



The Boko Haram and Nigerian Jihadism

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Executive Summary

- * Despite its growing notoriety, Boko Haram is but a small component of a wider and more convoluted Islamist-Jihadist challenge to the entire Heart of Africa – of which northern Nigeria is but an important part. The key to comprehending, confronting and ultimately defeating Boko Haram is thus in addressing the entire Islamist-Jihadist challenge at the Heart of Africa.
- * In mid-June 2010, Boko Haram became formally associated with the global Jihadist movement via the regional entity AQIM. Nigerian Jihadists have since played major roles in regional Jihadist struggles such as Mali, Niger and Somalia.
- * In early 2012, Ansaru separated as a distinct Al-Qaida-affiliated entity dedicated to attacking foreign targets in and around Nigeria in support of global and regional Jihadist causes.
- * Starting the second half of 2013, the Nigerian Jihadist movement – mainly Boko Haram and Ansaru – sought to formulate a viable command structure. There emerged a pragmatic organizational framework under the banner of Boko Haram that seems to be largely functioning by summer 2014.
- * The doctrine and strategy of the Nigerian Jihadist movement evolve. The sought-after destruction of the Nigerian state through fratricidal carnage is no longer only in revenge for being rejected by the grassroots, but also in pursuit of the larger quest for the establishment of an Islamist Sahelian-Maghrebi Caliphate that will replace existing states.
- * In practical terms, though, there still exists separation between internal and regional operations with most commanders engaged in domestic operations only.
- * The Nigerian Jihadist movement expanded and institutionalized its presence in, and cooperation with, regional Jihadist fronts and Shuras. The Nigerian Jihadists are rewarded with lavish weapon supplies and advanced training from their Al-Qaida-affiliated regional allies.
- * The internal strategy of the Boko Haram is based on a combination of terrorizing the population through carnage and challenging the government with spectacular strikes. Boko Haram is focusing increasingly on martyr car-bombing against high-value targets.
- * The most disturbing aspect of the Jihadist ascent is the penetration and subversion of the highest levels of the Nigerian security and intelligence services.
- * The brewing crisis in Nigeria has global and continental ramifications. Nigeria produces 2.6% of the annual international consumption and Nigeria's energy reserves are among the most unutilized and thus have long-term promise. With a population nearing 150 million, Nigeria is the most important country of sub-Saharan Africa and has the largest economy. If Nigeria explodes – the rest of Africa will burn and the West will feel the pain acutely.



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About the Author of this Issue

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State. He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (*New York Times* No. 1 Bestseller & *Washington Post* No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (*New York Times* Bestseller & *Foreign Affairs Magazine* Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports. Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



Yossef Bodansky



ANALYSIS

Boko Haram (Western Education Is Sacrilege in the Hausa language) burst into world attention after the mid-April 2014 kidnapping of more than 300 mostly Christian school girls between the ages of 16 and 18 from Chibok village in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. Two months later, the majority of the girls have already been forced to convert to Islam and remain in captivity. They are scattered in groups among a few camps in northeastern Nigeria (mainly in the Sambisa Forrest Reserve in eastern Borno State close to the border with Cameroon), Cameroon's northern sliver (particularly in the Kolofata area, about 15 km from the border with Nigeria), the southwestern corner of Chad across the Cameroon border, and the Birao region of the Central African Republic near the Sudan border. The videos posted by Boko Haram are believed to have been shot in the vicinity of the Sambisa Forrest Reserve in eastern Borno State. Several girls were sold as bounty-wives to Boko Haram mujahedin for 2,000 Naira (~US\$12) each. "Some of them have been married off to insurgents. A medieval kind of slavery. You go and capture women and then sell them off," community elder Pogu Bitrus of Chibok town reported. Boko Haram's Amir Hassan Ali of Maiduguri boasted he already married two of the girls while in the Sambisa forest. In early May, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau warned that other girls might be sold as slaves should Abuja refuse negotiations. "Allah instructed me to sell them, they are his properties and I will carry out his instructions. ... By Allah, I will sell them in the marketplace," he vowed. Abuja's insistence that the Army has long known where the girls' whereabouts is irrelevant for no rescue operation is possible without risking the lives of all or most of the girls.

Despite its growing notoriety, Boko Haram is but a small component of a wider and more convoluted Islamist-Jihadist challenge to the entire Heart of Africa – of which northern Nigeria is but an important part. The key to comprehending, confronting and ultimately defeating Boko Haram is thus in addressing the entire Islamist-Jihadist challenge at the Heart of Africa.

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The development of the region that includes contemporary northern Nigeria can be traced to the growth of caravan traffic. The westward expansion of the Muslim world boosted the revival of socio-political life. Already in the 10th Century, the cities of Kano and Katsina were key centers of trans-Saharan caravan traffic. These cities had a unique cosmopolitan character, bringing together both people and cultural influence from as far away as the Middle East and southern Africa. The aggregate impact of this foreign influence resulted in uniquely high levels of social development. By the 12th Century, Islamic civilization kept spreading into northern Nigeria along the caravan routes from the Sudan to Timbuktu, in the Mali Empire. Islam gained tangible foothold with distinct socio-political characteristics in the 14th Century – contributing to the ascent, by the 15th Century, of the Hausa city-states as the vibrant trading centers of the Heart of Africa. Throughout, scholars from the Mali Empire occupied important administrative posts in the Hausa city-states.

The Borno Empire to the north gradually replaced the Hausa as the regional center of power and influence during the 17th and 18th Centuries. The loss in 1759 of control over the oasis town of Bilma and access to the Trans-Saharan trade signaled the beginning of the end of the Borno Empire – which culminated in dismemberment to autonomous clusters by 1780. The forces that filled the ensuing vacuum in the early 19th Century created the socio-political dynamics and posture that still dominate northern Nigeria two centuries later.



At the turn of the 19th Century, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, an urbanized Fulani Islamic scholar in the Hausa-ruled city of Gobir, introduced the reliance on Islamic values in order to further socio-economic grievances. He unified nomadic Fulani, disgruntled Hausa peasantry, and Gobir urbanites who joined him in forced exile in Gudu – all of whom suffered under the despotism and corruption of the Hausa kings – into a military-religious force. Shehu Usman dan Fodio led the army of his followers on a Jihad aimed at purifying Islamic practices in the region by installing new righteous leadership in the Hausa city-states. In early 1804, dan Fodio was proclaimed Amir al-Muminin (The Defender of the Faithful) by his followers in Gudu. He immediately nominated a number of Flag Bearers amongst his followers – thus laying the foundations of the political structure of the Jihad. Between 1804 and 1808, dan Fodio's Jihad toppled fourteen Hausa kings and replaced them with Fulani emirs. These emirs swore allegiance to dan Fodio and jointly established a Caliphate in what is today northern Nigeria. In 1809, dan Fodio's son Muhammad Bello founded the city of Sokoto that became the capital of what was now known as the Sokoto Caliphate. Until the British conquest in 1903, the Sokoto Caliphate was among the largest and most powerful empires in sub-Saharan Africa. The British Government formally organized the territories of the region as a unified Nigeria in 1914.

After the end of the Second World War, Britain began moving Nigeria toward independence. Considering its size and diversity, the country-to-be was organized in the form of a federated state. The British established a comprehensive structure of self-governance at all levels with fairly well trained and prepared local officials and functionaries. It was intended that they would ultimately take over the running of the country on their own once independence came. Nigeria was granted independence in October 1960 in a peaceful and fairly well organized manner. The borders of independent Nigeria were determined in the map rooms in Berlin on the basis of the reach of European colonial officials and the skills of diplomats, and not on the basis of the natural habitats and economic spheres of the local population. Moreover, although the British authorities gave Nigeria a uniquely positive treatment, their socio-economic development programs were driven more by the self-interest of London, than by the desire to develop the local population. Now, to ensure the unity of the huge diverse country in the face of internal strife and economic crises, as well as external pressures, successive Nigerian governments – both civilian and military – succumbed to the lure of authoritarian centralization at the expense of local rule.

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Meanwhile, Nigeria, and particularly the restive north, was not immune to the ideological tidal waves sweeping across the Third World and particularly Africa. Political militant Islam re-emerged as an integral part of the ideological revival in the post-Colonial era in the form of "a leftist Islamic ideology" with violent revolutionary taint. The French Marxist scholar Maxime Rodinson noted that the evolution of the revolutionary post-independence struggles transformed "the implicit ideology of the Third World revolt" into a widespread adoption of "militant aspects of Marxism. Some people do so by presenting such tendencies as parts of the 'essential' Islam." Thus, Islam emerged as the expression of the cause of the Third World and the champion of the down trodden masses.

Yet, the main outbursts of Jihadist violence in northern Nigeria were by indigenous groups led by charismatic preachers. Most important was Muhammadu Marwa – a Cameroonian who emigrated to northern Nigeria in 1945 and assumed a leading role in confronting the British. He continued to fight central authority after independence. Known as Maitatsine (He Who Curses in the Hausa language), Marwa organized in the early-1970's a large militant following called the Yan Tatsine (Followers of Maitatsine in the Hausa language). In 1980-85, they



launched the first Jihadist uprising in northern Nigeria – renouncing the spread of the evils of westernization and state administration. Marwa himself was killed in the initial riots but his death only exacerbated the violence.

The large and rapidly growing Muslim population of Sub-Saharan Africa intrigued the Islamist and Jihadist leaders. Starting the mid-1970's, the Iranian Islamists sought to use the large Lebanese-Shiite population as a springboard for the radicalization of Africa's Muslims. The Iranians met with success in the 1980's when they expanded their reach to Marxist groups and convinced them to adopt Sunni Islamism-Jihadism as the key to lavish support. In April 1987, Tehran conducted an international conference on Islam and the Mustazafin (Oppressed in Persian) to address the revolutionary struggle in the Third World and Iranian financial and military assistance. "The freedom movements ... especially Islamic movements, are very important to us. We have always supported them from the beginning, and we shall continue to do so," declared then chairman of the Iranian parliament Hojjat ol-Islam Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani. Concurrently, Libyan intelligence also sought to capitalize on Islamic radicalization – spending huge amounts of money, as well as providing extensive training and large quantities of weapons, throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. However, as the Jihadist movement in Libya escalated its war against Muammar Qadhafi – Libyan intelligence swiftly disengaged from supporting all other Islamist-Jihadist causes.

In the early-1990's, Sudan's Hassan al-Turabi launched the first dedicated Islamist drive to harness and control the radicalization of Sub-Saharan Africa's Muslims. Tehran and Khartoum closely coordinated their involvement throughout Africa. They jointly transferred financial assistance, placed operatives, and established stockpiles of weapons and explosives. Meanwhile, Turabi promises to expand the work of the International Muslim Brothers and various al-Jihad organizations in sub-Saharan Africa in order to spread Sunni militant Islam and establish entities loyal to the Islamic Revolution. Throughout the Heart of Africa the surge was led by the Senegalese Ahmad Khalifa Niassé, aka the Ayatollah of Kaolack, who advocated a Black African liberation struggle tailored after the FIS struggle in Algeria. In spring 1993, Mohammed Sharif Mahdavi, the Director of the Africa Department in the Foreign Ministry, elucidated the Iranian doctrine in terms of continuing the legacy of the African struggles. "For West Africa ... the Islamic Revolution of Iran evoked a vivid memory of its past history when Islamic scholars like Shehu Umar Tall, Shehu Usman dan Fodio and others, transformed society and created Muslim empires. ... The merit of the Islamic Revolution in Iran is that it has rekindled the spirit of Islamic Revival and revitalized the confidence of the Muslim Ummah in its potentials and capabilities. ... Iran is the pioneer in the new phase of the struggle for a Muslim World Order."

Concurrently, the then fledgling global Jihadist movement dispatched emissaries and activists to establish a comprehensive network all over Africa. In early-2001, Osama bin Laden specifically urged the Muslims of Nigeria, as well as of other West African states, to rise up against what he called US "enslavement". That was to be the beginning of an African Jihad. Toward this end, bin Laden dispatched in June 2001 a most senior aide – Imad Abdelwahid Ahmed Alwan, a Yemeni – to conduct a major survey of the Islamist hot-spots of Africa. Alwan traveled from Afghanistan to Chad, Niger, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria and Algeria. He was most impressed by the growing radicalization and militancy of the Muslim communities in northern Nigeria and strongly recommended massive help by the supreme global leadership of Jihad.

However, the violence Alwan witnessed in Nigeria had little to do with bin Laden's calls for a global Jihad and a confrontation between Islamdom and the West. Starting 2000, northern Nigeria was rocked by cycles of clashes between Christians and Muslims over the establishment of Shariah States in the predominantly Muslim



parts of northern Nigeria. This confrontation was itself but a phase in a cyclical process prevalent throughout the entire Heart of Africa. There exists a sectarian fault line that runs from Uganda to Senegal/Gambia and is dominated by the traditional struggle over water and land rights between the predominantly Muslim nomads and the predominantly Christian homesteaders. At the turn of the 21st Century, these clashes evolved and escalated into anti-Christian Jihads. In the Nigerian section of this fault line, the conflict between nomadic Fulani and Hausa homesteaders was exacerbated and transformed into a vicious Jihad against the entire local Christian population as well as Muslim communities that refused to abandon modernization. In fall 2001, around the time Alwan was in northern Nigeria, intense Christian-Muslim violence flared anew – exacerbated by the growing flow of funds from Arab Islamist-Jihadist charities. At least a thousand people were killed in this cycle of communal violence.

The street violence of fall 2001 saw the first emergence of extremely violent groups of thugs that swore allegiance to a religious teacher from Yobe State called Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. In the first half of 2002, Yusuf consolidated these groups into an organization he first called the Yusufiyya Dawah (The Disciples of Yusuf in Arabic) movement and subsequently adopted the populist name Boko Haram. The group was formally founded in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, as the Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'a ala Minhaj as-Salaf (The People of the Way of the Prophet and the Community According to the Salafi Approach in Arabic) with Yusuf as its religious guide and de-facto leader. In early-2004, Boko Haram moved to Kanamma, Yobe State, close to the border with Niger. It set up a base called "Afghanistan" for the establishment of a real Muslim society that rejected all things Western and the conduct of military training. Soon afterwards, armed detachments of Boko Haram started attacking police outposts and killing police officers. Among the locals, the members of the Boko Haram were known as "the Nigerian Taliban". Yusuf now sought to consolidate control over the region's Islamist forces. Hence, Boko Haram gangs attacked rival Islamic mosques in addition to the usual list of police stations, local prisons, and Christian churches. In early-2009, Yusuf declared total war on the Nigerian modern state. "Democracy and the current system of education must be changed otherwise this war that is yet to start would continue for long," Yusuf decreed. On July 30, 2009, Yusuf was shot dead while in police custody in Maiduguri. Abuja would later claim that Yusuf was killed trying to escape – but nobody believed this excuse.

Meanwhile, around the turn of the 21st Century northern Nigeria was increasingly riddled with radicalized groupings and thus increasingly susceptible to the spread of the Jihadist message. The technological and information revolution made it easier for the Jihadist message to reach even the most remote parts of Africa. Cheaper and easily available air transportation enabled would-be fighters, commanders and leaders of Jihadist movements to reach centers of both Islamist-Jihadist scholarship and military expertise in the Middle East and South Asia. They acquired knowledge, funds and weapons for their home constituencies. By the middle of the decade, the global Jihadist system – the so-called al-Qaida – started emphasizing the emergence of regional trends and movements unique to local conditions. This evolution enabled the distinct Islamist-Jihadist movements of northern Nigeria to have better understanding and cooperation with "the center" – opening the door to greater amounts of support, training and supplies. This trend continues and keeps reinforcing and radicalizing the rapidly expanding Jihadist movement throughout northern Nigeria and the entire Heart of Africa. The main outcome has been the further integration of the inwardly looking Jihadist groups of the Heart of Africa into the global Jihadist movement.

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In mid-June 2010, Boko Haram became formally associated with the global Jihadist movement via the regional entity Al-Qaidat Jihad fi al-Maghreb al-Islami (The Foundation of Jihad in the Islamic West in Arabic, also known by the acronym AQIM, which is really more of a strategic-theological authority than an operational command). AQIM leader Abu Mousab Abdel Wadoud (aka Abdel Malek Drouqdal) announced that al-Qaida was “prepared to provide weapons training to [Boko Haram’s] sons and to provide them with whatever support we can – men, arms, ammunition, and supplies – in order to enable you to defend our people in Nigeria and to repel the wrongs of the Crusader minority.” Abdel Wadoud stressed that the entire global Jihadist movement was committed to markedly expanding presence and operations in sub-Saharan Africa because it provides for “strategic depth that would give [the Jihadists] a bigger scope for maneuvers.” It is impossible for al-Qaida to operate in West Africa without gaining a solid foothold in Nigeria, the region’s leading power – a foothold that the cooperation with Boko Haram is expected to provide.

In late-June, Imam Abubakar Shekau (aka Imam Abu Muhammed Abubakar bin Muhammed Shekau) resurfaced as the leader of Boko Haram. He announced that Boko Haram was now ready to launch attacks on “western culture” in Nigeria, and reiterated that Boko Haram was first and foremost committed to the imposition of strict Sharia Law throughout Nigeria. On July 11, Shekau issued a communique addressed to leaders of al-Qaida worldwide which stressed all-Jihadist themes to convey that Boko Haram was now an integral part of their milieu. He swore allegiance to all key Jihadist leaders. He defined the Jihad waged by Boko Haram as an integral component of the global Jihad that does not recognize modern states – including “some African territories called Nigeria” – and their boundaries. Shekau warned of the escalation of Jihad. “Infidels, hypocrites and apostates: Do not think Jihad is over. Rather Jihad has just begun. O America, die with your fury!”

The joining with the global Jihadist movement came in the aftermath of a few years of cultivating contacts and building trust. Back in 2003, Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia via Sudan ostensibly to study and do the Hajj. He made the first contacts with the Jihadist leadership. A Hausa-speaking AQIM senior commander known as Abu-Mihjan the Nigerian was instrumental in establishing the early theological and thrust building relations. Another manifestation of the growing importance of the Nigerian Jihad was the correspondence between Sheikh Abu-Muhammad Al-Maqdisi (real name Isam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi), one of the foremost Jihadist theological authorities, and Abu-Zaytuna (no further identification), a Nigerian Salafist-Jihadist scholar who sought advice on “how best to strengthen the Jihadist movement” in Nigeria. Abu-Muhammad Al-Maqdisi and Abu-Zaytuna corresponded between April 2008, when Al-Maqdisi was released from Jordanian jail, and September 2010, when he was rearrested.

In the aftermath of the crackdown in summer 2009, several Boko Haram would-be commanders escaped Nigeria to neighboring countries and then to the Middle East. Shekau fled to Niger, Chad and on to Sudan where he received comprehensive training for he returned to Nigeria a year later fluent in Arabic. Yusuf’s third in command Mamman Nur – a Cameroon-born Shuwa Arab raised in Maiduguri who is also known as Muhammed Marwan – also escaped to Somalia where he received advanced training from the Shabaab. He also visited the Sahel where he trained with AQIM senior commanders. All other Boko Haram commanders were also received with open arms by local Jihadist leaders and provided with advance training, mainly in Niger, Algeria, Sudan and Somalia, and, upon their leaving for home, with weapons and other terrorist equipment such as fuses and communications gear. Boko Haram would-be commanders acquired at the time the most important skill of recruiting and indoctrinating would-be martyrdom bombers. There must be several expert teams in northern Nigeria given the large number of martyr bombers and their diverse areas of operations.



Most significant was the involvement in Somalia of Hassan (aka Jimale, Yusuf, and Abdi Madobe) because it proves that Ayman al-Zawahiri and the upper-most Jihadist leadership are acquainted with and support the Boko Haram. Hassan is a former Sudanese military officer in his 50's who is the senior military trainer for the Shabaab. Around 2006-7, Zawahiri personally tasked Hassan with the training in Somalia of African Jihadists of importance who could not travel to Afghanistan-Pakistan for advanced training. Hassan then developed specialized training strategies and programs for the al-Qaida affiliates in Africa. In mid-2009, several Boko Haram fighters and commanders were enrolled in the training programs run by Hassan.

In March 2011, Hassan left Somalia for northern Nigeria in the company of Mamman Nur and other Boko Haram commanders and fighters who had just completed their training. In mid-June 2011, Boko Haram issued a communique hailing the impact on the returning fighters. "Very soon, we will wage Jihad," the communique read. "Our Jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training on warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable." In winter 2011/12, a Nigerian senior commander and several Yemeni, Kenyan and Ethiopian expert trainers from the Somalia camps joined Hassan in northern Nigeria in order to improve the professionalism and capabilities of local Jihadist forces. Simply put, Hassan would not have trained the Boko Haram in Somalia, let alone travel to Nigeria to help them, without the explicit authorization from Ayman al-Zawahiri.

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Boko Haram returned to life and public awareness between mid-2010 early 2012. The leadership capitalized on the gradual return of trained fighters and commanders to rebuild the organization in accordance with the guidelines received from al-Qaida. Although Boko Haram communiqués issued in Shekau's name implied a unified organization – the objective conditions in northern Nigeria, particularly problems of transportation and communications, made it impossible. Boko Haram organized around three cores with distinct commanders. Abubakar Shekau focused on rebuilding Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria with emphasis on populist grass-roots and headline-grabbing activities. Khalid al-Barnawi, a native of Borno State who initially joined Sahel-based Jihadists before 2005 and rose to prominence running joint operations with Mokhtar Belmokhtar between Algeria and Niger and all the way to Mauritania, used fighters returning from AQIM and the Shabaab training camps to establish a network of cells in northwestern Nigeria focusing on al-Qaida-style spectacular operations such as car-bombs and martyrdom operations. Other regional commanders and leaders were Adam Kamar in Kano, Kabiru Sokoto in Sokoto, and Abu Muhammed in Kaduna. Mamman Nur ran the third core that focused on building an al-Qaida-style professional core for the Boko Haram. He was assisted by foreign experts sent to Nigeria including attack planning expert Abu-Mahjin from Chad, logistics experts Abubakar Kilakam from Niger, and financing expert Muhiddin Abdullahi from Sudan who had Saudi connections facilitating fund-raising. Nur also maintained the communications with the Jihadist supreme leaders in Afghanistan-Pakistan, AQIM, the Shabaab, AQAP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and a host of other Jihadist entities.

Meanwhile, Boko Haram launched an unprecedented wave of terrorism throughout northern Nigeria. The wave was characterized by a spate of low-quality localized attrition of society punctuated by headline-grabbing spectacular operations. The first spectacular strike was launched on September 7, 2010. Boko Haram attacked a federal prison in Bauchi State and freed more than 850 prisoners – 100 of them Boko Haram fighters captured in the crackdown of summer 2009. Shekau utilized the public fixation with the prison break to reiterate the Jihadist credentials of Boko Haram. He announced that their ultimate objective is the return to



brotherly community of pure Islam. Shekau's communique also introduced the formal name of Boko Haram – Jama'tu Ahlus Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad (Community of the People Committed to the Propagation of [the Prophet's] Teachings and Jihad in phonetic Arabic). The next few months saw constant improvement in the tactics and quality of weapons – mainly IEDs and car-bombs – of the Boko Haram forces. Boko Haram also embarked on kidnapping-for-ransom and bank robberies in order to fund itself. Concurrently, small groups wielding machetes and using both hunting and assault rifles continued to maraud the centers of northern cities – killing real and imaginary enemies, and sowing terror. On June 16, 2011, Boko Haram launched Nigeria's first martyrdom operation – using a car-bomb to attack the police headquarters compound in Abuja. There quickly followed another martyrdom bombing of the UN building in Abuja in August. Escalation of terrorist strikes – both at the grassroots level and spectacular operations – continued into 2012.

The initial success of Boko Haram led to growing tension with the global Jihadist leadership. The leadership passed messages via the most senior leaders of AQIM that the lavish support and training were provided in order to further the global Jihad against the West and not the goals of a parochial pretentious Jihadist movement that Boko Haram was at the time. The primary venues for these messages were al-Barnawi and Kamar. Ayman al-Zawahiri communicated directly with Kamar in 2011-12 regarding the role of Nigeria's Jihadist entities in the global Jihad. Al-Barnawi concurred that the funding, training and weapons from AQIM must be used for attacking foreign targets in and around Nigeria instead of against Nigerian targets – particularly local Muslims. Although Shekau continued to insist that internal Nigerian operations be given ultimate priority, he would not cut ties with either AQIM or the Barnawi faction. Toward this end, Shekau nominated Habibu Yusuf (aka Babagana Assalafi), one of Barnawi's closest disciples, as his deputy and put him in charge of relations with AQIM. Assalafi was killed in March 2013 during a military raid in Sokoto.

Initially, al-Barnawi claimed a few spectacular operations under Al-Qaidat Jihad in the Lands Beyond the Sahel. The global Jihadist leadership did not approve of the gesture since Boko Haram remained the formal ally of al-Qaida. Instead, in January 2012, al-Barnawi, initially using the nom de guerre Abu-Usamatal Ansari, announced the formation of Jama'at Ansar al Muslimin fi Bilad al Sudan (Supporters/Partisans of Muslims in the Land of Black Africans in Arabic) as a distinct entity separate from Boko Haram. It soon became known by the shorthand Ansaru. The best AQIM-trained operatives – the Yan Sahara (The Sahara Men in the Hausa language) – joined the Ansaru, and brought with them a lot of the sophisticated systems received from AQIM and the Shaabab. AQIM-trained Adam Kamar (aka Abu Yasir) from Kano was the commander of the Sahara Men. Kamar was killed in a shoot-out in August 2012. Barnawi did not replace him. Another key commander that joined the Ansaru was Mummodo Abu Fatima – the foremost expert in organizing martyrdom operations starting with the Abuja attacks in summer 2011.

During 2012, Ansaru refined its message along the tenets of AQIM – focusing on the spread of anti-Western Jihad throughout the Heart of Africa – rather than the establishment of an Islamic State in northern Nigeria and fratricidal violence against Nigerian Muslims in revenge for the crackdown of 2009. Ansaru's forces increased their participation in regional operations in Niger, Cameroon and increasingly Mali. A few Boko Haram fighters led by Shekau also fought in northern Mali. Shekau was wounded in late 2012 while fighting in Gao. He was evacuated back to Borno in early 2013, but for fear for his safety he was moved to Amchide, Cameroon, until he recovered in August 2013. As well, 200-250 Nigerian Jihadists, mostly Ansaru fighters but also Boko Haram people, completed advanced training at an AQIM camp in Mali. They learned to use Technicals (weapons mounted on 4x4 vehicles) and a new generation of bomb fuses.



In late 2012, on the eve of the French military intervention in Mali, the Nigerian Jihadists were provided with several fully equipped Technicals and a few trucks filled with Libya-origin weapons and ammunition, and were sent to Nigeria via Niger. The newly arrived Technicals were first used with great effectiveness in the February 16, 2013, sophisticated night attack on a workers' camp on the Kano-Maiduguri highway and distraction strikes on a prison and a police station. Ansaru claimed responsibility and explained the attack was in revenge for "the transgressions and atrocities done to the religion of Allah ... by the European countries in many places such as Afghanistan and Mali." Meanwhile, in order to recognize AQIM's help, Shekau posted back on November 29, 2012, a lengthy video saluting global Jihadists and expressing Boko Haram's solidarity with al-Qaida's objectives and leaders. On December 24, Ansaru kidnapped a French engineer in Katsina, 50 kms from the border with Niger. Ansaru announced it would continue attacking French targets until France ends the ban on the veil and its "major role in the planned attack on the Islamic state in northern Mali."

The January 2013 French-led intervention in Mali excited the entire Jihadist movement throughout the Heart of Africa. Theological and personal disagreements were pushed aside in order to rally to the help of the Jihadists of Azawad as well as strike French and Western interests wherever possible. Mokhtar Belmokhtar established a rudimentary ad-hoc Shura to coordinate operations that included commanders from AQIM, Ansar Dine (Supporters of the Faith in Arabic), MUJAO (French acronyms of The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa), Ansaru, Boko Haram, and a host of smaller Jihadist entities. An Ansaru commander called Abu Ali al-Nigeri was a senior member of Belmokhtar's Shura. The Shura also oversaw the growing flow of weapons, munitions and funds from Libyan arsenals and their distribution among the region's Jihadist forces. Many weapons, including IEDs, recovered from Boko Haram since mid-2013 were traced to Libya.

Between March and May 2013, Ansaru and Boko Haram groups attacked along Nigeria's border with Niger and Cameroon in order to tie down local forces so they couldn't be sent to Mali. Ansaru fighters participated in several spectacular operations inside Niger including attacks on a French uranium mine in Arlit and the prison in Niamey. Both Ansaru and Boko Haram established rear bases in southern Niger to be used as safe havens and recruitment and training facilities. Meanwhile, Boko Haram led the operations in Cameroon – particularly the kidnappings of French citizens between March and November 2013. Islamist sympathizers in Yaounde and other cities organized riots, robberies and extortions in support of the Boko Haram and against France and its allies.

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Starting the second half of 2013, the Nigerian Jihadist movement – mainly Boko Haram and Ansaru – sought to formulate a viable command structure. Given the size and diversity of northern Nigeria, the paucity of communications and transportation, and the personalities of the key Jihadist commanders – a firm system of command and control was out of the question. Still, there emerged a pragmatic organizational framework under the banner of Boko Haram that seems to be largely functioning by summer 2014.

Boko Haram is led by an Amir ul-Aam (Commander in Chief) – Abubakar Shekau. He is answerable to a Shura (Council) of trusted Kwamandoji (Commanders in the Hausa language). Significantly, the Shura includes not only Boko Haram's senior regional commanders but also representatives of Ansaru, AQIM, MUJAO and others. The Shura is Boko Haram's highest decision-making body, and the Amir ul-Aam cannot launch major operations, formulate strategy or issue communiqués without the approval of the Shura. The Shura is functioning efficiently though, given the realities on the ground, not frequently.



Very little is known about the members of the Shura or even its size – estimated at 6-8 members. The only two known members are Mamman Nur, who is Shekau’s second-in-command, and Ansaru’s Khalid al-Barnawi. Other reported Shura members include Ibrahim Tada Ngalyike from Gwoza, member of the original “Nigerian Taliban” Aminu Tashen-Ilmi, and a faction leader known only as Abu Sumayya. There are conflicting reports whether Abu Kaka or Abu Qaqa – the media face of Boko Haram – is a Shura member. The identity of past members should be indicative. The three known members are Habibu Yusuf (killed in early 2013), Momodu Bama (aka Abu Saad, heavy-weapons expert and the son of Mallam Abatcha Flatari who provided charms for the soldiers until both were killed in late 2013), and Mohammed Zangina (who was involved in coordinating suicide bombings before his arrest in early 2013).

The main problem of the Boko Haram command and control system seems to be at the localized level. As a populist movement immersed in fratricidal violence all over the land, Boko Haram must be represented in every region and city. To achieve this, the Boko Haram has a system of local Amirs who are in charge of specific areas. Large cities and densely populated areas are subdivided into Lajna (Sectors in the Hausa language) each of which is being run fairly autonomously by a sub-Amir. The Amirs and sub-Amirs are supported by Kwamandoji who run operations on a localized level. Each Commander is in turn assisted by a Nabin (Deputy in the Hausa language). Each Nabin controls at least one Mu’askar (Lieutenant) who is the real leader and commander of the violent armed gangs that carry out Boko Haram’s murderous raids. Known commanders include Abdulmalik Bama, Umar Fulata, Alhaji Mustapha (aka Massa Ibrahim), Abubakar Suleiman Habu, Hassan Jazair, Ali Jalingo, Alhaji Musa Modu, Bashir Aketa, Abba Coroma, Ibrahim Bashir, Abubakar Zakariya and Tukur Ahmed Mohammed. There are also new zonal commanders for Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States who are unknown. Significantly, only a few of the more senior Amirs and Kwamandoji are members of the Boko Haram Shura.

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The doctrine and strategy of the Nigerian Jihadist movement – including Boko Haram and Ansaru – evolved since the winter of 2013/14. The hitherto distinct regional and internal-domestic strategies have been blurred. The key novelty is that the sought-after destruction of the Nigerian state through fratricidal carnage is no longer only in revenge for being rejected by the grassroots, but also in pursuit of the larger quest for the establishment of an Islamist Sahelian-Maghrebi Caliphate that will replace existing states. In practical terms, though, there still exists separation between internal and regional operations with most commanders engaged in domestic operations only.

The internal strategy of the Boko Haram is based on a combination of terrorizing the population through carnage and challenging the government (at all levels) with spectacular strikes. Boko Haram is focusing increasingly on martyr car-bombing against high-value targets in Abuja and other cities and major attacks on key facilities in rural areas. Since 2012, Boko Haram has also contemplated the conduct of spectacular operations against oil and transportation infrastructure in the south in order to demonstrate nation-wide outreach. In early 2014, there are indications the Boko Haram is finally getting ready to strike in the south. In winter 2013/14, Boko Haram formed “special kidnapping squad” most likely run jointly by al-Barnawi and Nur from across the Cameroon border. The main mission of the squad is generating funds through payments of ransom for foreigners.

Most gruesome, though, is the cruel and senseless killing and displacing of innocent Muslim civilians – particularly in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States. Locally-based factional commanders, most notably Ngalyike and



Tashen-Ilmi, play prominent role in directing the internal operations. For these internal operations, Boko Haram fields about 500 to 1,000 fighters with a few thousand youth that can be recruited for short-term mob violence as need be. Since the winter of 2013/14 there has been a marked escalation in the carnage against civilians. The data Abuja has is incomplete at best. However, even the rough numbers paint a horrific picture. In 2013, at least 3,000 people were killed by Boko Haram and other Jihadist entities. Since January 2014, at least 5,000 people were killed – over 2,000 in Borno State alone. The pace and scope of fratricidal killing has markedly increased since mid-May 2014. The financial costs to Nigerian society and the nation are inestimable.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Jihadist ascent is the penetration and subversion of the highest levels of the Nigerian security and intelligence services. These achievements were made possible by the training of Nigerian Jihadists in Sudan – including by experts from Iranian Intelligence and expert assistance provided by Iranian agents and operatives in Nigeria itself. The endemic corruption within the Nigerian elites made things easier for the Jihadists. The extent of the penetration first came to light in early March 2012 when a British Special Boat Service (SBS) hostage rescue attempt in Sokoto failed. The rescue mission was betrayed by high authorities in Abuja even before it commenced. Consequently, the Ansaru-affiliated Jihadists had time to murder their hostages and ambush the SBS troops as they approached the compound.

Presently, official Abuja can no-longer ignore the threat. In late May 2014, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Rudolph Atallah, the former Africa Counterterrorism Director for the Department of Defense warned that “there was a Nigerian internal investigation of nine generals and senior military officers all suspected of aiding and abetting Boko Haram. The officers were suspected of giving them weapons, access to the armories, and information on government tactics and targeting. It is very difficult to counter an organization when internally, within the Nigerian structure, there are political, militarily, and logistical issues.” Among the weapon systems betrayed to the Boko Haram were several vehicles and at least one QJG-02 PRC-made 14.5mm anti-aircraft machine-gun recently acquired by the Nigerian Army. On June 3, a Nigerian military court indicted 15 senior military officers for helping Boko Haram. “There are a lot of arrests that have been made over some officers who were sabotaging the ongoing counter-insurgency operations. The suspects include about 10 generals and other ranks, not to talk of soldiers who have been found culpable of sabotaging our operations,” a Nigerian military source explained. “They were found guilty of leaking military strategies to the Boko Haram people. This was why many soldiers have been ambushed and killed by Boko Haram.” Nigerian senior officials concede that these cases are but the tip of the iceberg and only the most blatant cases official Abuja could not ignore or brush aside.

Theologically, the main reason for the blurring of the separation between internal and regional operation is the Jihadists’ rejection of the modern state and its boundaries in favor of all-encompassing Ummah and Caliphate. On May 5, 2014, Shekau stated that “we don’t know Cameroon or Chad... I don’t have a country. Islamiyya is what I have.” For practical reasons, Boko Haram and Ansaru maintain safe-havens across the Nigerian border in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. In early 2014, they were stockpiling Libya-origin weapons caches and other supplies in these bases. These weapons include several SA-7 and SA-24 MANPADS originally delivered by AQIM to Agadez, Niger, in 2011/12 but handed over to the Nigerians only in late 2013. These undertakings are conducted under Nur and al-Barnawi. Nur was responsible for the dispensation of the several millions obtained as ransom for Kidnapped Europeans on weapons acquisition and construction of infrastructure along the Chadian-Cameroonian and Niger borders.



Meanwhile, the Nigerian Jihadist movement expanded and institutionalized its presence in, and cooperation with, regional Jihadist fronts and Shuras. In August 2013, a commander going by Abu Zamira noted that Boko Haram had “commanders as far afield as Niger, Chad, Sudan and Cameroon” who are involved in the Nigerian Jihad. In spring 2014, Boko Haram started joint kidnapping-for-ransom operations in Cameroon with Jihadist gangs and Séléka fighters from the Central African Republic. The Boko Haram’s reputation for ruthlessness was admired by the Séléka that invited Nigerian Jihadists to come to the Central African Republic to train the local forces and lead strike operations against the French forces. In May, several dozen Nigerian Jihadists were already fighting in the Central African Republic. In Bangui, Séléka fighters inscribed “Bocouharam [Boko Haram]” on their uniforms in appreciation of their fellow fighters. The Nigerian Jihadists in the northern Central African Republic also participated in regional raiding parties stretching into Sudan and Chad.

Nur continues to handle the Shura’s contacts and cooperation with the AQIM, MUJAO, the Shabaab, and other sponsors in Sudan and the Persian Gulf region. Most significant was the emergence in spring 2014 of a Nigerian branch of Ansar al-Sharia (Partisans of the Sharia) that is an off-shoot of the global Jihadist movement and al-Qaida. The Ansar al-Sharia handles in a concentrated fashion the flow of foreign experts to Nigeria as well as of Nigerian mujahedin returning from foreign Jihadist fronts – mainly Afghanistan-Pakistan, Syria, Somalia and Yemen. The travel of Nigerian Jihadists throughout the Sahel and the Maghreb is conducted locally.

In spring 2014, high-level Jihadist sources in Europe and in Syria-Iraq predicted that the Nigerian Jihad will soon reach Western Europe. The sources claim that the Boko Haram already has networks of supporters among the Nigerian ex-pats in the UK. These networks are being reinforced by the few UK-based Nigerians that were or still are in Syria. As well, the Boko Haram developed “solidarity networks” in cooperation with AQIM-controlled Maghrebi ex-pats in France and Belgium. These networks are also being radicalized and reinforced by veterans of the Syrian Jihad. To-date, the Nigerian Jihadists did not address strikes at the heart of the West or even outside the Heart of Africa. The designation in the West of the Boko Haram and several senior commanders as terrorists were shrugged. However, with the specter of Western military intervention against the Boko Haram in support of the Nigerian Government growing – the leaders of Boko Haram and Ansaru might be contemplating retaliatory strikes against their foes.

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The brewing crisis in Nigeria has global and continental ramifications. Nigeria produces 2.6% of the annual international consumption and Nigeria’s energy reserves are among the most unutilized and thus have long-term promise. With a population nearing 150 million, Nigeria is the most important country of sub-Saharan Africa and has the largest economy. If Nigeria explodes - the rest of Africa will burn and the West will feel the pain acutely.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.