

European Centre for Information Policy & Security®



February 5

2015

" Boko Haram was established by the radical Muslim cleric – Mohammed Yusuf – in Maiduguri in north-eastern Nigeria in 2002 . `Boko Haram` is derived from the Hausa word for book (boko) and the Arabic word for forbidden (haram). "

Understanding the Threat

REPORT

Titled 'Understanding the Threat Posed by Boko Haram'

By Research Council of ECIPS

Prof. Hussein Solomon

European Centre for Information Policy and Security (ECIPS)
3rd Floor ,207 Regent Street London W1B 3HH
United Kingdom
T + 44 BEL T :+32-2-5880860
UK T :+442032890111

<<NOT FOR PUBLIC USE>>

Private & Confidential

RESTRICTED USE WARNING

THE CONTENTS HEREIN CONTAIN PRIVILEGED AND SENSITIVE INFORMATION PROPRIETARY TO ECIPS. NO PART OF THIS DOCUMENT SHALL BE COPIED OR DISCLOSED EITHER INTERNALLY OR EXTERNALLY WITHOUT PRIOR WRITTEN CONSENT FROM ECIPS.

Boko Haram was established by the radical Muslim cleric – Mohammed Yusuf – in Maiduguri in north-eastern Nigeria in 2002ⁱ. ‘Boko Haram’ is derived from the Hausa word for book (boko) and the Arabic word for forbidden (haram). Literally then, Boko Haram means the ‘book is forbidden’. In this context, however, it means Western education is sinful and therefore forbiddenⁱⁱ. It should be stressed that this Islamist sect did not give this name to themselves. They were so named by the local population because of their antipathy to Western civilization. However, various analysts have noted that the movement may have been around for much longer – for up to fifteen years – under various other names including *Al Sunna wal Jamma*ⁱⁱⁱ, *Muhajirun*, the Nigerian Taliban, the Yusufiyya Islamic Movement^{iv} and *Ahlusunna wal’ jamma hijra*^v. Since 2002, the group calls itself *Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad* or ‘People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad’^{vi}.

The emergence of Boko Haram is intimately related to the spread of radical Islamist ideologies in the form of Tablighi clerics from Pakistan and Wahhabist missionaries from Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism, in particular lends itself to the ideology of Al Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and affiliated militant Islamist groups. Characteristic of such fundamentalist doctrines is the notion that the Nigerian state is *taghut* or evil, unworthy of allegiance on the part of true Muslims^{vii}. This also provides Boko Haram’s religious rationale for targeting police officers, politicians and other government officials. Flowing from this radical ideology Mohamed Yusuf^{viii} set out the Islamic alternative to the current Nigerian state:

“We want to re-emphasise that our main objective is the restoration of the Sharia Legal System in line with the teachings of the Holy Qur’an. We want the Nigerian Constitution to be abrogated and Democracy suspended and that a full-fledged Islamic State established. We want to emphasise that trouble started in this part of the world when white men came, colonised our land, chased away the Emirs and religious leaders and then replaced the system with Western Legislative, Judicial and Executive procedures. They also changed our pattern of learning and upbringing to the detriment of moral teachings; that were exactly what prompted the establishment of our organisation”.

There are, however, other considerations which have motivated the formation of the movement. Indeed there is a socio-economic basis to Boko Haram’s resurgence. Growing impoverishment of citizens, declining economic opportunities, and limited educational possibilities has swelled the ranks of the unemployed. Despite Nigeria receiving oil revenues in excess of US \$74 billion per annum, more than half of Nigerians live on less than US \$1 a day and four out of ten Nigerians are unemployed^{ix}. Despite the country being blessed with some of the world’s richest oil reserves, the state offers its citizens precious little. In many regions, the Nigerian state offers no water, electricity or education. Boko Haram’s founder, Mohammed Yusuf first started attracting followers by railing against deteriorating living standards and state corruption^x. It is no co-incidence that northern Nigeria has been so prone to radical Islamist uprisings – it also happens to be the poorest part of the country. While 27 percent of the population in the south live in poverty, the figure in the north is 72 percent^{xi}

Given the violence perpetrated by the group, a joint Nigerian security team launched a raid on Boko Haram’s hideout in the Dutsen Tanshi area of Bauchi State. During the raid, nine members of the sect were arrested together with bomb-making materials, arms and

ammunition^{xii}. Violence seemed to abate following the arrest and later death of Mohammed Yusuf whilst in police custody on 31 July 2009^{xiii}. He was replaced by Abubaker Shekau. Under his leadership, a far more lethal and violent Boko Haram was born. Between 30 December 2010 and 14 July 2014, for instance, more than 70 Boko Haram attacks take place^{xiv}. The events of July 2009 set the tone for how the Nigerian state was to respond to Boko Haram – meeting violence with violence. The more important lesson, that despite the violent security responses, and despite the decapitation of the group’s leadership, the sect could rebound with such force, seems not to have been learned.

Under Shekau’s leadership, the group has increasingly internationalised. For instance, there is greater coordination between it and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)^{xv}. Boko Haram has claimed that its fighters had been sent for further military training to Afghanistan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Iraq, Mauritania and Algeria^{xvi}. Evidence is emerging that Boko Haram also has ties with the Somali Al-Shabaab militant group^{xvii}. A spokesman for the group has claimed that Boko Haram fighters had been sent to Somalia and Yemen for further training^{xviii}. Boko Haram’s spokesman went on to state, “*We want to make it known that our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from those who made that country ungovernable... This time round, our attacks will be fiercer and wider than they have ever been*”^{xix}.

The words of the Boko Haram spokesman were certainly borne out in practice. While the initial geographical focus of the group’s attacks were in the four northern states of Bauchi, Yobe and Borno these attacks have now widened to spread across the country, notably in the federal capital of Abuja itself^{xx}. During this period the targets of the attacks also widened from churches and shops, politicians, religious leaders and the state security apparatus to the United Nations itself^{xxi}. In addition, the nature of the attacks grew more sophisticated, from bows and poisoned arrows to synchronised armed assaults, kidnappings, targeted assassinations and vehicle-borne explosive devices. With each attack, Boko Haram has grown in confidence and, following the capture of the town of Gwoza in August 2014 Abubaker Shekau declared that the town will form part of Boko Haram’s Islamic caliphate^{xxii}. Taking a leaf from the ISIS playbook, it is clear that Shekau views Boko Haram not merely as an insurgent Islamist movement but as one with ambitions to govern the region.

Given the Boko Haram offensives, the Nigerian government seems to have adopted a fatalistic attitude. Acknowledging the deteriorating security situation, the hapless President Goodluck Jonathan lamented that the current situation is even worse than the 1967-1970 civil war that killed more than a million people. “*During the civil war, we knew the enemy and could even predict where the enemy was coming from ... But the challenge we have today is more complicated*”, he admitted^{xxiii}. Also admitting to failure was General Andrew Azizi, President Jonathan’s National Security Advisor, who stated that Nigeria’s current security formations was ill-equipped to deal with the terrorist threat posed by Boko Haram^{xxiv}. It is in this context that the African Union has authorized a 7,500 pan African force to respond to the Boko Haram menace. Whilst such a force needs to be welcomed, the developmental and governance challenges which served as a catalyst for the emergence of Boko Haram must also be addressed in the interest of sustainable peace in this troubled region

ⁱ Farouk Chothia, “Who are Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamists?,” [BBC African Service](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13809501), 11 January 2012. Internet: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13809501>. Date accessed: 31 January 2012.

-
- ⁱⁱ Adesoji Abimbola, "The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 45 No. 2, 2010a, p. 100.
- ⁱⁱⁱ "Nigeria: Islamists raise the stakes as they take on Yar'Adua," *Africa Confidential*, 7 August 2009, Vol. 50 No. 16, p. 1.
- ^{iv} International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Boko Haram: Nigeria's growing new headache," *Strategic Comments*. 17 November 2011. Internet: <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/vol17-2011/nov>. Date accessed: 3 February 2012, pp. 2-3.
- ^v Adesoji Abimbola, "Between Maitatsane and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State," *Africa Today*, Vol. 57 No. 4, 2010b, p. 105.
- ^{vi} International Institute for Strategic Studies, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- ^{vii} Abimbola, 2010b, p. 103
- ^{viii} Horace Campbell, "Boko Haram: 'Economic Fundamentalism' and Impoverishment Send Unemployed Youths into Religious Militias," 2014. Internet: <http://www.globalreach.ca/boko-haram-economic-fundamentalism-and-impovertment-send-unemployed-youth-into-religious-militias/5385934>. Date accessed: 23 May 2014.
- ^{ix} "Nigeria's Elections: Reversing the Degeneration?," *Africa Policy Briefing* No. 79. Abuja: International Crisis Group, 24 February 2011, p. p. 3.
- ^x Toni Johnson, "Boko Haram," Council on Foreign Relations. 27 December 2011. Internet: <http://www.cfr.org/africa/boko-haram/p.25739>. Date accessed: 21 January 2012, p. 5.
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ^{xii} Abimbola, 2010b, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- ^{xiii} Ioannis Mantzikos, "The Absence of the State in Northern Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram," *African Renaissance*, Vol. 7 No. 1, 2010, p. 59.
- ^{xiv} Timeline of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria. Internet: en.wikipedia.org/Timeline-of-Boko-Haram-attacks-in-Nigeria. Date accessed: 4 August 2014.
- ^{xv} Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- ^{xvi} Mantzikos, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
- ^{xvii} Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- ^{xviii} Comfort Ero, "Bombing in Abuja: On Nigeria's Boko Haram," *International Crisis Group* No. 6, September 2011. Internet: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/nigeria/op-eds/bombing-in-abuja.aspx>. Date accessed: 28 January 2012, p. 2.
- ^{xix} Katherine Zimmerman, "From Somalia to Nigeria: Jihad," *The Weekly Standard*, 18 June 2011. Internet: <http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/katherine-zimmerman-somalia-nigeria-jihad-june-18-2011>. Date accessed: 31 January 2012.
- ^{xx} Abimbola, 2010a, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- ^{xxi} Chothia, *op. cit.*
- ^{xxii} News24. "Boko Haram: Seized town part of Islamic caliphate," 25 August 2014. Internet: www.news24.com/Africa/News/Boko-Haram-Seized-town-part-of-Islamic-caliphate-20140825. Date accessed: 25 August 2014.
- ^{xxiii} "Boko Haram sympathisers in government and security agencies," *The Telegraph*, 8 January 2012. Internet: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/9001033>. Date accessed: 9 January 2012.
- ^{xxiv} Osasu Obayiuwana, "Nigeria: Yet another seas of travails," *New African*, December 2011, p. 79.