worth emphasizing by way of recommendation: First, in addition to the measures already taken by the Nigerian government to manage Boko Haram and other forms of identity crisis in the country, the idea of organizing a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) should be carefully revisited and considered. Stakeholders in Nigeria have, since the 1980s, been agitating for a SNC in order to discuss and address the divisive issues that have stalled harmonious relationship among the different religious



and ethnic groups in Nigeria. Although the repressive military regime of Babangida (1985-1993) interfered with the prospect of organizing the conference in the 1980s, it is important for the present crop of Nigerian leaders to revisit the idea again. But for this to work, the Nigerian political class and the citizens must show unwavering willingness to genuinely participate in the conference and put aside their ethnic and religious divisions to freely debate, compromise, negotiate, and design the nature of their society (Rashid, 2004: 388).

Second, the political parties in the country need to articulate their policies using the vernacular of patriotism in order to be able to work toward building a national political philosophy; effort must also be made to achieve a more cohesive political class by making political parties more integrative. A good step in this direction would be to limit the vast number of political parties in Nigeria in order to checkmate the inter-ethnic, inter-religious, and inter-regional conflicts which has inundated Nigeria's political landscape since the attainment of independence in 1960. Where political parties, politicians, and other stakeholders become non-partisan and dissociated from identity politics, the country could be able to address the pitfalls of the colonial and postcolonial leaders who played critical roles in entrenching identity politics in their struggle for the control of resources and of the central government. Akin to the task of decolonization and de-imperialization, this exercise can be a painful process involving the sustained "practice of self-critique, self-negation, and self-rediscovery" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013: 348). However, if the political will to follow through on reorganisation and national unity is demonstrated and continuous, the Nigerian leaders would be able to engage more meaningfully the tasks of nation-building. There can be no compromises in these tasks if Nigeria is to move ahead peacefully.

## ***Conclusion***

The argument advanced in this paper is simply that to fully understand the Boko Haram crisis, in order to counter it effectively, it is important to understand also how religion has been politicized in Nigeria for the achievement of certain political and economic goals. The analysis on the historical and contemporary processes of religious politicization in Nigeria evinces the fact that the Boko Haram crisis is not an entirely new phenomenon, but that it is part of the broader range of political/religious activism that has dotted the history of northern Nigeria since the Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad in the 19th century. As aptly noted by Lewis (2002: 4), Boko Haram's calls for justice – through the Sharia – clearly reflects another form of violent religious activism, which draws its authority from the lineage of the historical jihad of Dan Fodio and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. According to Salifu (2012), these historical influences on Boko Haram continue to entrench the group as a domestic challenge to Nigeria. Viewed through this prism, the rise and radicalization of Boko Haram poses few mysteries. But in bringing these facts steadily into an analytical view, it is important to keep at a distance the conspiracy theories that proliferate in the minds of an unsettled public opinion or popular misconception -- seeing Boko Haram as an Islamic conspiracy against Christians or as a destabilizing force against the government of President Goodluck Jonathan or even as merely a consequence of state fragility in Nigeria. In the final analysis, understanding how religion could be easily rationalized by certain people in pursuit of self-interested goals is important in not only providing a nuanced understanding of the Boko Haram phenomenon but in informing a prudent and coordinated counterterrorism response that could have the greatest positive impact.



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## The Politics of Amnesty in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of the Boko Haram and Niger Delta Insurgencies

by Michael Nwankpa



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### Introduction

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the Niger Delta amnesty programme and the proposed amnesty for Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria. The motivation for comparing the two groups derives from the growing demand from some notable groups and individuals, mainly from the northern part of Nigeria, that the Boko Haram insurgents be granted amnesty just as the Niger Delta armed militants. One of such strong voices in favour of amnesty for Boko Haram insurgents is the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar, who, on the 7th of March 2013, called for "total and unconditional" amnesty for Boko Haram. Sultan Abubakar's demand has attracted mixed reaction as it is largely supported by the northern group-Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and rejected by others such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The most serious reaction comes from the presidency in its commission, on April 24th 2013, of a presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North. After an extension by 2 months of its initial 90 days task, the Turaki-led Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North has finally submitted its recommendations to the president. Two key recommendations are: the need to set up an advisory committee for continuous dialogue with Boko Haram (as the leadership of Boko Haram refused to dialogue) and a victims' support fund to help victims of Boko Haram.

The idea of granting amnesty to Boko Haram has been justified against the background of amnesty granted to the Niger Delta militants from 2009-2010. In his account, Okpi (as cited in Sampson, 2013) argues that:

*If the Niger-Delta militants could be granted amnesty despite the wanton destruction of oil facilities and indiscriminate killings of innocent citizens...then an olive branch should equally be extended to Boko Haram. They are both militant groups with destructive tendencies...so, what is good for the goose is also good for the gander (p. 19)*

It is therefore necessary to evaluate the logic behind the audacious statement above. The main concern of this paper therefore is to evaluate the Niger Delta amnesty programme as a suitable model for the proposed amnesty for Boko Haram. Sampson (2013) is the only study that has to a great extent attempted to compare the Niger Delta amnesty and the proposed Boko Haram amnesty. This is quite understandable, as the proposal for dialogue and peaceful resolution for the Boko Haram conflict, although not new (Johnson, 2011), has just gained momentum in the past few months, as manifested in the inauguration of the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North. This paper is divided into 3 parts: a brief background on Niger Delta and Boko Haram, a discussion of the legitimacy of amnesty, and the comparison between Niger Delta amnesty programme and the proposed Boko Haram's amnesty.



## ***Niger Delta: A Brief History***

The Niger Delta struggle is motivated by the demand for resource control and equitable wealth distribution and protest against the flagrant and damaging (ecological) activities of oil multinational companies (MNCs) operating in the region (Ikelegbe, 2005; Obi, 2010; Oluwaniyi, 2011; Sampson, 2013). According to Ikelegbe (2005) “decades of oil exploitation, environmental degradation and state neglect has created an impoverished, marginalised and exploited citizenry (leading to) a resistance of which the youth has been a vanguard” (p. 208). The Niger Delta struggle predates the discovery of oil and political independence (Sampson, 2013; Oluwaniyi, 2011). However, its non-violent protest has transformed into what Ikelegbe (2005) describes as

*a region of intense hostilities, violent confrontations and criminal violence... pervaded by a proliferation of arms and institutions and agencies of violence ranging from the Nigerian Armed Forces to community, ethnic and youth militias, armed gangs and networks, pirates, cultists and robbers (pp. 208-209).*

In response, the Nigerian government has largely favoured the use of force, as carried out mostly by the nation's Joint Task Force (JTF) (Ojokorotu & Gilbert, 2010; Tessier, 2009). There is evidence also of non-violent counterterrorism (CT) approaches as would be represented by several government development policies. The Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) established in 1961 by the Niger Delta Development Act, the Oil and Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) created by Decree 23 of 1992, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) set up in 2000, and the Ministry of Niger Delta formed in 2008, are some examples of the development approach adopted by the Nigerian government in countering the insurgency. The 2009 amnesty is the latest of such development strategy.

## ***Boko Haram: A Brief Introduction***

Since 2009, Boko Haram has gained relevance as a notorious insurgent group. Its notoriety is internationally recognised as it has been proscribed by the United Kingdom and blacklisted as a terrorist organisation by the United States. Boko Haram whose original name is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (“People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad”) has carried out a campaign of attacks on symbols of authority such as the police and military. Police stations, military barracks and other government buildings and establishments as well as media houses and international organisations (attack on the United Nations building in the nation's capital-Abuja) have been attacked. There have also been sustained attacks on Christians and their places of worship, market places and other public places. Suicide attacks, bombings, assassinations, and recently, kidnapping of foreign nationals, feature as some of their methods of attack. It is worth noting most of its attacks are confined to the Northern states (mainly northeast states such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe), including Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto. However, Boko Haram has unsuccessfully attempted in the past to expand its reach to Southern states such as Lagos. Even in high risk zones such as the capital of Borno, Maiduguri, the assault of the JTF on the sect has constrained Boko Haram's attacks to villages and towns outside Maiduguri.

While it is widely acclaimed that Boko Haram was formed in 2002 by a radical Islamist cleric known as Mohammed Yusuf, some commentators argue that the group has been in operation before 2002 and has operated under different names such as the Nigerian Taliban, and Yusufiyya (Adesoji, 2011). However, one tie of historical relevance that has gained recognition among scholars and critics interested in the Boko Haram insurgency is its link to the Maitatsine Riot of the early 1980s [1980-1985] (Johnson, 2011; Waldek & Jayasekara 2011). Boko Haram bears strong resemblance to the Maitatsine riots of the 80s in



its vitriolic criticisms and attacks on the Nigerian state (including the police and military) and perceived moderate/ambivalent Muslim clerics, and level of damage (about 5000 people died between 1980-1985 even after Mohammed Marwa or “Maitatsine” - “The one who damns” was killed in 1980) (Adesoji, 2011). There is also very little difference between the socio-economic conditions that facilitated the emergence of Maitatsine and Boko Haram (Adesoji, 2010).

The motive behind Boko Haram’s violent activities is one that is difficult to identify. Alozieuwa (2012) provides five different theories that explain the motivation for Boko Haram- human needs/socio-economic; political feud, Islamic Theocratic State, conspiracy theories, and relational vengeance theory perspectives (see also Anyadike, 2013). The main objective, as claimed by Boko Haram is to transform the Nigerian state into an Islamic nation. However, Boko Haram’s religious explanation of its act of violence (as with most religiously-motivated groups) has been challenged as having no basis in Islam, especially its intolerance of people of other religions (Achtar, 2010). The uncertainty of Boko Haram’s motive has made it difficult to counter the terror that it poses.

The Nigerian government has responded strongly to the threat posed by Boko Haram by favouring a strong military counter-terrorist strategy carried out by the JTF. Other non-military counter-terrorist approaches include the use of counter-narratives and, of particular relevance to this paper, the commissioning of a committee to advise on dialogue with Boko Haram insurgents, with possible amnesty granted to the group.

### *Amnesty: The Question of Legitimacy*

One argument that has dominated the literature on amnesty is the question of legitimacy (Slye, 2002; Heine, 2007; Sadat, 2007; Scharf, 2007; Laplante, 2012). Amnesty has long been a political tool used by governments for both good and bad purposes. It is a tractable political tool that lends itself to wide-ranging purposes, some of which are morally right and some that are self-serving (Slye, 2002). Slye (2002) argues further that amnesties “have been granted at times of great social stability and at times of great social unrest” (p. 174). We may therefore scrutinise amnesties from the basis of their intentions or morality. However, the most scrutiny of amnesty comes from the domain of law, especially international law.

Following the end of World War Two, we see a rise in international frameworks such as the United Nations with several promulgations of international conventions, treaties, and laws that govern human relations at international, regional and state levels and forestall the kind of atrocities that were displayed during the war. It is within this framework that we recognise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, Geneva Convention in 1949, among a host of other conventions and multilateral treaties. There are also a reasonable number of international courts such as Inter-American Court, International Criminal Court (ICC), and several Human Rights Commissions. These international mechanisms have been used to correct grave human rights violation of the past and poised with growing legal force to address any potential human rights violations. It is within the purview of human rights that the legitimacy of amnesties is questioned.

In spite of these international agencies and human rights structures, there seems to be a surge in amnesties. Slye (2002) posits that the rise in the use of amnesties is “less a reflection of our increased tolerance of impunity and more of an indicator of the growing force of the international human rights movement and international criminal law” (p. 175). The increasing use of amnesties by states can actually enhance human rights when they are done in good faith and with the utmost consideration given to truth and accountability, but, when they are used deliberately to prevent justice, their legitimacy becomes questionable. Such is the case with the amnesties of Argentina and Chile. The subsequent repeal of the “Full Stop” law and other amnesty





laws by President Alfonsín to halt the trials and prosecution of military officers and the trial of Pinochet and reopening of cases of human rights violation against the Chilean military through both national and international courts establish the case for retributive justice.

However, the former President of ICC Philippe Kirsch says that “some limited amnesties may be compatible with a country’s obligation genuinely to investigate or prosecute under the Statute” (cited in Dworkin, 2003). But the apparent absence of a clear and definable restriction on amnesties in international law frameworks pose a serious problem for the legality of such mechanisms used by states in the process of national reconciliation. The extent to which a state can go in the use of amnesty is not explicitly defined in ICC. While there is an implicit consensus between states and international legal bodies of certain non-derogable rights such as represented by the Geneva Convention, and crimes of genocide, virtually all international legal frameworks are unclear about crimes against humanity and other war crimes (Heine, 2007; Scharf, 2007; Slye, 2002). Hence, state amnesties do not protect individuals and groups that have committed gross human rights violation of international standard from international prosecution, as the Chilean and Argentine post-amnesty trials and the trial of Liberian Charles Taylor in the International Criminal Court prove.

This attempt at differentiating national and international-level crime nonetheless fails to conceal the conflict between domestic and international laws and tribunals in relation to the legality of amnesty (Sadat, 2007; Scharf, 2007; Slye, 2002). States are required under international law to prosecute gross violators of human rights; protect the fundamental rights of victims, and “establish a stable democracy that honours human rights and the rule of law” (Slye, 2002, p.182). Amnesties violate these international laws, according to their critics. The sympathisers of amnesties have often claimed that amnesties guarantee peace, truth and reconciliation. Slye (2002) discusses these three goals within “the rule of law”, “victim’s rights”, and “obligation to prosecute” arguments (p. 182). He finds, inhibitive to prosecutorial discretion, a strict adherence to international requirement to prosecute. A state may be limited by resources and capacity to pursue full prosecution, hence may be selective in the crimes it prosecutes. Also, there are other “non-prosecutorial means to further the legitimate goals of a criminal justice system” (Slye, 2002, p. 184). More so, as restorative justice argument espouses, punishment is not the only form of criminal justice. Criminal justice can gain accountability within the framework of Truth Commissions. However, the restorative justice school of thought rejects blanket amnesties. The challenge for proponents of restorative justice, as Slye (2002) argues is to find the “methods of accountability that de-emphasise punishment” (p. 187; Naqvi, 2012; Laplante, 2012; Heine, 2007).

From the perspectives of fundamental human rights of victims, amnesties are criticised on the grounds that they violate five crucial principles- *right to justice*, *right to truth*, *right to judicial protection*, *right to reparations*, and, *right to access to court* (Slye, 2002, p. 191). Amnesties are also viewed as providing short-lived social stability, and are inimical to the long-term enjoyment of a stable democracy, human rights and rule of law. Sadat (2007) describes amnesties as having “little moral or persuasive force” (p. 240), and Slye (2002), using the examples of the amnesties given by the governments of Argentina and Chile, posits that “short-term amnesty eventually gives way to individual accountability” (p. 200). Amnesties, as can be deduced, are not undesirable. They can gain enhanced legitimacy if they fulfil certain conditions: strive for accountability and truth, and guarantee reparations and participation.

### ***The Niger Delta Amnesty: A True Model?***

On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2009, the late former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Musa Yar’Adua, in exercising his constitutional power under Section 175 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,



granted amnesty and unconditional pardon to the Niger Delta militants. The pardon was effective for a period of 60 days (25th June-4th October, 2009), requiring the militants to surrender every weapon and ammunition in their possession and to publicly denounce militancy. With constant increase in oil production and consequently increase in oil revenue, and a significant reduction in violence in the region, many commentators have described the amnesty programme in glowing terms. Interestingly, supporters of amnesty for the Boko Haram insurgent group have referenced the Niger Delta amnesty. It becomes therefore crucial to evaluate the implication of this connection between the Niger Delta and Boko Haram, especially in the light of perceived differences in their motivations.

The Niger Delta conflict, for several decades, was sustained by a socio-economic drive. This, as stated earlier, includes resource control, equitable wealth distribution and protest against the environmentally-damaging activities of the oil MNCs. This obviously appears different from the self-acclaimed motivation by Boko Haram to transform Nigeria into an Islamic state. The comparison of the proposed Boko Haram amnesty with the Niger Delta amnesty seems insensitive to the plight of the victims and ignorant of growing evidence that group ideology and motivation are crucial to an effective counterterrorism (CT) measure (Miller, 2007; Forest, 2009; Crenshaw, 2007; Sederberg, 1995; Abrahms, 2008). Arguably, the demand for amnesty for the Boko Haram insurgents comes short of an attempt at political correctness, and, significantly, reveals a Nigerian State that is politically divided along ethnic and religious lines and biases.

The argument put forward by supporters of amnesty for the Boko Haram insurgents fails to conceal the divisive tendencies within the ethnic and religious composition of Nigeria that play out in its political space (Fayemi, 2003). The argument of “what is good for the goose is also good for the gander” undermines the rule of law, victim’s right and the state’s duty to prosecute (Slye, 2002). More so, the Niger Delta amnesty programme may not after all be a correct model for the proposed Boko Haram amnesty.

The Niger Delta amnesty programme has been hailed by local and international commentators as largely successful. It is tempting to accept this popular view, especially when we compare the relative peace in the Niger Delta region to the incessant violent attacks and militancy from 2000 to 2009. Since 2009, relative peace has returned to the region and there is an increase in the production of oil (from 700,000 barrels per day to between 2.4 million and 2.6 million barrels per day) and, consequently, increase in the generation of oil revenue (Jamestown Foundation, 2013; Alike, 2013). The federal government recovered arms from the militants who surrendered and renounced violence during the first stage of the amnesty programme-disarmament and demobilisation. The militants surrendered in return for formal education and vocational skills training and monthly stipends for a period of 5 years. This explains the second phase of the programme-rehabilitation and reintegration. Mr Kingsley Kuku, the chairman of the Presidential amnesty programme argues that over 16,000 out of the over 30,000 enrolled Niger Delta youths have received training in different fields within and outside Nigeria (Jegade, 2013).

There is no doubt that the Niger Delta amnesty programme presents some great merits. What is rather doubtful is whether the militants surrendered all the arms in their possession, as is the case with most armed insurgents, and especially evident in the rising violence in the region and the growing threat from militants’ chiefs (Muggah&Batchelor, 2002; Gilbert, 2010). Hence, we may not have seen the end of violence in the Niger Delta region, as there is an increase in piracy in the region and other violent incidents that are largely unreported. In 2013 alone, out of about 34 piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, 30 are related to Nigeria, with “29 piracy incidents, including two hijackings, 11 ships boarded, 13 vessels fired upon and three attempted attacks” (Anaesoronye, 2013; International Chamber of Commerce, ICC, 2013). Also, on the 24th of October 2013, Niger Delta pirates attacked a United States (US) vessel and kidnapped two US nationals.



The abducted US nationals were released on the 12th of November 2013, but details of the terms of their release are undisclosed. Another evidence of the rise of violence in the region is the October 22nd explosion in an oil refinery in Warri-an action that the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) claims responsibility.

It is also worrisome that pipeline attacks (oil theft) is on the increase and about 20 per cent (400,000 barrels per day) of the country's fuel production is lost to oil thefts (Reuters, as cited by Jamestown Foundation, 2013). The Nigerian government loses about \$7 billion yearly to oil pipeline attacks, and loses a further \$5 billion to the repair of the pipelines (Jamestown Foundation, 2013)

We may otherwise say that the Niger Delta amnesty, like the Northern Ireland peace process needs time to solidify. As is the case in Northern Ireland, the peace process was stalled by intermittent violence between the first ceasefire in 1994 and 2005 when the warring groups finally put down their arms beyond use. Therefore, "the failure to resolve the arms issue" contributed largely to the stalling transitional peace process in Northern Ireland (Monaghan, 2008, p.85). It is therefore not surprising that setting penalties for the use of violence was one of the three factors that ensured the success of the Northern Ireland Peace process. The other two are the adoption of an inclusive process (involving main spoilers in the peace process) and the lack of direct economic motivation (such as the presence of a natural/primary resource) (MacGinty, 2006).

While the resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict may provide useful lessons to the Niger Delta and Boko Haram peace processes, certain conditions make themselves distinct in the case of the Nigerian conflicts. The political-economy of the Niger Delta conflict is higher than that of Northern Ireland as there is primary resource (oil) in the Niger Delta. Hence, economic (direct) motivation defines the Niger Delta conflict. However, economic motivation in the Niger Delta crisis is dependent, as there was and still is a genuine demand for economic improvement of the region. It becomes difficult therefore to separate the ongoing violence from the continuing poor development and environmental despoliation of the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta amnesty programme- disarmament, demobilisation, and rehabilitation, has been criticised on many grounds- it is not clear on the role of oil MNCs (Adeyemi&Olu-Adeyemi, 2010), it does not provide justice to victims (Ubhenin, 2013), there is lack of accountability in its drafting and implementation (Ubhenin, 2013; Muggah&Batchelor, 2002), it is given in a vacuum (Samson, 2013; Gilbert, 2010), and it is too militant-centred (Ubhenin, 2013).

The major criticism however comes from its failure to address the basic socio-economic and environmental needs in the region (Oluwaniyi, 2011). The Niger Delta amnesty, as such, may not be different from past amnesties such as the one General Gowon offered Isaac Boro (a Niger Delta revolutionist that raised a mutiny against the Federal Government of Nigeria for 12 days in 1967) and the Biafran war lords during and after the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War (1967-1970) or the many presidential pardons granted to political prisoners since independence. The failure to address the fundamental needs of the Niger Delta people could potentially undermine the adjudged success of the Niger Delta amnesty programme. It is pertinent to add here that the huge pay-out given to the militants may be the incentive for their perceived voluntary surrender of arms. Significantly, since the declaration of Niger Delta amnesty, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs has received a total of 181bn (2009-2011), and the budget for Niger Delta amnesty for 2012 alone is \$450m (Ubhenin, 2013, p. 80). It is very likely that the "repentant" militants can divert the money to buying more arms, as the money is supposedly spent on feeding and reintegrating the ex-militants. Recent threats from the leaders of the Niger Delta militants suggest that such is possible, and that the militants may not have surrendered all their arms. The federal government is therefore in the right course in its recent inauguration of the Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (April 24th, 2013). While this move would help mitigate the



proliferation of arms, it coincides with the recent international embargo on the sales and distribution of small arms.

### ***Boko Haram Amnesty: Right or Wrong?***

Considering the evidence put forward concerning the Niger Delta amnesty programme and previous amnesties in Nigeria, the motion for amnesty for the Boko Haram sect may be ill-advised. Such a narrow proposal straitjackets a comprehensive understanding of the group's motivation, as well as forecloses other viable and effective CT measures. Interestingly, there is no standard CT approach (Miller, 2007). In the absence of a unified and comprehensive CT theory, flexibility and adaptability in CT policies become necessary (Crenshaw, 2007; Miller, 2007). The best CT approach to the Boko Haram insurgency would be one that is considered based on a careful study and clear understanding of the perceptions, associations and scope of its network. The lack of a unified explanation for the Boko Haram insurgency and the many conspiracy theories add to the ineffectiveness of the CT measures used so far. The Nigerian government should therefore work towards achieving a true assessment of the Boko Haram conflict. This should be the task of the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North. The Committee should not be fazed by the chant for amnesty for Boko Haram.

Interestingly, while the stick and carrot approach by the Jonathan administration towards Boko Haram have failed to make a lasting impact, one needs to appreciate the administration's openness to different approaches, including dialogue and peaceful resolution of the crisis as embodied by the Turaki-led Committee.

Conciliation and negotiation are very powerful tools for mitigating terrorism (Malvesti, 2002; Sederberg, 1995). These soft approaches to CT are fast gaining grounds, as hard power approaches such as the use of drones and airstrikes have come under intense criticisms as they do not only tend towards collateral damage, but fail to overcome terrorism. There is growing consensus that they even escalate violence and strengthen rather than weaken the resolves of terrorists groups. The Niger Delta insurgency is one clear example of a conflict that degenerated from a non-violent protest to a militant one as a result of the government's hard military offensive.

The unpopularity of drones and airstrikes does not however justify blanket amnesty to groups such as Boko Haram. As amnesties of the Latin American countries (particularly Chile and Argentina) prove, amnesties only provide short-term gains and are incompatible with ideals of justice and international laws (Grandin, 2005; Scharf, 2007; Slye, 2002; Sederberg, 1995; Malvesti, 2002; de Mesquita, 2005). This sounds true of the Niger Delta amnesty as its critics, including militants' chiefs, who are still benefitting from the programme, decry the programme as bribe. In the absence of true development of the region, lasting peace is only an illusion. Hence, the Niger Delta amnesty programme cannot be replicated in the North because the programme does not address the basic demands of the people of the Niger Delta, as Boko Haram's objectives do not reflect the views of the majority in the Northern region.

Such comparisons underscore the ethnic and religious sentiments that colour Nigeria's political space. The advocates of amnesty for Boko Haram based on amnesty for Niger Delta either fail to understand the cultural, economic and political differences between the Boko Haram and Niger Delta cases or they use amnesty as a manipulative instrument, as would be the case between Israel and Palestine peace process (Ranstorp, 2006). Boko Haram's amnesty will therefore be a "strategic art of deception" that shifts our focus away from the real problems (Ranstorp, 2010, p.242). This fact is substantiated by Boko Haram's rejection of the proposed amnesty and its past condemnation of supposed dialogue between the sect and the government. There is ample evidence to show that it is the moderate factions (and not the extremist faction) of insurgent



groups that are most likely to accept government concessions (de Mesquita, 2005). This becomes even more potent in the case of Boko Haram.

Boko Haram's acclaimed religious motivation is different from the secular demands by the Niger Delta militants. Sederberg (1995), quoting Bruce Hoffman, argues that "religiously motivated challengers are more likely to view their struggle in totalistic terms...resist[ing] utilitarian calculations in their political decision-making, whereas secular motivation for increased autonomy within a political community offers greater promise for a conciliatory strategy of transformation" (p.308). Hence, while amnesty may have helped reduced violent conflict in the Niger Delta, the same may not likely happen, if Boko Haram is offered amnesty. It is however important to mention that while there are indeed differences between the two crises, there remains an underlying similarity in relation to socio-economic issues. Hence, socio-economic interventions (through development of infrastructure, job creation and poverty alleviation) by the government, as well as improved governance and genuine fight against corruption may be very useful in addressing the Boko Haram crisis, particularly towards creating a disincentive for the largely impoverished youth to be recruited into the sect. However, the Niger Delta amnesty is largely flawed on the grounds of accountability. It has failed to address fundamental issues that are the basis for the conflict and, may be potentially damaging as reflected by the military force that has been largely used. The monetary incentives for the militant is a great disincentive towards a long-lasting solution to the conflict, and the increasing crimes in the region and growing threat from "repentant" militant chiefs are clear indicators. In the light of the proposed Boko Haram amnesty, it will be unwise to follow the same fruitless path as the Niger Delta amnesty.

## **Conclusion**

It seems very difficult finding a delicate balance between restorative and retributive justice. As valid as the argument for national reconciliation and national unity (through amnesty) is, equally important, if not more important, is the need to prosecute violators of human rights. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is perhaps the only one, out of a number of amnesties around the world that comes closest to achieving this balance. Other amnesties and truth commissions such as the ones given in Chile and Argentina lend little support for unconditional amnesty. The prosecution of key perpetrators in the Chilean and Argentine persecution, arrest and torture of political opponents in the 1970s and 80s and the continuous search for justice by victims of these heinous crimes explain why amnesty may be unfit for a progressive criminal justice system. Although amnesty is not altogether undesirable, its gains are rather temporary and conflict with justice and human rights ideals.

It becomes therefore imperative to carefully consider the proposition of amnesty for Boko Haram insurgents, especially against the not-too-impressive amnesties in the continent and the country. Past amnesties and pardons in Nigeria have failed to build a strong national consciousness in Nigeria. Virtually, every geo-political and ethnic group in Nigeria express one form of discontentment or another. In the South East, the Igbos feel marginalised due to the failure of successive Nigerian governments to develop the region, despite the amnesty offered to Biafran warlords by Gowon (Amadi, 2007). The same trend is observable in the Niger Delta case where critics of the Niger Delta amnesty programme (including beneficiaries) criticise the Federal government for its failure to address the basic concerns in the region.

Therefore, understanding motivations for grievances and addressing them will seem a wise thing to do. Such motivations that are applicable to the Niger Delta and Boko Haram insurgencies include "perceptions of social exclusion, real or perceived discrimination, frustrated expectations, and government repression [that] may push individuals into collective violence" (Aldrich, 2012, p. 48). Arguably the assumption: *what is good*



for the goose is also good for the gander does not hold sway, as the “goose” in this case; the Niger Delta amnesty presents a fundamentally flawed model for the proposed Boko Haram amnesty.

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## Opinion Pieces

### Who Is to Teach “These Guys” to “Shoot Less?”

by Kacper Rekawek



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While conducting research on counter-terrorism (CT) systems of the Central and Eastern European Member States of the European Union, a unique perspective on the European involvement in countering terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa was offered to the author by a Czech defence ministry official. In his view, the fact that his country made a decision to contribute “boots on the ground” to the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) was astonishing, to say the least: “Things like Mali, you sometimes wonder how these things happen, even if you are part of them (Havranek 2013).” Thus a decision to participate in this latest CT motivated (building a Malian military capable of taking on the jihadists of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM) EU venture in Africa seems not to have been preceded by a careful analysis and weighting of the options on behalf of his country. In fact, it seemed like a knee jerk reaction to a call for troops from France and subsequently from Brussels. In the end, we might even speculate if, in this very case, the Czech Republic duly settled on a number of troops to be sent to Mali (very low – in dozens) and comfortably ticked off the box on its involvement in yet another Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military mission in Africa, and its contribution to external aspects of combating terrorism on EU level.

One is bound, however, to ask whether such CT “assistance” will be of any use to our African partners. Military training missions seem a one size fits all type of a solution to numerous African problems, including those related to the issue of CT. Somalia, with AMISOM African troops fighting “terrorists” in the country, and EUTM Somalia based in Uganda, provides a perfect example, a seeming role model for Mali in which MINUSMA would do the fighting with AQIM and its affiliates, and the Bamako based EUTM would concentrate on training. Unfortunately, European and African perceptions of what the newly trained African troops would focus on in the future differ sharply, and it is more than possible that our preference for them to concentrate on combatting either Al-Shabab in Somalia or AQIM in Mali will be lost on the Somali and Malian governments who might need their reconstituted militaries to fight a different set of internal (the non-Islamist Tuareg in Mali) or external (Kenyan military occupying the Southern part of Somalia?) enemies. In such conditions, it would be beneficial to all parties concerned to speculate about other forms of purely CT oriented assistance which are within the European reach but may not have been seriously assessed so far due to our inability and also unwillingness to correctly diagnose the African needs.

In theory, parts of Africa seem to be turning into what *The Economist* dubbed “Afrighanistan”, i.e. next battleground with the phenomenon of global, jihadist terrorism (*The Economist*, 2013). Allegedly, a terrorist “arc”, stretching from Maghreb, through Mali and Nigeria into the Eastern part of the continent, is being formed in Africa. It is as if all the jihadist forces of the world converged onto some of the weakest states in the world and made the most of their inability to counter terrorism in any meaningful way. This narrative, albeit more than popular in the media, misses a couple of rather key issues which should inform our perception



of the terrorist threat to Africa. The Northern African Arab states, Nigeria, Kenya and Mali are not exactly the weakest links in the African order of battle. Kenya and Nigeria are dubbed future economic and political leaders of the continent, some of the North African Mediterranean states have been undergoing rapid political transitions which should enable them to combat threats like terrorism much more effectively, and Mali, wrongly regarded as the model African democracy, is far from a failed state akin to the Central African Republic. On the other hand, their terrorist enemies have relatively low ability to communicate, co-operate and co-ordinate with each other on a continental basis, and often focus more on petty domestic or regional agendas (see: Nigeria's Boko Haram unwillingness to internationalize its insurgency, internecine feuding in both AQIM and Al-Shabab) (Cristiani and Rekawek, 2013), far removed from the banner of global jihad.

At the same time, some of the aforementioned strengths of the African states with terrorist problems are often undermined by their lack of expertise on conducting and implementing CT policies. This phenomenon was presciently captured by another of my interviewees for the research on CT systems in Central and Eastern Europe, commander of the main Polish SWAT police unit: "These guys [Africans] – they shoot a lot and yes, sometimes they even hit their targets (Stepinski 2013)." In short, the African CT operations often make things worse and only strengthen or fuel terrorist violence in a given country (see: Nigeria's 2009 crackdown on Boko Haram (*International Crisis Group*, 2010) or the 2013 botched siege of the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya (Angira, 2013). Thus, it could be useful to ask whether the European or also U.S. assistance, seemingly aimed at countering terrorism, actually misses its mark and does nothing to improve the situation on the ground.

The CT problem in Africa lies not in the question of standing up military units or equipping them to Western standards using donor money so that they can conduct spectacular operations. The issue at stake is the broader security sector reform (SSR) which will actually: prevent the African CT operators from "shooting a lot," make sure that the next time another Westgate happens no local police and military will not spend hours arguing who should take the lead in rescuing hostages, introduce clear cut chains of authority in command at both strategic and operational levels of CT, and acquaint the relevant personnel with the issue of the need to uphold human rights standards while conducting operations. All of this should not be seen as an attempt to disregard the need for the Europeans or Americans to assist in the reform of the local militaries which are chronically underfunded, badly trained and un-deployable. Focusing on them, however, will only give us a false sense that we are addressing the issue of "Afghanistan."

The key question in relation to teaching "these guys" to "shoot less" is deciding on who should play the leading role in the process of standing up the African CT capabilities. France, the old colonial power in Mali, seems like an obvious candidate, so do other Western European states with far reaching experiences of combating terrorism both domestically and externally. At the same time, voices in Brussels, e.g. amongst the personnel of the EU's Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, profess surprise at the reluctance of the "new" Member States to share their SSR experiences with the likes of the democratizing countries of the Southern Mediterranean (Bostyn 2013). In their view, the "new Europeans," with their experiences of transition and learning from the experiences of their Western European neighbours, could be interesting interlocutors for at least some of the Africans who might be distrustful of the old colonial powers. Interestingly enough, some of the Central and Eastern Europeans are already involved in security outreach activities to non-EU countries, e.g. Polish SWAT units mentor their Ukrainian counterparts (Stepinski 2013) and Slovenia and Hungary have traditionally been involved in SSR in the Western Balkans (Slapnicar 2013). In theory, such an outreach could now also be extended to other parts of the world and help Africa address the issue of "shooting a lot."



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## Assessing Boko Haram: A Conversation

by Mark Amaliya and Michael Nwankpa



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In terms of the current terrorist organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa, Boko Haram is undoubtedly one of the most high profile and among the more long-established. Following a panel session on the group at the 2013 conference of the Society for Terrorism Research at the university of East London, two of the panellists discuss the conceptualisation of the group, the nature and scale of the threat posed by the group, and what responses might offer a viable route away from the violence that has affected particularly Northern Nigeria since the onset of the Boko Haram insurgency.

### Q1. Briefly, how would you describe Boko Haram as a group?

*Mark Amaliya*

Typical of any group engaged in political violence, the radicalization, de-radicalization and re-radicalization of its group identity, ideology and modus operandi changes over time. In describing Boko Haram, two factors are worth noting. From 2002 to present, the sect's modus operandi and ideology have shifted to reflect emergent changes in the geo-political setting of the country. Boko Haram represents a modern reincarnation of the historical clash of civilizations between Traditional Islamic jurisprudence in the North of Nigeria and its amalgamation into the secular Nigerian nation state of 1914 interred in the colonial legacy of British rule.

The sect can thus be viewed as a conservative, fanatical Islamic sect, fundamentally opposed to secular statehood and western political ideology by engaging in a Jihad-inspired perpetuation of terror as its principal means to establish a Nigerian state rooted in Salafist proselytism. In terms of its structure and modus operandi, the organization could be categorised as amorphous (combining sophisticated combat techniques and technology with a variety of target victims), anonymous (due to the lack of an organised group of interlocutors with whom, policy agencies could engage), and internally fragmented without a centred leadership. From a strategic point of view, the sect depends heavily on media publicity and sporadic strikes in order to remain relevant as a counteractive force to the secular status quo. By so doing, its action align it to more established jihad networks such as Al-Qaida and its affiliates in Africa with a potential to evolve into a much greater threat across the continent.

However, Boko Haram's radicalization owes directly to the securitization and kinetic posture of Nigeria's state security services towards its membership in particular and the North in general, which has lent the group leverage to constitute itself as a de-facto pro-Northern militia, drawing sympathy from families of victims and empathy among the elite for what is generally considered a failure of the federal government to address inequality gaps in the north and improved public welfare.

*Michael Nwankpa*

Mark's observation about the evolutionary nature of extremist groups' ideologies and motives is consistent



with views in the extant literature. However, the popular view about Boko Haram (BH) as “a conservative, fanatical Islamic sect, fundamentally opposed to secular statehood and western political ideology”, a view supported by Mark, is just one slice of the cake, and may even be a misleading way of viewing BH.

First, it is important to recognise that the project of imposing an Islamic social and political system in the secularised state of Nigeria – what is supposedly the political project of BH - is one that is not so far removed from some parts of the political mainstream. It is also an agenda that has been promoted by Northern leaders starting from General Murtala Muhammed (1975) and carried on by successive Northern heads of state such as Shehu Shagari (1979), General Buhari (1983), Ibrahim Babangida (1995), General Sani Abacha (1993), and, in a less clear way, by President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999) (Omoruyi, 2001). This itself raises a critical question: To what extent is BH operating alone or in alliance with those parts of the Northern leadership supportive of this broad political and social agenda?

This leads to a second point. If the motive of BH is or was ever to impose a Sharia political system on the secularised Nigerian state, that motive is now being relegated and supplanted by more pressing economic and political objectives. On the economic front, there has been the turn by some BH elements to what we might talk about as rogue or criminal BH activities akin to those used by the Niger Delta militants - in the kidnapping of foreigners and ransom-seeking from foreign governments (such as the alleged \$3m ransom paid for the release of the kidnapped French family of 7 in April, 2013). It is this rogue BH element that is likely to have engaged the Nigerian government in dialogue and talk about amnesty. Underlying these criminal activities is the political goal of creating a vacuum or political space where northern leadership can emerge. Following the direct and indirect indictment of several members of the Northern leadership, such as Senator Ali Ndume (Borno), Senator Khalifa Zanna (Borno), former governor of Borno (Ali Modu Sheriff), and late Saidu Pindar (Nigeria’s former ambassador to Sao Tome & Principe) as financial supporters of BH (The Nation, 2012) it is not far-fetched to argue that BH’s main motive is to tilt the balance of power or guarantee the control and domination of power by the north.

### *Mark Amaliya*

Michael makes a salient point in noting that an Islam-centric characterization of BH risks undermining other intrinsic and less manifest motives of the sect. While noteworthy, it is however equally critical to note that an interpretation of BH that centres on political motives may also lose sight of the fluid interaction between the economic, political and ethno-religious aspects of this conflict. I would propose that any attempt to view the specific dominance of any one of these aspects (the political or economic), at any given evolutionary stage of the sect as opposed to its self-proclaimed objective of establishing an Islamic State and countering western political hegemony may lead to a reductionist analysis of the group’s ideology. Furthermore, one ought not to conflate the sect’s operational means with its desired end. The argument that BH’s anti-secular fascism is being supplanted by economic crime and political sponsorship confuses the sect’s modus operandi with its primary end of disempowering the status quo.

In his submissions, Michael cites in the first instance, an upsurge in kidnappings and ransom claims by the sect as an ideological shift from anti-secularism without acknowledging the larger domain of subaltern economic crime in the country where kidnappings and celebrity abductions thrive independent of Islamic political extremism. I would also question the argument of northern political sponsorship to the group as a strategy to create a power vacuum to be filled by Northern political elite. There exist notable cases that contradict such a linear progression. The most iconic being the fact that the greatest crackdown on BH occurred in 2009 during the tenure of President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua, who hailed from northern Nigeria.



At this critical moment one could label the incident as a Northern insurgency against a Northern incumbent. The sect has also targeted Northern political elites including the Sarduna of Sokoto and has been ruthless in bombing northern mosques, schools and security installations believed to be unsympathetic to their course. Thus any semblance of northern political alliance in the Boko Haram struggle should be seen more as a marriage of convenience and less an ideological shift.

### *Michael Nwankpa*

Mark's argument is compatible with my views that the activities of BH are motivated by a combination of several factors including politics, economics and ethno-religion, and that any attempt at elevating one factor above the others may undermine, rather than help our understanding of the group. Yet he still appears to hold a preference for an explanation based on an Islamist motivation, while I would emphasise a strong political undertone. Further evidence for this position would seem to come from the fact observed by the late General Owoeye Azazi, National Security Adviser to President Jonathan, that "the issue of violence did not increase in Nigeria until there was a declaration by the current President that he was going to contest" (Channels, 2012). In other words, the increase in violence coincided with and might even be read as a response to wider political developments.

### **Q2: What, in your assessment, is the scale of threat posed by Boko Haram to the Nigerian state?**

### *Michael Nwankpa*

In order to develop an analysis of the threat posed by BH to the Nigerian state, it would be wise to break this down into a discussion of the different types of threat that the group might be seen to pose: economic, socio-political and security/counter-terrorism.

From an economic perspective, BH does not pose a serious direct threat to the Nigerian state, particularly when compared to the Niger Delta insurgency (which impacts directly on the country's economic mainstay, oil). It does however pose an indirect economic threat, as the state of insecurity it creates discourages potential local and foreign investors from investing in the northern as well as other parts of Nigeria.

The most substantial threat posed by BH is a socio-political threat. First, BH's agenda (if it is to Islamise Nigeria) is incompatible with the secular nature of the Nigerian state. Secondly, its disproportionate attacks on peoples and properties of other religion (faith) and ethnicity can fuel ethno-religious sentiments and conflicts. Such ethnic and religious sentiments and conflicts can turn into sectarian war (evident in the reprisal and/or threat of reprisal attack from the Christian Association of Nigeria [CAN]) or a large scale civil war similar to the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War of 1967-1970.

From a counter-terrorism perspective, BH can also be seen to pose a substantial threat, albeit one that would appear to be relatively concentrated geographically: with the exception of the suicide bombing attacks on the police headquarters, United Nations building, and a newspaper [*ThisDay*] property in Abuja-the capital city, BH's coordinated attacks have been largely confined to the northern region, or even some northern states such as Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. Yet in spite of the opportunities that BH's limited operational space would seem to offer for the Nigerian government to concentrate its full resources geographically in order to curb the situation, the Joint Task Force (JTF) has been unable to disband BH, and BH has been able to maintain vigorous and sustained attacks on its victims



## *Mark Amaliya*

Boko Haram's ability to challenge the State's monopoly over the use of force constitutes its greatest threat. This threat poses both a physical challenge to the survival of the Nigerian state, and a psychological challenge that threatens to undermine civic engagement.

Physically, Boko Haram represents a challenge to the underlying political principles of political autonomy and territorial inviolability. The present security standoff, along with a history of economic, political and institutional ineptitude has led some observers to categorise the country in the family of fragile states, or even to call it a 'dysfunctional state' (Lewis 2006). Any advancement in Boko Haram's lethal attacks and operational scope would arguably risk the country sliding into the pariah category of 'failed states', in particular as such a development might establish a condition for an infiltration of violent allies such as Al Qaida, thus leading to a similar scenario as that which developed in Somalia.

Psychologically, the persistence and lethality of the sect's attacks has created an atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty in civic life and social congregation, which has done much to disrupt the activities that comprise Nigeria's public sphere. Failure to contain and control the attacks by Boko Haram has left a community subjected to fear, hindering political organization and stifling private sector activity.

The physical and psychological dimensions of the threat posed by BH have combined to generate a toxic context of suspicion and distrust of the state and its authority. This has manifested in several ways. We have seen the emergence of a number of self-help community initiatives including the formation of vigilante militia groups in Maiduguri, there have been repeated charges of vested partisan interest and sponsorship of the sect's activities by political parties, as well as a more general inflaming of ethnic tensions regarding issues of Islamic fanaticism in the north and concentrations of oil wealth in the south. Furthermore, the conduct of the State Security Services (SSS) has done little to inspire public confidence in the authority of the state. Following reports of corruption, human rights abuses and extra judicial killings (see Human Rights Watch Report 2013), operations of the JTF have increasingly tarnished its professional image and raised questions regarding the disproportionality of force being expended.

## *Michael Nwankpa*

Yet the fact is that the scale of casualties and property losses associated with the current conflict with Boko Haram is not as great as those associated with the wider wave of ethno-religious violence that has taken place in the North of Nigeria in recent years. In Jos alone, the deadly cycle of violence has claimed, besides damaged properties, more than a conservative figure of 5000 lives in a decade (2000-2010).

This raises the crucial question of why Boko Haram has received so much attention in comparison with the wider violence. There would appear to be a few reasons for this. One of these is arguably the fear that the group may be particularly susceptible to infiltration by, and provide a vehicle for, more dangerous global terrorist organisations (that is if this has not already taken place) such as Al Qaeda and Al Shabab. Related to this is the group's increased targeting of foreign nationals and the damage that Boko Haram is able to do to Nigeria's relations with other countries whose business and personal interests are affected negatively by the conflict. In addition, the failure of the Nigerian state to curb the activities of BH in spite of an apparently significant investment of resources means that BH has been capable of inflicting particularly significant symbolic damage on the Nigerian state apparatus both in domestic and international arenas.



### **Q3: What are the potential avenues towards a solution to the violence and hostilities associated with Boko Haram? What are the key issues that need to be addressed?**

*Michael Nwankpa*

In spite of the wide range of counter-terrorism measures (including direct force, declarations of a state of emergency, curfews and counter-narratives), the end of the conflict seems far away (even though the Nigerian military's public relations department would have us think otherwise).

What seems clear is that military force, and especially military force alone, is not the solution to the violence and tension associated with BH. There is no doubt that the Nigerian military is overwhelmingly more powerful than BH, but what is doubtful is how well suited it is to overcome a force like the BH insurgents. The loose and hilly spatial character of the northern states and the porous borders between the northern states and neighbouring countries such as Chad and Cameroon make it possible for the insurgents to retreat and engage the military using guerrilla tactics. The federal composition of Nigeria's force and the history of deploying soldiers from separate ethnic groups to quell crises in other ethnic regions make it difficult for the force to overcome BH, as they most times do not understand the terrain better than the local insurgents.

Given the limitations on the use of large-scale military force, there is a clear need for the adoption of intelligence-led responses – responses that will help the military achieve precise and accurate targeting, avoiding the kind of collateral damage that can play into the hands of the insurgents. Yet to date, Nigeria lacks a suitable counter-terrorism intelligence structure. The three Intelligence structures - Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and State Security Service (SSS) - created in 1986 by Babangida to cater for military, foreign and domestic intelligence respectively do not have the capacity to engage the terror posed by BH. The mandate of the SSS leans more on the protection of public officials. One way forward could be the development of a dedicated counter-terrorism centre (similar to the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre [JTAC] in the United Kingdom). This should not be confused with the Nigerian military's endorsement of a civilian Joint Task Force (a civilian arm of the military JTF, comprising of little more than local youth vigilante groups).

More broadly, any more targeted response to BH violence needs to go hand in hand with a serious and credible effort to improve the living standards of the people of the region. This could take the form of Government investment in infrastructure, education, in creating job opportunities for the largely impoverished populace of the Northern states, and ought also include a programme of improving the provision of social welfare, respect of human rights and fight against corruption among public officials. This will help mitigate the attraction of BH to young people, who make up a large number of the group's recruit.

*Mark Amaliya*

The main avenue towards a lasting solution is for the state to prioritize and broaden non-violent approaches. Among some of the nonviolent counter terror-initiatives already implemented by the government, the following are noteworthy: the passing of the Terrorism Prevention Amendment (TPA) in February 2013, a directive for judicial clarity on competency issues between State and Federal courts regarding their jurisdictional powers over crimes committed by members of the sect and the expeditious prosecution





of suspects (OTP-ICC report 2013). Also, the president set up the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North (OTP-ICC report 2013: 50).

While laudable, most of these interventions have either stalled in the process of implementation or failed to command authority on the ground, not helped by allegations of extra judicial killings and the unlawful release of arrested suspects. Furthermore, only marginal gains have been achieved in the area of negotiations as the work of the committee on dialogue failed to engage the leadership of Boko Haram in dialogue until the submission of its report to the president on November 12, 2013. The committee also suffered the early withdrawal of a key negotiator, Dr. Ahmad Ibrahim Datti, President General of the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN), who cited a lack of trust in government's commitment to implement committee findings following his previous experience serving on a similar panel (Binnyat 2013).

The search for a reliable exit out of conflict requires coherency in terms of policy objectives and their respective strategies of implementation. The need to maintain consistency begins with the language of political leaders. To demonstrate such consistency, epithets like 'faceless cowards' and 'ghosts' which have repeatedly been used by President Goodluck Jonathan to describe the sect should be avoided, since they undermine efforts at building trust between the government and the leadership of the sect.

Secondly, a unified and channel of consultative engagement with Boko Haram is necessary. Past forms of engagement with Boko Haram, have been characterised by a multiplicity of bodies and individuals striving to negotiate with the sect, resulting in disparate proposals without a clear strategy. For instance, Coalitions such as the Forum of Northern Governors, whose attempts in the past to localize dialogue and explore ceasefire incentives for the group risked impeding the efforts being formulated at the federal level in terms of a duplication of functional roles and authority.

Other important target groups include CSOs, researchers and multilateral partners. CSOs mainly in the areas of governance and advocacy should work to address problems of illiteracy, youth unemployment and good governance. In addition, the government should allocate more funds towards research and development in the field of domestic radicalism and security in the north. Some essential focal areas include research on the evolution of traditional and post-independence Muslim cultures, exploring avenues of cultural integration and setting up a national centre for the study of radicalism.

Finally, domestic counter-terrorism measures should be complemented with an effective regional and global collaborative strategy. Noting the challenges associated with border security, money laundering and trans-border crime, the ECOWAS sub-region must prioritize strengthening trans-border security, intelligence gathering and sharing across neighbouring countries. However, in taking steps towards such coordination, it is important to be wary of the tendency for the undue securitization of domestic threats from the transnational level. For instance, the recent designation of Boko Haram and its spinoff group Ansaru as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the USA on November 13<sup>th</sup> 2013 and the release of an ICC report indicting boko haram for committing crimes against humanity and classifying the armed violence between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces as an 'armed conflict of non-international character' (OTP ICC report 2013) present an opportunity for a heavy handed global response to the sect's activities. The real challenge for the Nigerian state is how to synergise cooperation between the various actors, maintaining the state as the principal protagonist on the ground and exhausting all avenues to peaceful resolutions before resorting to drastic humanitarian interventions.



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