Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria

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Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria

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More than 3,500 people have died in Nigeria since 2009 when Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group from northeastern Nigeria, launched its violent campaign to wrest power from the Nigerian government and foist an Islamic state under the supreme law of Sharia. Attempts at negotiating with the group, including the recent amnesty offer extended to its members by the Nigerian government, have stalled due to distrust on both sides and the factionalized leadership of the group’s different cells. This article provides a systematic account of Boko Haram’s emergence, demands, and modus operandi. It also evaluates how the Nigerian government has responded to the group’s threat and how they should respond. The socioeconomic approach of this article helps to explain the Boko Haram problem beyond a usual religious agenda and to evaluate the development of the group in the context of Nigeria’s checkered political history and local economic grievances.

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.1

Boko Haram, an extremist Islamist group from northeastern Nigeria, first announced itself on the Nigerian stage in 2009, following a riot in Maiduguri that killed over 800 people.2 The group’s founder and then leader Mohammed Yusuf was killed while in police custody.3 Ever since, Boko Haram has killed thousands of Nigerians, with the death toll rising nearly everyday (see Table 1). Human rights organizations estimate that more than 3,500 people have been killed as a result of Boko Haram’s violent attacks over the past three years.4 In April 2013, at least 187 Nigerians were confirmed dead after Boko Haram gunmen engaged soldiers of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in a deadly shootout that left the commercial border town of Baga in Borno State completely burnt down. At least 2,128 houses, 64 motorcycles, and 40 cars were razed in the wake of the attack.5 More alarmingly, since January 2013, Boko Haram has taken control of Marte, Mobbar, Guzamala, Abadam, Kukawa,
Table 1
Timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence 2002–2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Mohammed Yusuf founded Boko Haram in 2002, establishing a mosque called Markaz as the headquarters of his movement, following his expulsion from two mosques in Maiduguri by Muslim clerics for propagating his radical views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–31 December 2003</td>
<td>A group of about 200 members of a Boko Haram splinter group launched attacks on police stations in the towns of Kanamma and Geidam in Yob state from their enclave outside Kanamma on the Nigerian border with Niger. The militant killed several police men and requisitioned police weapons and vehicles. Following the deployment of military troops to contain the insurrection, 18 militants were killed and an number arrested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2004</td>
<td>Four members of Boko Haram were killed by prison guards in a foiled jail break in Yobe state capital Damaturu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 January 2004</td>
<td>Seven members of Boko Haram killed and three others arrested by a team of local vigilantes outside the town of Damboa, Borno state, near border with Chad. Bags containing AK-47 rifles were recovered from sect members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 September 2004</td>
<td>A Boko Haram group launches a militia attack on police stations in the towns of Gwoza and Bama in Borno state, killing four policemen and two civilians. They took to the Mandra mountains along the Nigeria–Cameroon border. Soldiers and two gunships were deployed in the mountains and after two days of battle 27 sect members were killed while the rest slipped away. Five Boko Haram members who crossed into Cameroon were arrested by Cameroonian gendarmes who had been alerted by Nigerian authorities. The five were deported and handed over to Nigerian authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 October 2004</td>
<td>Gunmen from a Boko Haram splinter group attack a convoy of 60 policemen in an ambush near the town of Kala-Balge on the border with Chad. The militants took 12 policemen hostage and police authorities presumed they were killed by the gunmen because all attempts to trace them failed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–2008</td>
<td>Boko Haram concentrated on recruiting new members and shoring up its resources. As evidence of their growing popularity, Borno state governor Ali Modu Sheriff appoints an influential Boko Haram member, Buju Foi, as his commissioner of religious affairs in 2007.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–12 June 2009</td>
<td>Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf threatens reprisals in a video recording to the president following the killing of 17 Boko Haram members in a joint military and police operation in Borno state. This was after a disagreement over Boko Haram members’ alleged refusal to use crash helmets while in a funeral procession to bury members who had died in a car accident.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Continued on next page)
Table 1
Timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence 2002–2013 (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 July 2009</td>
<td>Boko Haram launches a short-lived uprising in parts of the north, which is quelled by a military crackdown that leaves more than 800 dead—mostly sect members, including Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf. A mosque in the capital of Borno state (Maiduguri) that served as a sect headquarter is burnt down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 December 2010</td>
<td>A group of Boko Haram gunmen free over 700 inmates including over 100 sect members from a prison in Bauchi. Four people including a soldier, one policemen and two residents were killed in the raid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 and 27 December 2010</td>
<td>A series of attacks claimed by Boko Haram in the central city of Jos and Maiduguri kill at least 86 people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 December 2010</td>
<td>Suspected Boko Haram gunmen shoot dead eight people in Maiduguri, including the governorship candidate of the ruling All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in Borno state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 April 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram frees 14 prisoners during a jailbreak in Yola, Adamawa state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 May 2011</td>
<td>A group of around 70 suspected Boko Haram gunmen kill eight people including four policemen in simultaneous gun and bomb attacks on a police station, a police barracks and a bank in Damboa, Borno state, near the border with Chad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May 2011</td>
<td>Three bombs rip through a beer garden in a military barracks in the northern city of Bauchi, killing 13 and wounding 33. Boko Haram claims responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 June 2011</td>
<td>Muslim cleric Ibrahim Birkuti, critical of Boko Haram, shot dead by two motorcycle-riding Boko Haram gunmen outside his house in Biu, 200 km from Maiduguri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 June 2011</td>
<td>Attacks on a church and two police posts in Maiduguri, blamed on the sect, leave at least 14 dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram claims responsibility for the 2011 Abuja police headquarters bombings that killed two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 June 2011</td>
<td>Bombing attack on a beer garden in Maiduguri, leaving 25 dead and 12 injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 July 2011</td>
<td>Bombing at the All Christian Fellowship Church in Suleja, Niger state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 July 2011</td>
<td>The University of Maiduguri temporarily closes down its campus citing security concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 July 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram’s gun and bomb attack on a beer garden in Maiduguri leaves at least 25 dead and dozens injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 August 2011</td>
<td>The government rejects negotiations with Boko Haram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 August 2011</td>
<td>Prominent Muslim Cleric Liman Bana is shot dead by Boko Haram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 August 2011</td>
<td>Gun and bomb attacks by Boko Haram on two police stations and two banks in Gombi, Adamawa State, kill at least 16 people, including seven policemen.</td>
</tr>
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Table 1
Timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence 2002–2013 (Continued)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 August 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram claims responsibility for a suicide bomb blast on the UN compound in Abuja, killing 23 people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 September 2011</td>
<td>A shootout between Boko Haram gunmen and soldiers in Song, Adamawa state, kills one sect member while another is injured and captured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 September 2011</td>
<td>Muslim Cleric Malam Dala shot dead by two Boko Haram members outside his home in the Zinnari area of Maiduguri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 September 2011</td>
<td>Seven men, including four policemen, are killed by Boko Haram gunmen in bomb and shooting attacks on a police station and a bank in Misau, Bauchi state. The attackers rob the bank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 September 2011</td>
<td>Four soldiers shot and wounded in an ambush by Boko Haram members in Maiduguri shortly after the arrest of 15 sect members in military raids on Boko Haram hideouts in the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 September 2011</td>
<td>Babakura Fugu, brother-in-law to slain Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf, is shot dead outside his house in Maiduguri two days after attending a peace meeting with Nigeria’s ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo in the city. Boko Haram denies any involvement in the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 October 2011</td>
<td>A butcher and his assistant are killed by Boko Haram gunmen at Baga market in Maiduguri in a targeted killing. In a separate incident, three people are killed in a shoot-out following Boko Haram bomb and shooting attacks on a military patrol vehicle delivering food to soldiers at a checkpoint in Maiduguri. All three victims are civilians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 October 2011</td>
<td>Three killed in Boko Haram attacks on Baga market in Maiduguri, Borno state. The victims included a tea-seller, a drug store owner and a passer-by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 October 2011</td>
<td>Sect members open fire on a market in the town of Katari in Kaduna state, killing two. Boko Haram members kill a policeman and a bank security guard in bombing and shooting attacks on a police station and two banks in Saminaka, Kaduna state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 October 2011</td>
<td>A policeman is shot dead in his house in a targeted attack by Boko Haram gunmen in Damaturu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 October 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram gunmen shoot dead Muslim Cleric Sheikh Ali Jana’a outside his home in the Bulubulin Ngarnam neighborhood of Maiduguri. Jana’a is known to have provided information to security forces regarding the sect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 November 2011</td>
<td>A soldier on duty is shot dead by sect members outside Maiduguri’s main market. Boko Haram says it will not dialogue with the government until all of its members who have been arrested are released.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>4 November 2011</td>
<td>The motorcade of Borno state governor Kashim Shettima comes under Boko Haram bomb attack in Maiduguri on its way from the airport to the governor’s residence as he returns from a trip to Abuja. Around 150 are killed in coordinated Boko Haram bombing and shooting attacks on police facilities in Damaturu and Potiskum in Yobe state. Two Boko Haram suicide-bombers blow themselves up outside the military Joint Task Force headquarters in Maiduguri in a botched suicide attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 November 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram members bomb a police station and the office of Nigeria’s road safety agency in Maina village, Borno state. No one is hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 November 2011</td>
<td>Three policemen and a civilian are wounded in Boko Haram bomb and shooting attacks in Geidam, Yobe state. Six churches, a police station, a beer parlor, a shopping complex, a high court, a local council building and 11 cars are burnt in the attacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 November 2011</td>
<td>A Borno state protocol officer in the office of the governor is shot dead by motorcycle-riding sect members while driving home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 December 2011</td>
<td>A soldier, a policeman, and a civilian are killed in bomb and gun attacks on police buildings and two banks in Azare, Bauchi state. Boko Haram open fire at a wedding in Maiduguri, killing the groom and a guest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 December 2011</td>
<td>An explosion linked to Boko Haram kills eight in the Oriyapata district of Kaduna city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 December 2011</td>
<td>A bomb attack on a military checkpoint by Boko haram and resulting shooting by soldiers in Maiduguri leaves 10 dead and 30 injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 December 2011</td>
<td>A shootout between sect members and policemen following a raid on the hideout of a Boko Haram sect leader in the Darmanawa area of Kano state kills seven, including three police officers. Police arrest 14 Boko Haram suspects and seize large amounts of arms and bombs. Three Boko Haram members die in an accidental explosion while assembling homemade bombs in a hideout on the outskirts of Maiduguri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 December 2011</td>
<td>One suspected Boko Haram member dies and two others wounded in an accidental explosion while assembling a homemade bomb in a hideout in Damaturu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 December 2011</td>
<td>Boko Haram bombs in parts of Maiduguri kill 20. Four policemen and a civilian are killed in gun and bomb attacks on a police building in Potiskum, Yobe state. Around 100 are killed following multiple bomb and shooting attacks by Boko Haram gunmen and ensuing gun battles with troops in the Pompomari outskirts of Damaturu.</td>
</tr>
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Table 1
Timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence 2002–2013 (Continued)

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 December 2011</td>
<td>A Christmas Day Boko Haram bomb attack on Saint Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla town near Abuja kills 42 worshippers. Three secret police (SSS) operatives and a Boko Haram bomber are killed in a suicide attack when the bomber rams his bomb-laden car into a military convoy at the gates of SSS headquarters in Damaturu. A policeman is killed in a botched Boko Haram bomb attack on a church in the Ray Field area of Jos, capital of Plateau state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 December 2011</td>
<td>A bombing and shooting attack by Boko Haram on a beer palor in the town of Mubi, Adamawa state, wounds 15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 December 2011</td>
<td>Four Muslim worshippers are killed in a Boko Haram bomb and shooting attack targeting a military checkpoint in Maiduguri as worshippers leave a mosque after attending Friday prayers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January 2012</td>
<td>President Goodluck Jonathan imposes a state of emergency on 15 local government areas hardest-hit by Boko Haram attacks, in Borno, Yobe, and Plateau states. He orders the closure of Nigerian borders in the north.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 January 2012</td>
<td>Boko Haram gunmen attack a police station in the town of Birniwa in Jigawa state killing a teenage girl and wounding a police officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 January 2012</td>
<td>Six worshippers are killed and 10 others wounded when Boko Haram gunmen attack a church in Gombe city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 January 2012</td>
<td>Eight worshippers are killed in a shooting attack on a church in Yola. Boko Haram gunmen shoot dead 17 Christian mourners in the town of Mubi in the northeastern state of Adamawa. The victims are friends and relations of one of five people killed in a Boko Haram attack on a hotel the previous day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 January 2012</td>
<td>Boko Haram gunmen shoot dead a secret police operative along with his civilian friend as they leave a mosque in Biu, Borno state, 200 km south of the state capital Maiduguri. The president says Boko Haram has infiltrated the executive, parliamentary, and judicial wings of government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 January 2012</td>
<td>A Boko Haram attack on a beer garden kills eight, including five policemen and a teenage girl, in Damaturu, capital of Yobe State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 January 2012</td>
<td>Four Christians killed by Gunmen in Potiskum, Yobe state, when gunmen open fire on their car as they stop for fuel. The victims had been fleeing Maiduguri to their hometown in Eastern Nigeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 January 2012</td>
<td>Boko Haram kills four and injures two others, including a policeman, in two separate attacks on pubs in Yola (Adamawa state) and Gombe city in neighboring Gombe state.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on next page)
Table 1  
Timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence 2002–2013 (Continued)

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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 January 2012</td>
<td>Two soldiers and four Boko Haram gunmen are killed in an attack on a military checkpoint in Maiduguri, Borno state. Soldiers arrest six high-profile Boko Haram members in a raid on a sect hideout in the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 January 2012</td>
<td>Nigerian army says it killed 11 Boko Haram insurgents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 February 2012</td>
<td>Boko Haram claims responsibility for a suicide bombing at the army headquarters in Kaduna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 February 2012</td>
<td>Another prison break staged in central Nigeria; 119 prisoners are released, one warden killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March 2012</td>
<td>During a British hostage rescue attempt to free Italian engineer Franco Lamolinara and Briton Christopher McManus, abducted in 2011 by Boko Haram, both hostages were killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 May 2013</td>
<td>At least 55 killed and 105 inmates freed in coordinated attacks on army barracks, a prison and police post in Bama town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 May 2012</td>
<td>During a Joint Task Force raid on a Boko Haram hideout, it was reported that five sect members and a German hostage were killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June 2012</td>
<td>15 church-goers were killed and several injured in a church bombing in Bauchi state. Boko Haram claimed responsibility through Spokesperson Abu Qaqa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 June 2012</td>
<td>Suicide bombers strike three churches in Kaduna state. At least 50 people were killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 June 2012</td>
<td>130 bodies were found in Plateau state. It is presumed they were killed by Boko Haram members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Kala-Balge, and Gamboru Ngala local government areas in northern Borno, chasing out local government officials and imposing Sharia law (see Figure 1). On 6 July 2013, Boko Haram Islamists stormed a boarding school in Yobe state, northeastern Nigeria, burning 29 students and one teacher alive. In the latest bloodbath, the Islamists assassinated 44 people while praying in a mosque in northern Nigeria’s Borno state. So critical is the threat posed by Boko Haram that in January 2012, the Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan lamented: “The situation we have in our hands is even worse than the Civil War [1967–1970] that we fought.”

Sadly, attempts at negotiating with Boko Haram, including the recent amnesty offer extended to its members, have stalled due to the factionalized leadership of the group’s different cells, as well as due to the growing distrust between the negotiators. Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram’s current leader, responded to the amnesty entreaties by saying that his group had done no wrong, and that an amnesty would not be applicable to them. In his words: “Surprisingly, the Nigerian government is talking about granting us amnesty. What
wrong have we done? On the contrary, it is we that should grant you [a] pardon.9 Barely a
week after Boko Haram refused the offer of amnesty, the group launched a violent attack that
killed 53 people and burnt down 13 villages in central Nigeria’s Benue State.10 Prior to that,
a group of Boko Haram fighters, disguised in military uniforms and in buses and machine
gun-mouthed trucks, laid siege to the town of Bama, in Borno State, killing 55 and freeing
over 100 prison inmates (see Table 1).11 The violent attacks led the Nigerian President
to declare a state of emergency (on 15 May 2013) in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (three
northern states where Boko Haram have been most active) in an attempt to restore order and
reclaim the northern region.12 In a pre-recorded message to the Nigerian public on 14 May
2013, President Jonathan said: “What we are facing is not just militancy or criminality, but
a rebellion and insurgency by terrorist groups which pose a very serious threat to national
unity and territorial integrity.”13 Jonathan further stated that “it would appear that there is
a systematic effort by insurgents and terrorists to destabilize the Nigerian state and test our
collective resolve.”14 The president’s speech brought the violent campaign of Boko Haram
into stark relief, at one point describing how fighters had laid waste to state buildings and
“had taken women and children as hostages.”15 According to Jonathan, “These actions
amount to a declaration of war...”16

Based on the premise that a problem well put is half solved, this article sets out
to do three things: (1) to furnish a detailed account of Boko Haram’s origins, ideology,
demands/goals, and modus operandi; (2) to critically examine state responses to the Boko
Haram threat so far; and (3) to explore how the government should respond to Boko Haram.
The rest of the article is structured into three sections. The second maps the conflict scenario
in (northern) Nigeria. The third section provides an account of why Boko Haram exists
and why it rebels. The fourth section looks closely at state responses to the threat posed by

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[Figure 1. Map of Nigeria. The shaded/green areas are states where Boko Haram operate and that
available online).]
Boko Haram and offers some policy recommendations on how to respond effectively to the Boko Haram crisis.

Mapping the Conflict Scenario: Identifying Conducing Factors

The Muslim North, Militancy, and Sectarian Violence

Northern Nigeria, the birthplace of Boko Haram, is home to roughly 53 million people, the vast majority of which are Muslims. There is a sizeable Christian minority, both indigenous to the area and the product of migration from the south of the country. The majorities of Muslims in the north are Sunni, estimated at 95 percent, and belong to the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya sufi order. These orders are represented by a number of organizations that have been important actors in the region. Jama‘atu Nasril Islam (JNI), based in Kaduna and established in 1961, is the largest umbrella Islamic organization in the country, supporting a network of activists across the region. Northern Nigeria consists predominantly of Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups. Other groups include the Gwari, Borim, Tiv, and Jukun, among others. With the decline of the Nok and Sokoto, who had previously controlled central and northern Nigeria between 800 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., the Hausa were able to emerge as the new power in the region. Closely linked with the Kanuri people of Kanem-Bornu (Lake Chad), the Hausa aristocracy adopted Islam in the eleventh century C.E.

Radical Islam is not a new phenomenon in northern Nigeria. Following independence in October 1960, the violent confrontations that took place between a sect of Muslim fanatics (popularly known as the Maitatsine uprisings) and the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) in Kano (December 1980) and Maiduguri (October 1982) did not come as a surprise to those who understand the complexity of the religious situation in northern Nigeria. Hickey argues that the Maitatsine uprisings had its roots in the “deeply conservative practice of Islam,” which has been dominant in the region since the jihad of Dan Fodio in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Dan Fodio launched a holy war against what he saw as an apostate and hopelessly corrupt Hausa ruling elite of his time. The aftermath of the war saw the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (1804–1808), under the supreme law of Sharia, across much of what is today known as northern Nigeria. In 1903, both the Sokoto Caliphate and the Bornu Sultanate fell to British conquerors. Under British rule the state’s authority was challenged by the Islamist, anti-colonial trans-Saharan Mahadist movement, which opposed foreign presence and the unification of the northern and southern protectorates. Some authors have argued that the defeat of the Caliphate by the British, and its subsequent dealings with colonial and post-colonial states, opened the Caliphate to the corrupting influence of secular political power. In any case, what began with Dan Fodio as a search for religious purification soon metamorphosed into a quest for a political kingdom, with the outcome that “Islam has remained the focal veneer for the legitimacy of the northern ruling class . . . [and consequently] its politicians have always prided themselves as soldiers for the defence of the faith.”

The leader of Maitatsine, Muhammed Marwa (also known as Maitatsine), was an Islamic scholar who migrated from the town of Marwa in northern Cameroun to the city of Kano in 1945. In Kano, Marwa became an Islamic zealot and believed that Islam had come under the corrupting influence of modernization (Westernization). Marwa attracted the urban poor in the northern city of Kano with its message that “denounced the affluent elites as infidels, opposed Western Influence, and refused to recognize secular authorities.” The urban Muslim poor were attracted to Maitatsine because “he condemned the hypocrisy and
ostentation of the *nouveau riche* and promised redemption and salvation to God’s righteous people.” Maitatsine extremists, rejecting Muslims who had, in their eyes, gone astray, lived in secluded areas to avoid mixing with mainstream Muslims, and rejected material wealth on the grounds that it was associated with Western values. The Maitatsine uprising led to eleven days of violent clashes with state security forces in Kano in December 1980. A tribunal of inquiry set up by the federal government in 1981 found that 4,177 people were killed in the violence, excluding members of the police force who lost their lives. Although the Nigerian military crushed the uprisings and killed its leader, over the next five years hundreds of people were killed in reprisal attacks between remnants of the radical movement in the north and government security forces.

Sheik Abubaka Mahmoud Gumi was another noteworthy Muslim that promoted Islamic radicalism during the 1980s. He was renowned as the most distinguished Islamic savant in Nigeria during the 1980s. He once openly declared that “once you are a Muslim, you cannot accept to choose a non-Muslim as a leader...” Furthermore, Sheik promoted the implementation of Sharia courts in the Christian south of Nigeria. He also argued that Nigeria should become an Islamic state. His speeches and ideas radicalized many Muslims in Nigeria. The burning of eight prominent churches in Kano by Muslims in October 1982 signaled the beginning of a religious war. According to a government tribunal, the dastardly act was precipitated by two things. Firstly, Kano was predominantly an Islamic city were the growing influence of Christianity was a constant worry for Muslims. Secondly, the tribunal argued that the radical Islamic literature imported from Iran motivated the Muslims to start the fighting.

The general assumption is that there has been an exponential rise in religious violence since Nigeria’s return to a democratic system of government in 1999. Indeed, “Since the end of military rule in 1999, more than 18,000 people have died in inter-communal, political, and sectarian violence.” However, statistics on religious violence across the country reveals that at least 95 percent of religious conflicts took place in northern Nigeria. For example, out of the 178 conflict outbreaks in northern Nigeria between 1980 and 2004, 104 had religious undertones. Violence in northern Nigeria has flared up at regular intervals, but mainly in the form of urban riots. It has pitted Muslims against Christians and has seen clashes between different Islamic sects. Notably, violent conflicts, be it riots or fighting between insurrectional groups and members of the police, tends to occur at specific flashpoints. Examples are the northern cities of Kaduna and Zaria, whose populations are religiously and ethnically very mixed, and the very poor states of the far northeast, where anti-establishment groups have flourished.

Many factors fueling these religious conflicts and sectarian violence are common across Nigeria, ranging from the political manipulation of religion and ethnicity to disputes between supposed local groups and “settlers” over distribution of public resources. The failure of Nigeria’s government to address the widespread poverty, corruption, police abuse, and longstanding impunity for a range of crimes has created a fertile ground for violent conflicts. Sadly, the authorities have still not prosecuted members of the police and military for the unlawful killing of more than 130 people during the 2008 sectarian violence in Jos, Plateau state, nor have they brought to book soldiers who massacred more than 200 people in Benue State in 2001.

**Relative Deprivation and Conflict in Northern Nigeria**

Nigeria’s first postcolonial rulers inherited a state made up of three regional structures, which were configured by the British to use the majority ethnic groups as anchors for the
The British assumed that there would be no discrepancy between political and economic powers that could not be easily tackled by the established federal structure. A perusal of the 1961 statistical figures on regional revenue and personal taxes demonstrate built-in problems. For that year, the total regional revenues (exclusive of federal allocations) were accounted for by: the West, 58.5 percent; the East, 25.7 percent; and the North, 15.7 percent. In regard to national aggregate of collected taxes, the percentages were as follows: West, 67.7 percent; East, 27.2 percent; and North, 9 percent. These figures were substantiated by educational enrolment figures. In 1965, the north with more than half of the national population had 10 percent of the national total of all primary school population. For higher education in 1965, Northerners made up 8 percent of total student population compared to 48 percent for the East, 5 percent for Lagos, and 39 percent for the West.

In 2013, northern Nigeria remains the most underdeveloped part of the country, with chronic unemployment and poverty writ large. The effects of poverty on health and education are particularly striking. In Borno State, the birthplace of Boko Haram: “Only 2% of children under 25 months have been vaccinated; 83% of young people are illiterate; 48.5% of children do not go to school.” Another recent report by the National Population Commission found that literacy rates were much lower among states in the north, and that 72 percent of children around the ages of 6–16 had never attended schools in Borno State. Also, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data on poverty in Nigeria shows that looking into each specific zone, the highest poverty rate of 64.8 percent is recorded in the North-East zone. On the other hand, the lowest poverty rate of 31.2 percent is recorded in the South-East. Notably, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Nigeria as a whole has risen steadily from 0.425 in 1990 to 0.513 in 2008. Looking at the figures by zone for 2008/2009, as shown in Table 2, the highest HDI is found in the South-South zone (0.573) while the lowest is in the North-East zone (0.332) where Boko Haram operates. As for the poverty index in Nigeria, the poorest five states are all situated in the northern areas. The southern states with a somewhat higher-level economy have high HDI, and the northern states with a lower-level economy have low HDI. In addition, the trends in the two types of poverty presented in Table 3 shows that while a significant decrease in the core poor population and a decrease in the moderately poor population to some extent are observed in every southern zone, the core poor increased in the north central zone, and the moderately poor increased in every northern zone.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>North</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>0.573</td>
<td>0.471</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>0.420</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Nigerian National HDI: 0.513]</td>
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Source. UNDP (2009: 10).
The extent of relative poverty and inequality in northern Nigeria has led some scholars and organizations to argue that socioeconomic deprivation is fueling violence and militancy in the region. Kwaja, for example, argues that religious dimensions of the conflict have been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement and inequality are the root causes. According to Elegbe, “Unemployment is higher in the north than in the south. Mix this situation with radical Islam, which promises a better life for martyrs, and you can understand the growing violence in the north.” In his recent personal account of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), the late Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe noted that “[e]conomic deprivation and corruption produce and exacerbate financial and social inequities in a population, which in turn fuel political instability.” For Kukah, religion is used to mobilize against modernity, which is seen as the root cause of social ills. This view is supported by notable scholars like Clapham who argue that “the breakdown of law and order in African states was basically the result of the legacy of bad governance.” In her visit to Nigeria in August, 2009, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, aptly captured the problem associated with the rise of conflict in Nigeria when she said: “Lack of transparency and accountability has eroded the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state.”

The link between the rise of group violence and socioeconomic underdevelopment remains unclear and the debate unsettled. Evans contends that “a downward spiral of economic decline, often exacerbated by official corruption and mismanagement, has created governments that are at or near the point of collapse and that are being challenged often violently, by their own citizens. Economic decline has hastened the process of national disintegration, and vice versa.” Collier et al. toes a similar line in arguing that: “In the absence of economic development, neither good political institutions, nor ethnic and religious homogeneity, nor high military spending provide significant defenses against large scale violence.” Explanations such as these are anchored on the human needs theory of social conflicts, which holds that all humans have basic needs that they seek to fulfill and
failure to meet these needs could lead to the outbreak of violent conflict. The theory resonates with the frustration-aggression theory of violence, which argues that the occurrence of aggressive behavior presupposes the existence of frustration. The frustration-aggression theory provides the psychological dynamic for the relative deprivation theory—the proposed nexus between the intensity of deprivation and the potential for collective violence.

In recent years, however, the link between economic deprivation and the onset of violence has been criticized as simplistic and no longer particularly useful. This is because they fail to explain why some poor people or places do not participate in violence, and because they offer very little in the way of clear recommendation for policymakers. For example, Krieger and Meierriek examine a host of possible influences on terrorism including global order, contagion, modernization, institutional order, identity conflict, inter alia. Following a detailed review of the relevant empirical literature on terrorism causes they conclude that “there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that economic deprivation causes terrorism . . . poor economic conditions matter less to terrorism once it is controlled for institutional and political factors.” Instead, they argue that terrorism is closely linked to political instability, sharp divides within the populace, country size and further demographic, institutional, and international factors.

The Politics of Religion

The coupling of religion with politics in Nigeria is portentous for the stability of the country and the emergence of a true national identity. Unfortunately, government complicity in religious matters has often fanned the flames of religious tensions. During his tenure as president, for example, Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) unilaterally registered Nigeria as a full-fledged member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Anchored on the core values and goals of the OIC, membership of the organization is underpinned by a commitment to the advancement of Islam. This decision caused much consternation among Nigerian Christians who saw the government’s moves as an attempt toward the Islamization of Nigeria. Following a chorus of disapproval by Christians, the issue of Nigerian membership in the OIC was put on hold. This decision, however, precipitated a series of religious disturbances in the north, beginning with the March 1986 clash in Ilorin between Muslims and Christians and the May 1986 clash between Christian and Muslim students at Uthman Dan Fodio University in Sokoto.

The politics of religion in Nigeria is also evident in the Sharia law debate that engulfed Nigeria shortly after her return to democracy in 1999. Zamfara State was the first northern state to introduce Sharia as the supreme law of the land. The then Zamfara governor, Ahmed Sani, was quoted as saying: “Whoever administers or governs any society not based on Sharia is an unbeliever.” Following in his footsteps, many northern governors also soon introduced Sharia law, but in the case of Kaduna State with half of its population being Christians, there was a strong resistance. This led to violent religious confrontations in February 2000 between Christians and Muslims as attempts were made to implement the Sharia law. In this conflict, “hundreds of people were killed, property worth billions of Naira was destroyed and thousands of people were rendered homeless.”

It is important to note that the ethnic factor has a significant role to play in most of the religious conflicts that have engulfed (northern) Nigeria. According to Duruji, “[democracy] opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethno-religious demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule.” In particular, the Jos crisis illustrates this fact. Over 3,000 people were killed and more than 250,000 people displaced in Plateau State in November.
2008 because of the results of local government election that were viewed by the voters as unfavorable to some people in Jos North Local Government Area.70 According to Ostein, local conflicts in Jos arose “primarily out of ethnic differences, pitting Hausa ‘settlers’ against the Plateau ‘indigenes’ groups of Afizere, Anaguta and Berom.” He further argued that the underlying problem was “the alleged rights of indigenes . . . to control particular locations.”71 Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor argued: “the battle for supremacy between Hausa and Fulani settlers and indigenes . . . has been largely exploited by religious bigots and political jobbers.”72 More recently, following the April 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria, Human Rights Watch reported that over 800 people were killed, more than 700 churches destroyed, and close to 65,000 people were displaced in three days of violent protests in 12 states in the north.73 The violence started with popular protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim from the Congress for Progressive Change Party, following the re-election of the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the minority south, who was the candidate for the ruling People’s Democratic Party.74 The primary drivers of violence in northern Nigeria appears to be a mix of all the variables identified in this section. These variables laid the foundation for the emergence and violent campaign of Boko Haram, which we consider next.

Boko Haram Explained

Since 2009 Boko Haram, yet another religious extremist group from northern Nigeria, has been responsible for more violence than any other armed group in Nigeria. The attacks, which show evidence of increasing sophistication, appear to be strategically targeted at Nigeria’s ethno-religious faultlines as well as national security forces in a bid to hurt the nation’s stability. In particular, a spate of attacks against churches from December 2011 through July 2012 suggests “a strategy of provocation” through which the group seeks to “spark a large scale of sectarian conflict that will destabilize the country.”75

What is Boko Haram?

The nomenclature, “Boko Haram,” is derived from a combination of the Hausa word, boko (book), and the Arabic word, haram (forbidden). Put together, Boko Haram means “Western education is forbidden.” It is important here to clarify that the Hausa word, “boko,” originally had implications of “falseness” and “duplicity.” This certainly has increasingly become the case in recent times, but only with regard to books of Western provenance, as they were deemed to contain material antithetical to Islam and, therefore, “boko.” In any case, Boko Haram has even rejected the designation, “Western education is forbidden,” and instead, the group now prefers the slogan, “Western culture is forbidden.” The difference, as one of the senior members of Boko Haram noted, is that “while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West . . . which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western education.”76 Boko Haram officially calls itself Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati wal Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad).

Founder

Mohammed Yusuf, born on the 29 January 1970, in Girgir village in Yobe State, Nigeria, founded Boko Haram in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the goal of establishing Sharia
government in Borno State under then Senator Ali Modu Sheriff. Yusuf received instruction in Salafi radicalism and was a protégé of Ibn Taymiyyah, an Islamic scholar (*alim*) born 1263 C.E. in the town of Harran in Upper Mesopotamia, into an Arabophone family. This region came to form part of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. Boko Haram was led by Yusuf until he was killed by Nigerian security forces just after the sectarian violence in July 2009 that killed over 800 people (see Table 1). At the time of his death, Yusuf was the commander in chief (*Amir ul-Aam*) of Boko Haram. He had two deputies (*Na’ib Amir ul-Aam I & II*) and each state and local government where Boko Haram existed had its own *amir* (commander/leader). Yusuf established a religious complex in his hometown that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighbouring countries enrolled their children. However, the centre had ulterior political goals and soon it was also working as a recruiting ground for future *jihadists* to fight the state. The group was able to attract more than 280,000 members across northern Nigeria as well as in Chad and Niger Republic.

**Membership**

Boko Haram’s membership comprises university lecturers, bankers, political elites, drug addicts, unemployed graduates, *almajiris*, and migrants from neighbouring countries. Members are also drawn primarily from the Kanuri tribe with roughly 4 percent of the Nigerian population, who are concentrated in the north eastern states of Nigeria including Bauchi and Borno, and the Hausa-Fulani with 29 percent of the population, spread more generally throughout most of the northern states. Like the *Maitatsine* movement, many of the members attracted by Boko Haram are enraged at deep-seated socioeconomic and political grievances such as corruption and appalling governance. Their anger has been translated into a religious idiom. Already, John Campbell noted, “Boko Haram, once an obscure, radical Islamic cult in the North, is evolving into an insurrection with support among the impoverished and alienated Northern population.”

**Ideology**

Boko Haram’s ideology is embedded in deeply traditional Islamism, and is but one of several variants of radical Islamism to have emerged in northern Nigeria. Its adherents are reportedly influenced by the Koranic phrase: “Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors.” As the name suggests, Boko Haram is strongly opposed to what it sees as a Western-based incursion that threatens traditional values, beliefs, and customs among Muslim communities in northern Nigeria. The group’s first leader, Mohammed Yusuf, told the BBC in 2009: “Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam.” Elsewhere, the charismatic leader argued: “Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a *kafir* (infidel) land. The current system is contrary to true Islamic beliefs.” In an audiotape posted on the Internet in January 2012, a spokesman for the group, Abubakar Shekau, even accused the United States of waging war on Islam. *Tell* magazine captures the group’s ideology thus: “The mission of the sect was to establish an Islamic state where ‘orthodox Islam’ is practiced. Hence, for their aim to be achieved, all institutions represented by government including security agencies like police, military and other uniformed personnel should be crushed.”
The Turning Point

Boko Haram became an ultra-violent group following confrontations between the group and the state’s security agency in Bauchi State charged with the responsibility of enforcing a newly introduced law that required motorcyclists in the entire country to wear crash-helmets. Members of Boko Haram refused to obey this law. This led to a violent clash between the state’s enforcement agency and Boko Haram, killing 17 Boko Haram members in the crossfire. The group’s hideout in Bauchi State was also ransacked, and materials for making explosives were confiscated. Following this crackdown, the group mobilized its members for reprisal attacks which led to the death of several policemen and civilians. The riot was temporarily quelled after Nigerian forces captured and killed the Boko Haram leader, Yusuf, and roughly 1,000 Boko Haram members.87 Yusuf’s death and the bloodletting of his followers pushed the movement to retreat for a while and transform itself into a network of underground cells with a hidden leadership—a situation that makes any military solution illusory. Boko Haram resurfaced in 2010 with more advanced tactics and devastating attacks, as was demonstrated in the bombing of the police headquarters in Abuja in June 2011 and the UN building in August 2011.88 In the first 10 months of 2012 alone, more than 900 people died in attacks by the group—more than in 2010 and 2011 combined (see Table 1).89

Boko Haram’s modus operandi has involved the use of suicide bombing and gunmen on motorbikes, killing police, politicians, and anyone who criticizes it, including Muslim clerics who disclose information of their whereabouts to state security services (see Table 1, from June to October 2011). For many Boko Haram members, the extrajudicial killing of their founder served to foment pre-existing animosities toward the Nigerian government and its security forces. In the group’s bid to avenge the death of their founder, the Nigerian security forces were antagonized.90 Boko Haram’s most frequent targets have been police stations, patrols, and individual policemen at home or in public who were off-duty or retired.

Demands and Overriding Goal

Among the proximate demands of Boko Haram are the release of all its prisoners and the prosecution of those responsible for the killing of their founder. Boko Haram’s overriding goal is to overthrow the Nigerian government and to create an Islamic state under the supreme law of Sharia. Such demands pitted the group against the Nigerian state and its security forces. In 2012, the group launched hundreds of attacks against police officers, Christians, and Muslims who allegedly cooperate with the government or oppose the group. Some scholars have argued that the potent cocktail of political corruption, poverty, and youth unemployment in northern Nigeria fuels Boko Haram members and their supporters.91 According to the northern Nigerian scholar, Fr. Matthew Kukah, Boko Haram is symptomatic of what happens when “the architecture of state are weighed down and destroyed by corruption.”92 The overriding mission of Boko Haram can also be gleaned from the group’s mission statement:

We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that the Muslims can be liberated. We will not respect the Nigerian government because it is illegal. We will continue to fight its military and the police because they are not protecting Islam. We
do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities.93

Sources of Funding

In the past, Nigerian officials have been criticized for being unable to trace much of the funding that the group has received. However, in February 2012, recently arrested Boko Haram officials revealed that while the group initially relied on donations from members, its growing foreign links opened it up to more funding from groups in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.94 Arrested officials divulged that other sources of funding included the Al Muntada Trust Fund and the Islamic World Society. Also, a spokesman of Boko Haram revealed that Kano State Governor Ibrahim Shekarau and Bauchi State Governor Isa Yuguda had placed them on a monthly salary.95 Boko Haram also derives its finances from robbing local banks. For example, on 12 January 2010, four Boko Haram members attempted to rob a bank in Bakori Local Government Area of Katsina State, according to the local Police Commissioner Umaru Abubakar.96 On 4 December 2011, Bauchi Police Commissioner Ikechukwu Aduba claimed that members of Boko Haram had robbed local branches of Guaranty Trust Bank PLC and Intercontinental Bank PLC.97 And on 10 December 2011, Mohammed Abdullahi, Central Bank of Nigeria spokesman claimed that “At least 30 bank attacks attributed to Boko Haram have been reported this year.”98 Beyond bank robberies and individual financiers, there have also been rumours of Boko Haram’s involvement in trafficking illicit weapons, albeit there has been no hard evidence to corroborate such claims.99

External Dimensions

One of Boko Haram’s major goals is to become a key player in global jihad, which has been fought by transnational terrorist groups like the Islamic Maghreb’s Al Qaeda, its affiliates in Mali and in the entire Sahel, and Somali-based Al-Shabaab. Members of Boko Haram have been known to fight in Mali alongside groups affiliated with Al Qaeda.100 Given their large-scale attacks that have spread serious ripples beyond the shores of Nigeria, there is no doubt that Boko Haram’s activities have generated a psychological impact that transcends the actual physical damage caused. In particular, using suicide bombers and explosives has intensified the ferocity of the sect and led to speculation in some quarters that the group might be linked to Al Qaeda.101 Indeed, on 24 November 2012 a spokesman for Boko Haram, Abul Qaqa, confirmed what many had long suspected: “It is true that we have links with Al-Qaeda. They assist us and we assist them.”102 Boko Haram has also admitted to establishing links in Somalia. A statement allegedly released by the group read: “very soon, we will wage jihad. . . . We want to make it known that our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable. . . . This time round, our attacks will be fiercer and wider than they have been.”103

Given the increased frequency of bomb attacks and shootings carried out by Boko Haram, the prospect for human security remains grim in Nigeria, with potentially grave consequences for the international community. For one thing, Boko Haram provides Al Qaeda with an avenue to expand its operations in Africa, should the two groups become affiliated organizations. Leaders of both organizations have publicly pledged mutual support.104 Abubakar bin Muhammad Shekau, current head of Boko Haram, has linked the
being fought by Boko Haram with the global jihad. He has threatened attacks not only in Nigeria but also against “outposts of Western culture.” In association with Al Qaeda, Boko Haram could potentially pose a threat not only to Nigeria, but also transnationally. Boko Haram’s increasing sophistication of attacks and its adoption of suicide car bombings may be a sign that the group is indeed receiving tactical and operational assistance from a foreign militant group. Since AQIM has attacked UN targets in Algeria, and Al-Shabaab has attacked UN targets in Somalia, Boko Haram’s decision to attack the UN building in Abuja is unlikely to be a coincidence. However, it remains to be seen whether the attack on the UN building was an isolated event or whether Boko Haram has indeed embraced the tactics of global jihadists, targeting strategy and ideological imperatives. The need for a study of the external dimensions of Boko Haram has become all the more important because of the recent alleged link between the group and the developments in Mali and the entire Sahel region. In 2012, the U.S. State Department added Boko Haram’s most visible leader, Abubakar Shekau, to the list of specially designated global terrorists. In 2013, the United States announced a $7 million bounty for the capture of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, putting him in the top echelon of wanted jihadist leaders. Four other Al Qaeda leaders in Africa were also included in the “rewards for justice list.” The U.S. State Department noted that “Boko and Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Yemen and Saudi Arabia are cooperating to strengthen Boko Haram’s capacity to conduct terrorist attacks.”

Boko Haram as a Non-Monolithic Entity

Boko Haram is not a monolithic entity with a unified purpose. There are separate factions within the movement who disagree about tactics and strategic directions, competing at times for attention and followers. According to a recent U.S. House of Representatives report on Boko Haram, one faction of the group might be focused on domestic issues and another on violent international extremism. Another report indicated that the group may have even split into three factions: one that remains moderate and welcomes an end to the violence; another that wants a peace agreement; and a third that refuses to negotiate and wants to implement strict Sharia law across Nigeria. In July 2011, a group calling itself the Yusufiya Islamic Movement distributed leaflets widely in Maiduguri denouncing other Boko Haram factions as “evil.” Asserting the legacy of founder Mohammed Yusuf, the authors of the leaflets distanced themselves from violent attacks on civilians and on churches.

Yet another Boko Haram splinter group in Nigeria, headed by a man that goes by the pseudonym Abu Usamratul Ansar, has pledged to defend the interests of Muslims in Africa, claiming a different understanding of Jihad and vowing to avenge the killing of Muslims. The group, which officially calls itself Jama’atu Ansarul Musilimina fi Biladin Sudan (Supporters of Islam in the Land of Sudan) has said in a video recently posted on the Internet that they will not target non-Muslims except “in self-defence or if they attack Muslims.” The group’s leader noted that “rampant massacre of Muslims in Nigeria will no longer be tolerated.” On 17 February 2012, Jama’atu Ansarul kidnapped, and later killed, seven foreigners who worked for a Lebanese construction firm in the northern state of Bauchi. The victims, who were French, were abducted in Cameroon. According to a statement reportedly released by the group, the kidnappings were a response to alleged transgressions against Islam by European countries in “many places such as Afghanistan and Mali etc.” Today, “some local observers now discriminate between a Kogi Boko Haram, Kanuri Boko Haram, and Hausa Fulani Boko Haram.”
State Response to Boko Haram

The Nigerian government has over the last few months indicated its disposition to resolving the Boko Haram insurgency through what may be described as a carrot and stick approach. These two approaches are explained below.

The Carrot Approach

This approach involves political negotiation or dialogue with all stakeholders in the conflict. At the state level, the carrot approach has involved overtures and rapprochements to Boko Haram extremists. For example, former governor of Borno state Ali Modu Sheriff allegedly paid the sum of N100 million, or six hundred twenty thousand U.S. dollars, to mollify the anger of the group when their leader was killed under police custody in 2009. Since August 2011, the government has undertaken “back-channel” talks with the Islamists based on recommendations by a panel tasked to negotiate with the group and provide amnesty for those who renounce violence. On 16 September 2011, former president Olusegun Obasanjo held talks with some Boko Haram members in their birthplace and stronghold, the northeastern city of Maiduguri, where they tabled demands for a cease-fire that included an end to arrests and killings of their members, payments of compensation to families of sect members killed by security personnel, and prosecution of policemen responsible for the killing of group leader Mohammed Yusuf in June 2009. These demands were submitted to President Jonathan who promised to look into them but he has not implemented any of the group’s demands. In 2012, Datti Ahmad, president of the National Supreme Council on Sharia, who is believed to have the respect of Boko Haram’s founder, Mohammed Yusuf, attempted to reach out to the group. But contact was broken by Boko Haram, who accused the Nigerian state of bad faith after the media got wind of the talks.

For its part, Boko Haram has accused the Nigerian government of insincerity in its call for dialogue. The State Security Service (Nigerian secret police) announced in January 2011 that it had arrested Boko Haram’s spokesman in Kaduna and identified him as Abul Qaqa. However, the group, which gave the name of the arrested sect member as Abu Dardaa, denied that Qaqa had been arrested. According to the group’s statement, “The arrest of Abu Dardaa is an outright deception and betrayal by the Nigerian government and security agents. They proclaimed dialogue and are doing the opposite. His arrest has proven to us that they were waiting for us to avail ourselves so that they can arrest us.” After a year of negotiation bids between the government and Boko Haram, President Goodluck Jonathan said in a televised interview in November 2012 that he was still ready for talks, although there were difficulties: “There is no dialogue with Boko Haram and the government. There is no dialogue that is going on anywhere. There is no face so you don’t have anybody to discuss with.”

In the latest attempt to negotiate with Boko Haram, the Nigerian state established a committee of inquiry led by Ambassador Usman Galtimari to “identify the grievances of the sect and make possible recommendations on how to improve security in the northeast region.” On 17 April 2013, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan set up a 26-member Amnesty “Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North” with a three-month mandate to try to convince Boko Haram to lay down its arms in exchange for a state pardon and social integration. According to a presidential statement, the Committee “has been given the task of identifying and constructively engaging key leaders of Boko Haram, and developing a workable framework for amnesty and disarmament of members of the group.” The Committee was composed of former and current
government officials, religious authorities, and human rights activists. However, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau rejected the amnesty overtures and vowed not to stop his group’s violent campaigns to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria. In July 2013, Nigeria’s Minister of Special Duties and Chairman of the presidential task force negotiating with Boko Haram, Kabiru Turaki, publicly announced that the Islamist group had agreed to a cease-fire with his committee. He said the cease-fire would soon be signed publicly with the group. However, Boko Haram has denied entering into any cease-fire agreement with the Federal government. The group stated this in a new video by its leader, Abubakar Shekau: “We will not enter into any agreement with non-believers or the Nigerian government. ... The Quran teaches that we must shun democracy, we must shun the constitution, [and] we must shun western education.” On 24 August 2013, the Nigerian government made yet another announcement claiming that Boko Haram’s highest decision-making body, also known as the group’s Shura committee, has accepted to dialogue with the Federal government, according to a 30-minute video clip released by the Presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peace Resolution of Conflict and Security Challenges in the North. In the video, played for journalists at the Banquet Hall of the Presidential Villa in Abuja, the Boko Haram members said though Allah enjoins them to fight enemies and infidels, he also enjoins them to accept dialogue whenever requested. The video was in Hausa and Arabic languages but was subtitled in English. The jury is still out on the authenticity of this cease-fire agreement.

The Stick Approach

Despite the above attempts by the Nigerian government to negotiate with Boko Haram, the stick response to the radical Islamist group has been the preferred option from the outset, involving the use of state security forces to “mount aggressive pursuit and crackdown of [Boko Haram] members.” On 24 December 2003, when Boko Haram extremists attacked a police station and public buildings in the towns of Geiam and Kanamma in Yobe, a joint operation of soldiers and police was deployed to crackdown on the group. The security operatives reportedly killed 18 Boko Haram members and arrested several others. This violent state repression failed to deter the militants. Instead, it encouraged the group to strategize and diversify its techniques. On 21 September 2004, Boko Haram fighters again launched attacks at Bama and Gworza police stations in Borno state. Later the police launched a counterattack, during which 24 members of the group were allegedly killed and 22 rifles and large quantities of ammunition were recovered. In the latest stick approach against Boko Haram, the Nigerian government established a special Joint Task Force (JTF), known as “Operation Restore Order (JORO)” to crush the group. The JTF has had modest successes, including the September 2011 arrest of a top Boko Haram commander, Ali Saleh, and five accomplices in Maiduguri. In the biggest military deployment since Nigeria’s Civil War, President Jonathan ordered some 8,000 soldiers to the region in a direct military offensive against Boko Haram members. The president vowed to “take all necessary action ... to put an end to the impunity of insurgents and terrorists.” Three days into the emergency, the JTF announced that it had rescued nine women and children held hostage by Boko Haram during a recent crackdown on one of the group’s hideouts. The Nigerian government imposed a blockade on the group’s traditional base of Maiduguri in Borno in order to reestablish Nigeria’s “territorial integrity.” However, far too often, members of the JTF have been accused of killing innocent people in the name of counterterrorism. In Borno State, for example, JTF resorted to extralegal killings, dragnet arrests, and intimidation of the hapless Borno residents. As noted by Solomon,
“Far from conducting intelligence-driven operations, the JTF simply cordoned off areas and carried out house-to-house searches, at times shooting young men in these homes.”

In the most recent crossfire between JTF and Boko Haram in Baga, a village on Lake Chad near Nigeria’s border with Cameroon, reportedly up to 187 people were killed and 77 others were injured. But Baga residents have accused the JTF, not Boko Haram, of firing indiscriminately at civilians and setting fire to much of the fishing town. While the military has denied repeatedly that it attacks and kills civilians in its operations, Nigeria’s armed forces have an unenviable history of terrorizing civilians. As Alemika argues, the legacy of the Nigerian armed forces is that of “arbitrariness, ruthlessness, brutality, vandalism, incivility, low accountability to the public and corruption.” The armed forces are a reflection of the heavy-handedness of the Nigerian state itself. As the late Nigerian political scientist, Professor Claude Ake, argues: “more often than not, the post-colonial state in Nigeria presented itself as an apparatus of violence, and while its base in social forces remained extremely narrow it relied unduly on coercion for compliance, rather than authority.”

**Conclusion: How Should the State Respond?**

The only alternative to war is peace and the only road to peace is negotiations. This article has provided an account of Boko Haram’s emergence and raison d’être. From discussions in the article, it may be deduced that Boko Haram has become arguably the most serious problem confronting the Nigerian state today, with consequences going beyond security into the political and socioeconomic aspects of governance in the country. The frustration of the Nigerian government with the deteriorating security situation in northern Nigeria is evident in its “flip-flop” approach from amnesty talks to the deployment of troops and the declaration of an outright war on Boko Haram. The latter has complicated the task of the Amnesty Committee and made it difficult to win the confidence of Boko Haram, which is crucial in bringing them to the negotiating table. As Sani argues, “you can’t talk of peace on one hand and be deploying troops on the other.” Some analysts, however, have argued that the Nigerian government had no choice. According to Yahaya Mahmud, a famous constitutional lawyer in Nigeria: “No government anywhere will allow a group to usurp part of territorial sovereignty. The declaration of a state of emergency was necessitated by the constitutional obligation to restore a portion of Nigeria’s territory taken over by an armed group which involves the suspension of constitutional provisions relating to civic rights.” Others, however, worry that the heavy-handed response of the Nigerian government will force Boko Haram to shift their bases, with grave consequences for Nigeria. As Kyari argues, “Boko Haram can’t face Nigerian troops in conventional war; the troop deployment to northern Borno means they will move out to other towns and cities with less military presence and launch guerrilla war, which is deadlier.” Already, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry issued a strongly worded statement saying: “We are . . . deeply concerned by credible allegations that Nigerian security forces are committing gross human rights violations, which, in turn, only escalate the violence and fuel extremism.”

As things now stand, the task facing the Amnesty Committee is Herculean: How will the new Committee on Dialogue identify credible interlocutors? Can anyone speak for Boko Haram, particularly if it proves increasingly fragmented and prone to the emergence of splinter groups like Ansar al Muslimin fī Bilad al Sudan (The Defenders of Muslims in West Africa)? If Boko Haram has already rejected amnesty, what conditions would induce
a *volte-face*? Does the group have grievances and demands that an amnesty program could feasibly address? Will the state of emergency and efforts toward amnesty prove mutually reinforcing, constituting a “carrot and stick” approach to Boko Haram, or does the state of emergency signal that the government is continuing to lurch from tactic to tactic, lacking a clear strategy? The task of the Amnesty Committee is further complicated by the fact that, as President Jonathan once noted: “Some [members of Boko Haram] are in the executive arm of government, some of them are in the parliamentary/legislative arm of government, while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the armed forces, the police and other security agencies.” Although the establishment of the Committee on Dialogue reflects Jonathan’s acknowledgment that purely military means cannot resolve the current impasse, it is also consistent with policymaking tendencies toward Boko Haram that are “reactive, *ad hoc*, and cyclical.”

If Nigeria is to effectively respond to the current Boko Haram crisis, the following policy recommendations should be seriously considered: (1) the Nigerian government should work toward winning the confidence of Boko Haram by implementing some of the demands the group members presented to the government, including the release of detained group members and the payment of compensation to the families of those killed in the security crackdowns by the JTF. This will show the group that the government is sincere about its willingness to dialogue. (2) The Nigerian government must develop an effective counterterrorism policy that goes beyond a security-only killing approach to embed counterterrorism in an overarching national security strategy that appreciates the broader context in which Islamic radicalization occurs. What Nigeria has lacked so far is a viable concept of strategic counterterrorism that will guide her actions, help undermine the recruitment of terrorists, and change the environment they inhabit into increasingly non-permissive one. (3) There is a need for an intelligence-led strategy to better confront Boko Haram’s localized terrorist activities and its global aspirations. Added to this, there is a necessity for greater international cooperation in terms of identifying and intersecting Boko Haram’s growing external funding, weapon sources, and training which is crucial to the group’s operational capabilities. (4) A long-term strategy that will undercut the *jihadist* appeal in northern Nigeria must address the sources of socioeconomic inequalities and human insecurity in the region—the poorest geopolitical zone in Nigeria in terms of socioeconomic indices. In collaboration with the state and local governments the federal government should undertake a grassroots socioeconomic empowerment programme aimed at employment generation and human security. Poverty and underdevelopment in the Muslim north, coupled with population increase and government’s inability to deal effectively with non-state groups, can turn northern states into an ideal recruitment ground for *jihadist* groups. (5) Finally, the use of military force as a counterterrorism strategy is frequently unwise because it is inevitably indiscriminate and often results in the alienation of exactly those individuals in northern Nigeria who we do not want radicalized. Moreover, military action against terrorist targets often causes the deaths of innocents, no matter how much care is taken. A military strategy does not only provide terrorists with critical experience in tactics, but forces them to create new networks of support as a form of survival strategy. A non-killing strategy that perseveres in political dialogue is likely to win the trust of the Boko Haram leadership, which is crucial to bringing them to the negotiating table.

**Notes**


6. IRIN, “Nigerians on the Run.”


12. This is not the first time that Goodluck Jonathan has declared a state of emergency in some parts of northern Nigeria. In December 2011, Jonathan declared a state of emergency over some limited local government areas in the north, after a church bombing blamed on Boko Haram killed hundreds of people, but he lifted it in July 2012.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.


19. Besides Quaddiriya and Tijjaniya, there are different Islamic sects in Nigeria among which are Derika, the Izala, the Kaulu (Kablu), the Muslim Brotherhood, and several other splinter groups. Once in a while, there are skirmishes between and among some of the sects. See N. D. Danjibo, “Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The ‘Maitatsine’ and ‘Boko Haram’ Crisis in Nigeria,” Paper presented at the 2009 IFRA Conference on Conflict and Violence in Zaria, Nigeria. Available at http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/spip.php?article156, pp. 1–21.

20. ICG, “Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict.”


24. Ibid.


31. Ibid.


39. Agbiboa and Okem, “Unholy Trinity.”


44. Ibid., p. 24.


50. NBS, *Nigerian Poverty Profile*.


64. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Forest, “Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria,” p. 15.
77. Umar, The Discourses of Salafi Radicalism.
80. Forest, “Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria.”
86. Thurston, “Threat of Militancy in Nigeria.”
88. Danjibo, “Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence.”
95. Ibid.
104. Agbiboa, “No Retreat, No Surrender.”
108. Forest, “Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram.”
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
120. Cited in ibid.
122. IRIN, “Nigerians on the Run as Military Combat Boko Haram.”
129. IRIN, “Nigerians on the Run.”
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid.
142. Thurston, “Amnesty for Boko Haram.”
144. Thurston, “Amnesty for Boko Haram.”