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## **Boko Haram and the Global War on Terror**

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### **Summary and Keywords**

Although the Boko Haram crisis started like other riots before it and was initially treated as such, its escalation and metamorphosis from ordinary religious protest to insurgency has given an air of notoriety and fatality to it in Nigeria and across the borders of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Despite being similar in orientation, philosophy, and *modus operandi* to the Maitatsine religious crises of 1980 to 1985 in Nigeria, the Boko Haram crisis is clearly marked out by its more virulent nature, its sophistication, the wider global attention it has attracted, its festering nature, and more significantly the seeming inability to bring it under control. Presented here are the views and perspectives of scholars on the origin and growth of the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria, its philosophy and ideology, its strategies and tactics, and its progression from common religious crisis and eventual metamorphosis to insurgency. The highly volatile religious background from which the sect emerged and the central role played by Mohammed Yusuf in its nurturing and growth are discussed. Also discussed are the impact of Salafism and the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, among others, on the sect and the motivation it derives from the global jihad movement. The article examines and appraises the Nigerian government approach in seeking to contain the group and situate it in the context of the African states and global coalition against terror and discusses why the central government has struggled to firmly contain the group.

The central role played by Mohammed Yusuf in the evolution and growth of the sect is brought out in the first part of the article. Pertinent was the influence of individuals and groups on Yusuf's beliefs and activities aided by his demagoguery. His group's abhorrence of Western education and lifestyle as well as rejection of democracy as a form of government and justification of violence, aided by Salafist thoughts and writings, form the kernel of the next section on philosophy and ideology. The third section, on transformation and changing strategies, discusses the factors in the escalation of the crisis, its various manifestations, and the growing global link of the sect resulting from its brutal suppression in 2009. The various measures devised to contain the sect and its effectiveness or otherwise are presented. A final section discusses the efforts made by the

group to integrate itself into the global jihad movement as well as government response, particularly at the regional level, to defeat it.

Keywords: Boko Haram, religious crisis, fundamentalism, insurgency, global jihadist movement, Islamism, African politics

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## Introduction

Religion is a phenomenon in Nigeria. It is described as the lifeblood of people's fundamental reality and daily experience (Enwerem, 1999, pp. 47–56; Kukah, 1993, p. ix). Obviously a significant feature of existence and culture, the religious inclination of different Nigerian groups dated back to a far date in the past. Thus, despite Nigeria's secularity, religion has influenced both the evolution of the Nigerian state and the character it assumed, particularly after political independence. It is more of a rule than an exception that religious sentiments and explanations have been offered to justify even the most mundane or politically motivated situations. This particularly was the situation with the advent of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria and more importantly the zeal of the adherents to spread their religious beliefs and gain more following. In particular, the coincidence of religious differences with spatial configuration of the country makes religion a central element for the constitution of social differentiation and power relations (Olurode, 1989, pp. 352–377). A 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in Nigeria estimated the population to be 49.3% Christian and 48.8% Muslim, while the remaining 2% belong to other or no religions (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012). But unlike the north and east, where Islam and Christianity dominate, respectively, the west has an almost equal numerical presence of both Muslims and Christians (Nolte, Jones, Taiyan, & Occhiali, 2016).

The pervasive hold of religion on the people is best understood in the context of the contest for religious space among competing religious interests like the white Christian missionaries in the south and the Fulani Jihad movement in the north (Adeleye, 1971; Last, 1967; Smith, 1961). The British colonial government, given its predisposition and perception, widened the gulf between the major religions and its adherents and in the process prepared the grounds for a violent manifestation of these differences in the post-independence period (Falola, 1998). Violent religious crises became recurrent in Nigeria beginning in 1980, though preceded by clashes between the Quadriyya and Tijaniyya brotherhoods in the north and the protests and resentment generated by attempts by the northern regional power to spread Islam to central Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s (Falola, 1998; Kastfelt, 1994; Paden, 1973). But the outbreak of the Maitatsine crisis, first in 1980 in Kano and subsequently in 1982 in Kaduna and Bulumkutu, 1984 in Yola, and 1985 in Bauchi, marked a turning point in the history of religious crises in terms of its intensity and sowed the seed of future volatile crises as seen in the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency beginning from 2009 (Adesoji, 2010; Ibrahim, 1997; Imo, 1995; Williams, 1997). Recurrent religious crises in Nigeria, obviously a product of intolerance among various groups in the country, are manifestations of manipulation of religious

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differences among people, internal divisions within religious groups, the increasing redefinition of identity and, the tendency toward religious fundamentalism (Enwerem, 1999; Imo, 1995).

Other factors promoting recurrent religious crises in Nigeria are a hardline position on religious beliefs, practices, and doctrines; limited economic opportunities arising out of, but not limited to, a high level of illiteracy, unemployment, and growing poverty compounded by pervasive and extreme government corruption (Lubeck, Lipschutz, & Weeks, 2003; Lubeck, 2011; Okafor, 2011); and the political patronage of religion. Growing global Islamic fundamentalism has provided ideological support and motivation to local groups where it has not provided material and training supports. But the pervasive influence of Islam occasioned by the 1804 jihad and subsequent Islamic movements, its toleration by successive government elites beginning with the colonial government, its patronage resulting in the granting of incremental concessions and gains to Islam and Muslim elite, and the seeming inability to resolve successfully festering religious crises all combined to lay the foundation for violent religious crises *ab initio*. The climax was the occurrence of the Boko Haram crises, first openly in 2009 and then its metamorphosis to insurgency from late 2010 (Mordi, 2012).

In understanding the effectiveness of government efforts in confronting and tackling the menace that the Boko Haram has come to represent, a proper understanding of the endemic and organized global jihad movement and the cross-border activities of the groups necessitating intercountry, regional, and global coalitions becomes pertinent. Much more important is the persistent insurgent acts characteristic of jihadist groups around the world, which have made the war on terror seemingly insurmountable.

## Origin and Evolution of Boko Haram

Different accounts have been given of the origin of the Boko Haram sect, but certain common threads are discernible. The sect initially operated under the name Shabaab Muslim Youth Organization, with Mallam Lawal as the leader in the early 1990s, but leadership of the group shifted to Mallam Mohammed Yusuf when Mallam Lawal left Nigeria to continue his education in Saudi Arabia. It is the leadership of Mallam Yusuf that allegedly opened the group to political influence and popularity. By implication, therefore, Mallam Yusuf officially founded Boko Haram in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri with the aim of establishing Sharia government in Borno and neighboring states (Adesoji, 2010, p. 98; Awortu, 2015; Falode, 2016A, 2016B).

Yusuf was a student of Sheik Abubakar Gumi, spiritual leader of the Izala movement, in the early 1990s and was also mentored by Sheik Jafaar Adam. Thus, Yusuf, influenced by the teachings of Yan Izala, and many of Boko Haram's earliest recruits were largely from the Izala movement. Jama'at Izalat al-Bidaa wa-Iqamat as Sunna, commonly known as Yan Izala, is the largest Islamic reform movement in Nigeria and an outspoken opponent of the established orders (Azumah, 2015, p. 39; Pate, 2014, p. 8). Founded in 1978 by Ismaila Idris in Jos under the spiritual leadership of Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, Yan Izala is a

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Salafist organization that embraces a legalist and scripture-centric understanding of Islam, with a goal of purging the practice of Islam of foreign ideas and practices (Loimeier, 2012). According to Hill (2010, p. 18), Izala proponents encourage “the faithful to live by its quite literal interpretation of the Qur’an, Sunnah, and hadith; to emulate the *salafs*.” Yusuf moved into a leadership position at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi and Daggash mosques in Maiduguri, Borno State, but was expelled from both by 2002 due to his increasing extremism. Pertinent in this regard is the perception of Campbell (2014) that Boko Haram was a recent manifestation of a decade-long civil war within Islam in which radical reformers have long claimed that Muslim leaders were infidels for as long as they were not showing enough support for Islamic causes even when they professed to be Muslims. This was a source of conflict between Salafi fundamentalists and the tolerant Sufis who dominated the traditional Nigerian Muslim elite.

The Boko Haram sect once referred to as *Yusuffiya* after its founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf, transformed and embraced the most extreme and advanced teachings from *Ahalul Sunnah Waljama Hijrah* to *Jama’atul Ahalul Sunna Waljama’a Lidda’a awati Wal Jihadi (Jaswal Jihad)* with a significant number of members resigning themselves to fate and willing to die in planned attacks (Bintube, 2015). Having failed to secure the platform of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) founded by Ibrahim El Zakzzaky to propound his ideas and carry out his plan of purification through violent means and following his expulsion from Ndimi and Daggash, Yusuf established his own mosque and Islamic school “to serve as a magnet for primary and secondary school pupils who, in response to his teachings, would abandon Westernized schools in the belief that Western education [Boko] is a sin [Haram]” (Pate, 2014, p. 11). Yusuf attracted a wide following in northern Nigeria and bordering areas of Chad and Niger following his radical sermons against the Muslim establishment and the state (Adegbulu, 2013, p. 266).

The influence of Saudi Arabian scholar Abubakar bin Abdullah Abu Zayad and radical Islamist Ibn Taymiyya caused Yusuf to reject the modern Islamic schools embraced by the Izala movement as well as secular education. He also turned against the Nigerian state and rejected the Sultan of Sokoto as the nominal head of all Nigerian Muslims. From initially being non-violent, Yusuf attracted disillusioned youths who viewed him as a moral crusader. Providing grants and financial assistance to his recruits, including loans to start small businesses, these recruits in turn contributed funds to the common purse of the group. In 2004, Yusuf and several of his followers established a settlement, called “Afghanistan” near Kanamma, Yobe State, in emulation of the Prophet Muhammad’s hijra from Mecca to Medina (Pate, 2014, p. 12). This was after the group had camped at Jaijin Biri thick forest in November 2003 to give its members military training to prepare them for jihad and after the uprising in Bama and Gwoza in 2004 (Bintube, 2015, p. 14). The destruction of Afghanistan in September 2004 by the Nigerian army, which launched the offensive following an escalation of attacks by the group, did not stop or impair its evolution (Loimeier, 2012, p. 150). The purported link of the group with Afghanistan or the desire to seek affiliation with the Taliban explains the name, the Nigerian Taliban, by which the group was known for a period (Adesoji, 2010, pp. 99–101). This name came about following the re-integration of Muhammadu Ali’s group into the fold of Yusuf group

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in 2003, following Ali's killing, after its initial separation motivated by desire for pious living from Ndimi mosque in 2002 (Azumah, 2015, p. 40; Thurston, 2016, pp. 201–202; Weeraratne, 2017, p. 611). The Taliban, a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movement, was formed in 1994 under the leadership of Mohammed Omar. Its objective was to rule Afghanistan as a country and impose its own interpretation of Islamic law. It succeeded in imposing itself on Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 before it was overthrown by the US-led invasion (Neamatollah, 2002).

Yusuf's demagoguery was a significant factor in the evolution of the movement. His approach was to direct his attack against the state and the leaders whom he accused of being behind the sufferings and deprivation of people. He also accused political leaders of being the agents of an international conspiracy to perpetuate misrule and corruption in the society as dictated by the Western world. This strong teaching and dangerous incitement, as well as the call for the implementation of Sharia, impressed many of the jobless youths who considered him courageous and frank. Ignorance and the desire to gain political opportunity were also prominent in the considerations that attracted followers, particularly the educated and the working class. On several occasions, the leader emphasized to his followers that it was better for a Muslim to die than survive under *Taghut* (evil), in apparent reference to the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, declared unworthy of allegiance on the part of good and upright Muslims. Similarly, it was forbidden for a Muslim to respect the constitution, which was considered a man-made law (Adesoji, 2011, p. 103; Bintube, 2015, p. 13).

Apparent, therefore, in the evolution of the sect was the significant role played by Yusuf. Born on January 29, 1970, at Girigiri Village in the Jakusko Local Government Area of Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria, to a Nigerien father from the Dora-speaking tribe and a Nigerian mother from Gashua in Yobe State, Yusuf dropped out of the formal Western education system and was taught by different Islamic scholars, including Mallams Abubakar and Goni Dauda in Damaturu; Ibrahim Goni, Mustapha Baga, and Sheikh Atom in Maiduguri; and Mallams Shuaibu and Muhammad in Kaduna between 1981 and 2001.

From all indications, it was clear that Yusuf, from relative obscurity, ingratiated himself into the heart of not only the poor, the hopeless, and the disinherited but also the elite in Borno society. This, in a way, elevated him to the privileged class in the society. His promised accommodation in the unfolding political dispensation in 2003, particularly by being centrally involved in Sharia implementation, led to Yusuf serving together with his followers in one of the private militias known as the "ECOMOG boys" engaged by political aspirants in Borno (Bintube, 2015, pp. 9–10).<sup>1</sup> These groups were provided with arms and used extensively as political thugs. Although the groups were abandoned once the politicians had achieved their primary purpose, Yusuf still enjoyed some privileges and was sent on pilgrimage to Mecca and made a member of the Borno state Sharia Board (Adesoji, 2011, p. 110). But these privileges appeared to Yusuf as tokenism, and his desire to achieve his goal, which was to introduce and enforce strict Sharia in the extreme by the use of violence, was a major catalyst in his declaration of war in 2009. Noticed to have featured prominently in this political alignment and calculation was Alhaji Ali Modu

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Sheriff, the governor of Borno state from 2003 to 2011 (Gilbert, 2014; Iyekekpolo, 2016, p. 11; Thurston, 2016, pp. 200–202).

Despite its confrontations with the security agencies, the group did not disband. Neither did it engage in an open brazen violence until June 11, 2009, when it had a major clash with the Borno state security squad codenamed “Operation Flush” at the Custom Roundabout in Maiduguri. The confrontation was prompted by new traffic laws regarding motorbikes, which required riders to wear helmets and banned them from moving at night. Police checkpoints were used to enforce the new rules. The refusal by the sect members to follow the new law led to a clash with police in which 17 unarmed members were shot with live ammunition (Loimeier, 2012, p. 151).<sup>2</sup> This prompted a reaction on June 12, 2009, from Yusuf, who boasted openly during a lecture held at Anguwar Doki in Maiduguri that he was going to carry out retaliatory attacks against the state and that no amount of persuasion would deter him. About a month later, a major crisis was triggered with the invasion of the group’s hideout at the Dutsen Tenshin area of Bauchi on July 26, 2009, by a joint security team, in which nine of its members were arrested and materials for making bombs and other weapons were confiscated. This provoked attacks two hours later by the group members on police formations in Bauchi and eventually in Yobe, Kano, and Borno, where it was most extensive perhaps because Borno was the base of the group’s leader. The riot was quelled after the controversial death in police custody of Yusuf, who was arrested alive by soldiers who handed him over to the police, and a fierce battle with his followers, some of whom were arrested. It is estimated that more than 700 lives, mostly of the sect members, were lost, while public buildings like police stations, prisons, government offices, schools, and churches were destroyed (Adesoji, 2010, p. 98, 2011, p. 105; Higazi, 2013, pp. 137–145, 2015, pp. 305–325).<sup>3</sup> As noted by Pate (2014, p. 13), the killing of Yusuf by Nigerian security agents is widely seen as the critical turning point in the evolution of Boko Haram.

Like in the early stages of the sect’s evolution, when it was known to have mobilized its membership from a broad spectrum of people including unemployed university and polytechnic graduates, most of whom tore up their certificates, this act of absolute loyalty became a pattern of belonging to the sect thereafter, though with a preponderance of the poor uneducated masses flocking to Yusuf and his group. The rationalization is that unemployment, underdevelopment, and the general hopelessness pervading the society was caused by the government, which imposed Western education on them and failed to manage the resources of the country to their benefit (Awortu, 2015, p. 214).

Meanwhile, the emergence of Abubakar Shekau as the Boko Haram leader following the death of Yusuf over a more ideologically inclined Mamman Nur, his favoritism of the Kanuri elements within the group, his brutality, and the alleged indiscriminate killing of Muslim civilians eventually led to the emergence of a splinter group known as the Ansaru, which claimed to be humane and whose targets were government institutions and Christians. This group employed primarily kidnapping, particularly of foreigners, as its major focus (Azumah, 2015, p. 41)

# Philosophy and Ideology

The name Boko Haram is derived from a combination of the Hausa word “boko,” meaning book, and the Arabic word “haram,” meaning something forbidden, ungodly, or sinful. Literally, it means “book is sinful,” but its deeper meaning is that Western education is sinful, sacrilegious, or ungodly and should therefore be forbidden. Characteristically, the sect was opposed to and outright rejected Western education, Western culture (including lifestyles, entertainment, and governance), and modern science (Adesoji, 2011, p. 106). The widespread perception within northern Nigeria is that Western education was introduced initially by Christian missionaries as a vehicle to convert northern Muslims to Christianity. But in what appeared as a double standard, the sect’s rejection of Western education was not in its entirety—it embraced technical, engineering, and medical aspects that it considered beneficial while condemning those aspects that it considered to contravene the teaching of Islam (Pate, 2014, p. 14). This explains why Yusuf enjoyed the best of what Western technology could offer in the form of exotic cars, the latest communication equipment, and the best medical services. The group embraced and advocated the propagation of strict adherence to Islam by everyone, regardless of whether it was wanted or not. In line with this objective, the sect sought the adoption or imposition of Sharia across all the states in Nigeria, aimed at creating God’s kingdom on earth through justice for the poor (Bintube, 2015, p. 17). Consequently, Yusuf and his group initially withdrew from what they viewed as a corrupt society and sought the creation of a micro-society where “pure” Islam could be expressed (Pate, 2014, p. 15). The failure of this approach perhaps led to the radical idea of displacing the secular Nigerian regime for a Salafist government—i.e., anything that gets in the way of this goal must be destroyed.

For Boko Haram, violence is not a perversion of Islam, it is a justifiable means to a pure end (Campbell, 2014). Thus, the common denominator binding the group membership together was the desire to overthrow the secular government and propagate Islamic law, but with Yusuf’s oratory serving as a magnet (Adesoji, 2011, p. 106). In adhering to the strict Wahhabi understanding of *tawhid* (the oneness of God or monotheism), the group sees a secular nation as promoting idolatry, that is, state worship. The pledge of allegiance to the flag and singing of the national anthem are manifestations of such idolatry and hence punishable by death. For Boko Haram, the state is a nest of corruption that exploits the poor. The state is formed and sustained by Western values and education, both of which are against the will of Allah (Campbell, 2014).

Salafist thoughts and writings that treat anything Western as completely un-Islamic was strongly influenced by the writings of the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya, who called for jihad against rulers (including Muslim rulers) who do not follow and apply Sharia law. Ibn Taymiyya, a 13th-century scholar, was a staunch defender of Sunni Islam based on strict adherence to the Qur’an and authentic Sunna (practices) of the Prophet Muhammad. Ibn Taymiyya believed that these two sources contain all the religious and spiritual guidance necessary for salvation in the hereafter. Thus he rejected the arguments and ideas of both philosophers and Sufis regarding religious knowledge, spiritual experiences, and ritual

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practices. Ibn Taymiyya disagreed with many of his fellow Sunni scholars because of his rejection of the rigidity of the schools of jurisprudence in Islam. He believed that the four accepted schools of jurisprudence had become stagnant and sectarian and also that they were being improperly influenced by aspects of Greek logic and thought as well as Sufi mysticism. His challenge to the leading scholars of the day was to return to an understanding of Islam in practice and in faith, based solely on the Qur'an and Sunna (Salkida, 2012). It was this ideology that formed the basis of Yusuf's interest and link with the global jihad movement. Similarly Yusuf's hadith collection, entitled *Riyadh al-Salihin*, by Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi, which focuses on ethics, manners, and conduct for a pious Muslim, emphasizes the virtue and superiority of militant jihad and those that pursue it (Pate, 2014, p. 14). However, in Boko Haram's early days, the focus of the organization was primarily on *da'wa* (proselytization and conversion). It was after the extrajudicial execution of Yusuf that the focus turned to jihad, which the group had actually prepared for with the military training of its members (Pate, 2014, p. 14).

Yusuf also rejected democracy as an appropriate form of governance for a Muslim society. The Nigerian society, by his reasoning, was filled with ills teleguided by corrupt Western-oriented elite bourgeoisie whose vested interest of perpetual injustice had created impetus for looting state resources that went beyond limit to favor their unborn generations. This situation was seen as the ruling class taking advantage of democratic setting and dispensing the iron law of oligarchy against the teeming proletariat populace. This formed the cardinal thesis of Boko Haram. In his radical approach to preaching directed at attacking the state, its operatives, and some Islamic scholars, organizations, and groups thought to have compromised the true teaching of Islam, Yusuf believed that it was only through Sharia that a better Nigeria ruled with justice, equity, and fairness could emerge. Consequently he saw Jihad as being sacrosanct, accompanied by honest mobilization and deployment of members' hard-earned resources as well as physical, mental, and material infrastructure needed to stage jihad against the entrenched ills of the Western cultural values and Western-informed institutions as represented by security operatives (Bintube, 2015, p. 17).

Some other fundamental beliefs held by the group are that interest in such matters as financial transactions, taxation, jurisprudence, and unrestricted free speech, which led to the proliferation of pornography, immorality, secularism, homosexuality, feminism, and many other ideas that Islamists often oppose, are completely infidel. It contended that the mix of boys and girls under the same class in schools, the propagation of the theory that man evolved from the family of monkeys, as well as the static nature of the sky contradict what Allah and his Prophet had ordained. Ideologically, any member who fought and died for the cause of an Islamic/Sharia state by destroying modern state formation and government establishment would automatically gain *Aljanna* (paradise) (Raheem & Babalola, 2015, p. 65). In addition, working in the civil service was considered sinful, just like all institutions represented by government including security agencies like police, military, and other uniformed personnel were seen as evil entities that must be crushed (Danjibo, 2009).



# Transformation and Changing Strategies

The brutal suppression of the Boko Haram in 2009 ended a phase of its life with the destruction of the group's stronghold and its subsequent disorganization. But following this period, its resurgence started from late 2010, leading to the emergence of a full-blown terrorist group launching virulent attacks on police and military barracks to avenge the extrajudicial murder of Yusuf and other sect members. Pertinent in the early period of the group's transformation was its attack on a Nigerian prison in 2010 resulting in the escape of 150 prisoners comprising Boko Haram members. Given the likelihood of its connection to other terrorist groups around the globe, its *modus operandi* also grew in scope, savagery, and sophistication (Gilbert, 2014; Loimeier, 2012, p. 151)

From originally attacking mainly security forces and government officials, the sect extended its campaign to traditional rulers, suspected government collaborators and spies, and innocent commuters. Significant attacks perpetrated by the group included the 2010 Christmas Eve bomb attacks on churches and markets in two districts of Jos, Plateau State, killing scores of people; the 2010 New Year Eve bomb attack on a popular open-air fish restaurant and market inside the Mogadishu barracks, outside Abuja, killing 10 people; the June 2011 bombing of the National Police Headquarters in Abuja with a car laden with explosives resulting in the death of dozens of people; the August 2011 bombing of the United Nations compound in Abuja resulting in the death of 23 people with scores wounded; and the 2011 Christmas Eve bombing of St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, outside Abuja, in which over 40 worshippers were killed and dozens injured (Anyadike, 2013). In summing up the atrocities of the sect and the ferocity that characterized it, it was noted that between July 27, 2009, and February 17, 2012, the group had launched 53 attacks in which 1,157 people were killed and hundreds of people were injured in northern Nigeria (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). There were other gruesome attacks, like the January 2012 coordinated gun and suicide bombing attacks on three government buildings in Kano—the police headquarters, the office of the immigration service, and the state security service—in which more than 200 people were killed; the February 2012 bomb attack on St. Finbarr's Church, Rayfield, Jos, in which 19 people were killed; the bombing of the office of *This Day* newspaper in Abuja and Kaduna, the Catholic Chapel in Bayero University, Kano, and a cattle market in Yobe state; the December 2, 2013, coordinated attacks on the Nigerian Air Force base and military barracks in Maiduguri by about 200 insurgents dressed in military uniform and armed with rocket launchers, explosives, and assault rifles; the December 20, 2013, attack on military barracks outside Bama town by several hundred fighters resulting in the death of many soldiers, their wives, and children; the April 14, 2014, bomb blast in Nyanya District of Abuja, killing about 75 people and leaving not less than 215 others injured; and the April 14, 2014, abduction of over 200 school girls from Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, as well as the May 1, 2014, bomb blast in the Nyanya area of Abuja, killing about 71 persons and injuring several others (Awortu, 2015, pp. 215–216; Gilbert, 2014).

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Beyond the brutal suppression of the sect in 2009, other dynamics contributed significantly to its transformation to an insurgent group. The inadequate understanding of the philosophy and ideology of the group at the initial stage of its rebellion resulted in or promoted some complacency on the part of many Nigerians, particularly in the north. To liberal Muslims and some other Nigerians, the riot was an outcome of a misunderstanding between a disgruntled group and some elites in government, which they would sort out between them. For others, particularly some zealous Muslims who were perhaps interested in the spread of Islam, the activities of the group was a welcome development as it would most likely check the advance of Christianity in the region, erase previous gains of Christian evangelism, and further entrench Islam (Adesoji, 2010, p. 103, 2011, p. 109). This development explains the tacit support given to the group and the refusal to expose them until the group began to show, through assassination of prominent Muslim clerics and attacks on mosques in addition to churches, that everyone outside the group was considered an enemy. The tide began to turn against the insurgents following the watchfulness of the population and the formation of the civil watch group popularly called the civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) following the realization that the group constitutes a serious threat that has the capability to overrun the whole region and even the country if not checked.

The sect transformation to an insurgent group can obviously not be completely divorced from links with similar insurgent groups around the world. Given the similarity in their goal and *modus operandi*, the inference that the sect had benefited from similar groups in terms of training, supply of weapons and funds, and more importantly inspiration is strong. This becomes more pertinent given the desire of a group like the Islamic State (IS), otherwise known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), to spread its tentacles and make more impact around the world, as well as the open declaration of Abubakar Shekau of its link with the IS (Azumah, 2015, p. 42). The increased sophistication, brutality and savagery that characterized the attacks of the group, reminiscent of other insurgent groups, point in the direction of either inspiration, networking, or outright collaboration (Higazi, 2015, pp. 320-342; Onapajo, Uzodike, & Whetto, 2012, p. 347). Indeed, as observed by Gilbert (2014, p. 3) the transformation from a “machete-wielding mob” to a more organized group with armored personnel carriers, fleets of SUVs, convoys of hilux jeeps, and possession of an assortment of sophisticated weaponry could only have come about as a result of Boko Haram access to financial and logistical support outside the shores of Nigeria. Azumah (2015, p. 42) corroborates that the group had established links with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, from where it had received advanced training and monetary support for its strategic insurgent activities in Nigeria following Shekau’s pledge to these groups. It was also through these links that the sect was able to access various categories of arms and ammunition like surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank missiles, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), vehicle-mounted machine guns with anti-aircraft visors, and AK-47 assault rifles, among others, looted by rebel forces and mercenaries during the uprising in Libya but acquired by terrorist groups like AQIM and later acquired by Boko Haram and its splinter

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group (Gilbert, 2014). This clearly is an indication of the increased financial capacity of the sect even when the issue of affiliation had not been conclusively established. Importantly, however, Mustapha (2014) has maintained that analysis showing al Qaeda's significant impact on Boko Haram comes from a "Western security mind-set," which in a sense may help authoritarian and corrupt regimes to get international financial and military support in their war on terrorism.

Aiding the assumed connections of the sect with similar insurgent groups was the inability of the security agencies to gather credible intelligence on it, resulting mostly in the success of the surprise attack method employed by the group and eliciting in the process the usual reactive show of force on the part of security forces. More than any other thing, this method placed the activities of the sect ahead of Nigerian security forces, who had been hampered by low morale due to poor working conditions, inadequate and substandard arms, and activities of the fifth columnists within its rank who leaked sensitive information to insurgents resulting in occasional deadly ambushes (Adesoji, 2011).

From the guerrilla tactics of hit-and-run to harass and oppress Nigerians and the use of rudimentary weapons such as clubs, machetes, Molotov cocktails, knives, swords, and locally made guns, as well as the adoption of drive-by shootings on motorcycle, the sect graduated from mid-2010 to the use of bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at strategic locations. It also employed the use of powerful weapons and sophisticated tactics such as suicide bombings, including the use of vehicle-borne IEDs complemented by the use of YouTube to showcase its exploits (Falode, 2016A, 2016B; Gilbert, 2014). Also characterizing its transformation was the group's strategy of seizing cities and villages in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, obviously aimed at physically occupying these territories. This started with the seizure of Damboa and climaxed with the declaration of an Islamic caliphate over all its occupied areas with Gwoza designated as its headquarters (Weeraratne, 2017, pp. 617–618). With the collapse of the central command of the sect and the emergence of splinter cells, the group employed on a wider scale the use of such strategies as kidnapping—either for money to replenish its stock of financial resources or for young men and women to replenish its stock of fighters and suicide bombers and wives for the insurgents. It also intensified attacks on markets to replenish stocks of foodstuffs and money just as it began to rob banks, cash-in-transit convoys, and businesses, not only in Maiduguri but also in Bauchi, all in a bid to get what it termed spoils of war. All these strategies were in addition to assassination, which it employed early in its campaign (Gilbert, 2014).

## **Containing Boko Haram in Nigeria**

Characteristic of the Nigerian government, the usual approach of dealing with religious riots and later fundamentalist groups was to brutally suppress them by military force and thereafter constitute a tribunal or commission of enquiry to probe into their causes. This was the case with the Maitatsine crises and other low-level ethno-religious riots that

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preceded it in the 1980s and until 2009, when the Boko Haram crises first broke out. Not only were culprits not properly tried, many were granted pardon in what was characterized as misguided clemency (Isichei, 1987, p. 197). Beyond encouraging a culture of impunity and promoting a circle of violence, it prepared a pool from where future insurgents were drawn. It was not until after 2010 that this approach gradually changed following the metamorphosis of the sect to an insurgency group.

The failure of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the initial Joint Task Force, which launched “Operation Flush” to curb the Boko Haram menace, led to the deployment of the Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) in 2011. The SMJTF comprised personnel from the NPF, the Department of State Security (DSS), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and its number geometrically increased to 100,000 soldiers to confront the security challenge (Falode, 2016A, 2016B). The JTF operation code named “Operation Restore Order” initially involved gathering information about the operations of the sect and later involved the use of security forces to conduct road blocks, cordon and search operations, and armed patrols. It also entailed guarding of key points, surveillance, protection of very important persons, and carrying out military raids. The purpose obviously was to limit the operating space for the sect and to eliminate or arrest members of the group and their supporters (Umar, 2013).

The need to complement the SMJTF and familiarize them with the theater of crisis led to the formal recognition and training of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), composed mainly of vigilante groups, hunters, farmers, and youths in the areas most affected by the activities of the Boko Haram. In particular, the CJTF acted as the unofficial intelligence-gathering unit of the SMJTF and, in many instances, acted also as the first line of defense against the insurgents. This was the case in March 2014, when the SMJTF was able to foil a bomb attack on an internally displaced persons’ camp in Maiduguri due to the timely intelligence provided by the CJTF (Falode, 2016A, 2016B). In May 2013, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the three northeastern states of Yobe, Adamawa, and Borno, the main stronghold of the group in Nigeria. In addition to sourcing arms from friendly countries, a new military formation known as the 7th Division was established in Maiduguri with a mission to contain and rout Boko Haram. Giving further bite to government efforts was the enactment of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act in 2011, the constitution of the Usman Galtimari Committee by the Goodluck Jonathan’s administration to proffer solution to the problem of insurgency, and the training of more military personnel in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (Falode, 2016A, 2016B).

The Anti-Terrorism Act criminalizes terrorism and defines acts of terrorism and related offenses and addresses issues related to terrorism funding, the legal position of properties owned by identified terrorists, and the mutual assistance, extradition, and investigation and prosecution of terrorists and sponsors of terrorism in Nigeria. Additionally, the propagation and dissemination of information in any form calculated to cause panic, evoke violence, or intimidate government, a person, or group of persons all fall within activities criminalized by the Act. Other government efforts included the

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installation of closed circuit television cameras in many parts of Abuja aimed at enhancing surveillance and gathering evidence for the investigation and prosecution of terrorism-related offenses as well as the development and broadcast of security tips in mass media. These were facilitated by the incremental growth in the defense budget from 100 billion naira in 2010 to more than 1 trillion naira by 2014. In all these, the government did not discountenance the offer of strategic dialogue with the group, which was spurned by the sect (Falode, 2016A, 2016B; Gilbert, 2014; Umar, 2013).

Of particular importance were the activities of the white South African mercenaries known as STTEP (Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection), whose tactic of relentless pursuit actually matched and overwhelmed Boko Haram's hit-and-run tactics and put the group on the defensive. Even when Boko Haram was pronounced technically defeated in 2015, its attacks continued not in the conventional form but in the guerrilla tactics it started with. Significantly, the revival and strengthening of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in late 2015, comprising troops from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, further degraded the capacity of the sect (Falode, 2016A, 2016B). Similarly, the establishment in early 2016 by the Nigerian military of a "combat motorbike battalion" consisting of a rider and another riding shotgun, obviously an adaptation of the policy of "relentless pursuit" created by STTEP, had ensured faster, unannounced responses to the group's attacks, characterized by flexibility, dynamism, and fluidity unlike the earlier not-too-effective kinetic strategy, thus enabling the military to deal with the group more proactively (Falode, 2016A, 2016B). Whereas the capacity of the group to delegitimize the state had been considerably degraded, the group had continued with occasional raids of villages and towns mostly for food, suicide bombings, and kidnappings. The dislodging of the group from their hold in the Sambisa forest and the negotiation for the release of 106 of the Chibok schoolgirls abducted in April 2014 represented the highest points of the success recorded by the government in checking Boko Haram onslaught. This was also the case with the rescue of 104 Dapchi schoolgirls abducted in 2018 and the continued raids of Sambisa hideouts of the sect. This notwithstanding, the problem of uncoordinated and inefficient intelligence gathering persisted, particularly given the unending rivalry among different arms of the security services in Nigeria. This was evident in the inability to arrest or neutralize Abubakar Shekau and other leaders of the group and to prevent their regrouping following their initial dislodgement.

## **Engaging Boko Haram in the Context of Global Jihad Movement**

The attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, by the al-Qaeda terrorist group awakened the world to the reality of a problem to which it had not paid adequate attention, perhaps because of its clandestine nature. The desire, particularly on the part of the United States, to fight this brazen manifestation of insurgency informed its declaration of war in diverse forms, resulting in the elimination

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of notable insurgent leaders and the bursting of terrorist cells in different places. As rightly observed by Rabasa et al. (2006), the death of Osama bin Laden and the key operatives of the group, as well as the loss of his operating base, was not indicative of the end of war on terror given the existence of terrorist groups that are not formally part of al-Qaeda but have assimilated al-Qaeda's worldview and concept of mass-casualty terrorist attacks. The emergence of the IS lends credence. Jihadism, seen as an offshoot of Islamic revivalism of the 1960s and 1970s, generally applied to various insurgent and terrorist movements whose ideology is based on the notion of jihad. It has subsequently been applied to various insurgent and terrorist movements whose ideology is based on the notion of jihad. The IS, a Salafi-jihadist militant group that follows a fundamentalist Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam formally declared the establishment of a "caliphate," a state governed in accordance with Islamic law or Sharia by God's deputy on earth, or caliph, in June 2014.

Meanwhile, as Clark (2017) notes, following its considerable loss of territory in Iraq to the US-backed Iraq forces, ISIS is being forced to change its strategy and tactics, transitioning from an insurgent organization to a terrorist group. With its diminishing capacity, it is not able to hold and seize territory, exercise sovereignty over a population, or even operate in the open as armed units and engage in mass mobilization; instead it conducts attacks with members operating in small cells, rarely being able to hold territory. This transition, according to Clark (2017), could lead ISIS to shift resources to bolster existing franchises in Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt while also simultaneously seeking to gain entry into other failed states and ungoverned territories sympathetic to its Salafi-jihadist ideology, from the North Caucasus to Southeast Asia. The rapport between ISIS and the Boko Haram insurgency is explainable from this dimension.

Besides the group's link with Mauritania as early as 2005 following an invitation by a dissident group, the widening scope of Boko Haram's objectives caused it to publicly identify with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, obviously for the purpose of networking with other transnational groups (Onapajo et al., 2012, pp. 345-346). The link with AQIM apparently was a product of this public declaration. Arguably, the group touted links with the AQIM, Al-Shabaab, the Al-Qaeda Movement in the Arabian Peninsula, and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), through which it had networked and received sympathy and inspiration. Offers of training and financial support, the possibility of safe haven or places of refuge in situations of heavy onslaught on the group, and access to stolen and looted arms smuggled through the desert from Libya had aided its transformation (Falode, 2016A, 2016B; Onapajo et al., 2012, p. 347; Weeraratne, 2017, p. 615). A very strategic move by the global jihad movement to incorporate Boko Haram into its fold and strengthen its hold in West Africa was the emergence of the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP). This followed the declaration of a pledge of allegiance to ISIS by Abubakar Shekau in March 2015. Gilpin (2017) identifies the reversals suffered by both groups on the battlefield in early 2015 and the thinking that both groups could gain from the publicity as its basis for arguing further that while ISIS needed to project the notion of an expanding global caliphate that is firmly under its control, Boko Haram

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was struggling to burnish its credentials beyond Nigeria. In addition, the ISIS brand bestowed a semblance of organized lethality on Boko Haram, which apparently expected financial support and an influx of fighters from ISIS. But for the notional territorial gains ISIS made by accepting the Boko Haram pledge, it also inherited an ideologically fractured group exemplified by the split within the movement, with Abubakar Shekau referring to his faction by the group's original name, "Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad," and Abu Musab al-Barnawi using the post-March 2015 moniker, "Islamic State's West Africa Province" (Gilpin, 2017). Arising from these affiliations was the increased lethality of the sect, which earned it the distinction of being the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2014 by the Global Terrorism Index of 2015 (Gilpin, 2017).

The externalization of the crises was not limited to the Boko Haram sect alone. Falode (2016A, 2016B) sees the need on the part of the government to draw the attention of Nigeria's neighbors and possibly compel them to prevent cross-boundary attacks, as well as garner international military and political support, as major calculations. Thus, in seeking to prevent the tentacle of the group from growing and also uproot them effectively at home and in neighboring African countries, particularly through the establishment of joint security patrols, Nigeria signed both bilateral and multilateral security agreements with Cameroon in February 2012 and Niger in October 2012. This was in addition to other pacts with strategic partners like Britain for counterterrorism training. Significantly, the African Union-sanctioned MNJTF has considerably strengthened the war against Boko Haram. Originally established in 1994 to combat trans-border banditry in northern Nigeria and comprising troops from Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Benin, its scope was expanded to tackle the sect in the West African subregion and provide a platform to engage in counterterrorism (Falode, 2016A, 2016B). Its headquarters was relocated from Baga, Bornu State, in Nigeria to N'Djamena in Chad following the coordinated attack launched against it by Boko Haram in January 2015. However, in seeking to actualize its goal of defeating and dismantling Boko Haram, Gilpin (2017) observes that the modalities for its funding and its organization remain a challenge, stressing that out of the \$700 million budget for the proposed 8,700-person regional force, only \$250 million was pledged, of which less was disbursed. Gilpin (2017) also identifies other challenges such as difficult coordination due to distraction of members by other domestic issues and the slump in oil prices, which had affected operations and deployment from Chad and Nigeria, two countries that account for almost half of the pledge. With an initial mandate lasting 12 months and headed by a Nigerian commander, with a Cameroonian deputy and a Chadian chief of staff in what appeared like an ad hoc arrangement (Comolli, 2015, p. 110), coordination within or of the MNJTF was hampered by the absence of any clear coordinating mechanism, with troops from each of the four contributing countries following their national chains of command and using equipment and systems that may not be interoperable, thus making it more of a loose coalition of the willing. There were also the problems of mistrust among members of the Task Force; uneven levels of training, professionalism, and capability; poor equipment; and an inability to operate hurriedly purchased equipment (Comolli, 2015, pp. 111-114). These challenges notwithstanding, the MNJTF has made significant progress

wresting control of territory from the Boko Haram sect, destroying their bases and containing the movement of forces and materials in the Lake Chad basin region (Falode, 2016A, 2016B; Gilpin, 2017).

## Conclusion

The Boko Haram crises have grown in scope and dimension, with the group metamorphosing and changing strategies, seeking international links, and assuming greater notoriety given its growing sophistication and brutality, its massive destruction of lives and properties, and its threat to national, regional, and international security. Growing Islamism exemplified in the proliferation of jihad groups and the daring nature of the global jihad movement has given impetus to the group's activities and defines the nature of the war. Given its global dimension, Islamism also defines the limit of national and transnational military forces and in a way the inability to define how and when the war will end. But when it is considered that, unlike conventional warfare where the battle line is appropriately defined, insurgency with no definite battleground is more complex and could be far-reaching, it is understandable why the war on terror, whether at the level of Boko Haram or global jihad groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, will take a long time to bring under effective control. The examples of countries that have experienced guerilla war and other forms of insurgencies are pertinent in this regard. Beyond the traditional militaristic way of dealing with religious riots and later insurgency, the employment of subtle approaches, such as encouraging insurgents to lay down their arms through dialogue and propaganda, followed by a well-thought-out process of deradicalization and rehabilitation, will go a long way to deplete the ranks of the Boko Haram sect.

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### **Notes:**

- (1.) Other militia groups that operated in the North East were the “Sara-Suka” in Bauchi and “Yan-Kalere” in Gombe states, among others (see Bintube, 2015).
- (2.) Another source said that nearly 20 of the sect members were killed (see Salkida, 2012).
- (3.) Other sources reported that as many as 900 people were killed in Maiduguri alone (see Loimeier, 2012, p. 151).

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