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BOKO HARAM

THE ISLAMIST INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

Maren Sæbø

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Boko Haram – or Jam’aat Ahl as-Sunnah lidDa’wah wa’l-Jihad, as the group calls itself – is only the latest in a series of radical Islamist groups to emerge in the north and northeast of Nigeria. In April 2014, however, the group rose to international notoriety when it kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in Chibok in north-eastern Nigeria.

Its history goes further back. In 2003 and 2004, members of the sect skirmished with the police. In 2009, tensions came to a head, when a mosque in Maiduguri was stormed and members of the group were massacred. The founder of Boko Haram, Mohammad Yusuf, later died in custody. In the following months, the sect re-emerged as an armed group. Since then, it has changed and evolved its tactics several times, and today, it is amongst the most well-known terrorist groups in Africa. Boko Haram has also been tied to the self-declared Islamic State, its leader – Abu Shekau – declaring his allegiance to IS. While there is little evidence to suggest extensive contact between the two groups, the declaration has created further interest in Boko Haram as a phenomenon.

In mid-2014, Boko Haram gained control of considerable territory in and around the state of Borno, and in January 2015 the area was estimated at about 50,000 square kilometres. By the end of 2016, however, the group had lost most of its territory, and now also suffers from internal conflict.

This report outlines the history and evolution of Boko Haram, explores its organization and aspirations and concludes by looking at what may possibly happen in the future. It is our hope that it can provide both media professionals and the broader public with a better understanding of one of the most notorious terrorist groups of today.

*Øyvind Strømmen
Managing Editor, Hate Speech International*

Boko Haram rose to international notoriety in April 2014 when it kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in Chibok in north-eastern Nigeria. The Chibok girls became a symbol of suffering in a region caught up in fighting between the Islamist sect and the Nigerian military forces. Two years on, the organization is said to be on its back foot militarily, divided internally and possibly lacking in clear leadership. But Boko Haram’s troubles do not mean the communities of north-eastern Nigeria are safe from the group.

By Maren Sæbø

WHAT AND WHO IS BOKO HARAM?

Boko Haram is only the latest in a series of radical Islamist groups to emerge in the north and northeast of Nigeria. Most have not resorted to violence, though some have when challenged by the authorities. Boko Haram traces its origins back to this legacy. Its founder, Muhammad Yusuf, was involved in other sects before becoming the imam of Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād, as the group calls itself. This name translates roughly as “group of people of the Sunnah for preaching and the Jihad”. Some of Boko Haram’s antecedents had an anti-colonial or anti-British element. Other groups directed their opposition against religious authorities in Northern Nigeria. Among Boko Haram’s first targets were religious and political authorities in Borno state.

Yusuf, originally from Yobe state, assembled his congregation around a mosque in Maiduguri, the capital

of Borno, in the first decade of the new millennium. In 2003 and 2004 members of the sect skirmished with the police. Tensions between the sect and the government came to a head in 2009, when the mosque in Maiduguri was stormed and members were massacred. Mohammed Yusuf later died in custody, under suspicious circumstances. It was in the following months that the sect re-emerged as an armed group, attacking police stations and prisons to free jailed comrades. Since then the group has changed and evolved its tactics several times. It has favoured attacks on security forces by small armed groups, sieges of towns, kidnappings, guerrilla operations to gain territory, and suicide bombings. Not all attacks attributed to Boko Haram are actually its work. Some of the more spectacular attacks have been attributed to a splinter group called Ansaru. The political landscape of Nigeria includes violent thugs-for-hire and a range of other potentially violent groups known to create havoc.

There has been much speculation about Boko Haram’s external links, not at least because its emergence on



the international stage coincided with the rise of Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL) in the Middle East. However, there has been no evidence of extensive links between Boko Haram and other Salafist-jihadist groups. There is a possible link to the war in Mali, and to groups associated with Al-Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM). The Sahel and the Sahara have a vast network of ancient caravan routes used even today for trade, both legal and illegal. Into this network the war in Libya let loose a wave of weapons, sparking conflict all over the Sahel. It is likely that Boko Haram benefited from this.

The group first came to world attention when it kidnapped 276 girls from a dormitory at a school in Chibok in Borno. Two years later, the group has lost most of the territory it gained in 2014 and 2015, and hundreds of former kidnapping victims have been released. In October negotiations with the group set free 21 of the girls from Chibok. But Boko Haram still has the potential to create havoc. As it has lost territory it has stepped up its suicide campaign, using young women and even children against crowded areas in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. On the run from a military offensive, it has set up bases in new areas, including remote islands in Lake Chad.

PART 1 - ORIGINS

What today is known as Northern Nigeria is made up of 16 states. The two major ethnic groups of the north are Hausa and Fulani. Both are associated with agriculture, with the Fulani often engaged in nomadic livestock herding. While the Hausa are indigenous to the Chad basin, the Fulani are thought to have migrated to Hausa land in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries from present day Senegal, through Mali and Songhai. In Nigeria's far northeast the main group is the Kanuri. There are about 160 other groups in the area, including Christian minorities from the south. Some groups are identified by distinct traditions and history, others simply by language or religion. The three main groups, the Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri, are Muslim, mainly Sunni, followers of two Sufi traditions of the area, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. The Qadiriyya has its origins in Iraq, but came to what is now Northern Nigeria through Mali. The Tijaniyya are the followers of Sheik Ahmed Ti-

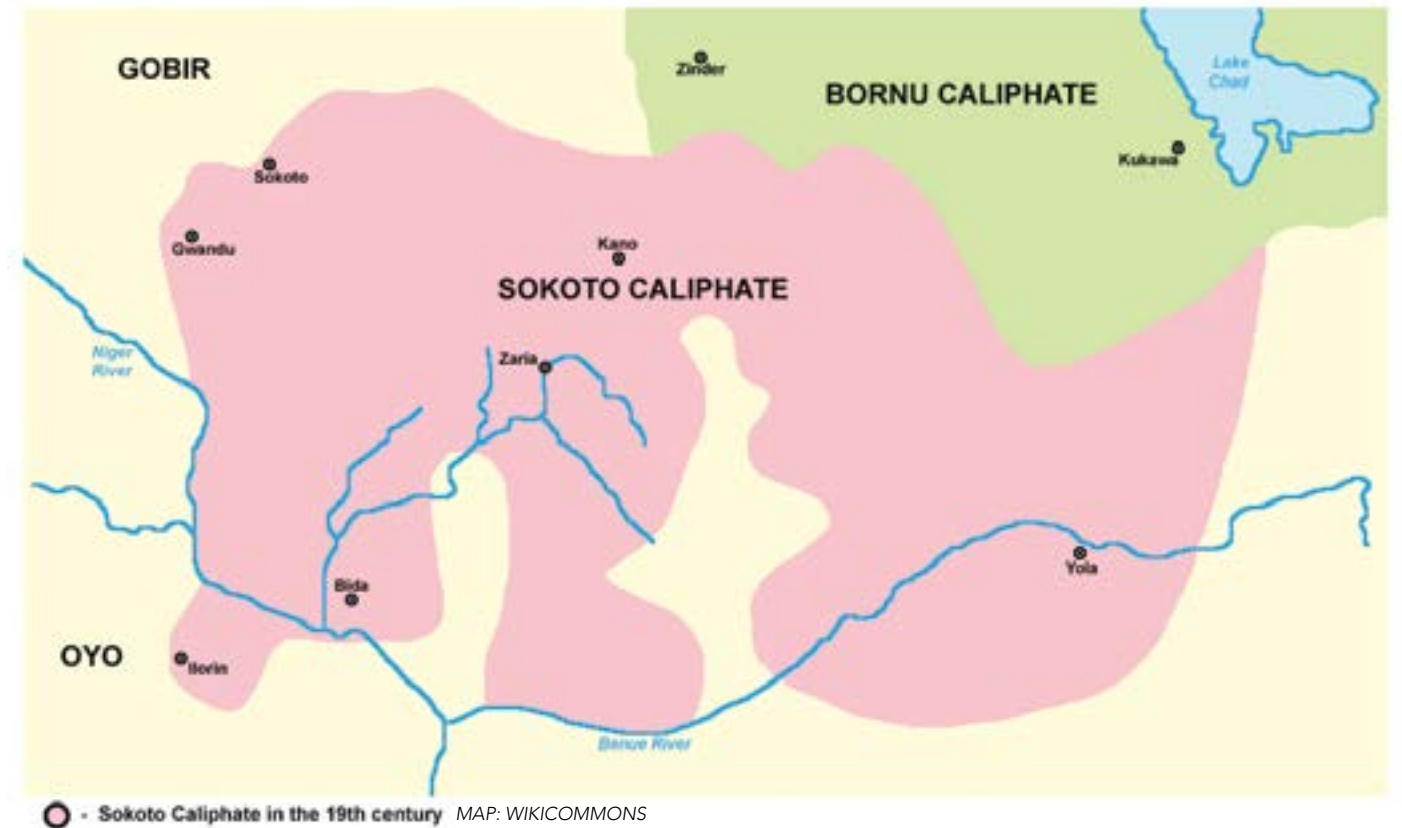
jani, born in Ain Mahdi in present-day Algeria in 1735.

Northern Nigeria includes several ancient kingdoms, most notably those centred on Kano in the west and Kanem-Borno in the east. Islam was brought to these areas between the 10th and 17th centuries along the caravan routes across the Sahara. It may have arrived among the Kanuri of Borno in the Chad basin as early as the 9th century. The area that today is the Nigerian state of Borno was then the destination of merchants crossing the Sahara from Sudan and Darfur. In the centuries that followed, the various empires of the Chad basin were important stopovers for the West African faithful on their way to Mecca.

In the centuries that followed the arrival of Islam to Borno, merchants and clerics from the medieval empires of Songhai and Mali to the west also crossed into present-day Northern Nigeria. This route stretches from Timbuktu and Gao in Mali to Kano, which was the largest of several city-states in the area. The main language group was Hausa, and the kingdoms here were known as the Hausa empire. The empire grew strong on the trans-Saharan trade in gold, slaves and salt, the starting point for most caravans being Kano. In addition to Kano, six other major cities were part of the Hausa empire, and an additional seven were affiliated. The city-states in the Hausa empire were semi-autonomous and their expansion was shaped by war. Sometimes they fought each other, for slaves and for control over important trade routes.

THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE

Several of these cities developed as important centres for Islamic learning, and the city-states depended on clerics and imams for administration. Muslim scholars were brought from Mali. Islam blended with the traditional beliefs of most people in the area, and local customs continued. In 1804 an Islamic scholar, Sheik Usman Dan Fodio, launched a jihad to "purify" the practices of the Hausa states surrounding Kano. Dan Fodio was a Fulani and his jihad was directed not only at "purifying" religious practices but also against the corruption he saw among the Hausa elite. It took Dan Fodio and his followers a mere four years to conquer all 14 city-states that constituted the Hausa empire of the



time. For a brief period, Dan Fodio also held the Borno empire to the east.

Dan Fodio and his followers established a caliphate of the newly conquered cities, each of them an autonomous empire under a sultan. Dan Fodio, the first caliph, was followed by his son, Muhammedu Bello. Bello founded the city of Sokoto as the caliphate's seat, resulting in the name "Sokoto Caliphate". Even though Dan Fodio had tapped into widespread disgruntlement with the Hausa elite, the jihad did not change the social system. Fulani nobles simply replaced the Hausa elite. But there was a new emphasis on learning and knowledge. Dan Fodio also encouraged his own children, including his daughters, to study. Several daughters wrote poetry and one, Nana Asma'u, also wrote on women issues and the importance of educating daughters.

In the later years the Sokoto Caliphate became weak-

ened, partly because of the infighting between followers of the two Sufi traditions, Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya.¹ When the British pushed northwards at the beginning of the 20th century, the city-states fell one by one. In 1903 the British forced their way through the medieval city gates of Kano and completed the conquest of Northern Nigeria.

COLONIAL TIME AND INDEPENDENCE

There was still no Nigeria, but the British now controlled two separate protectorates, one to the south with Lagos as the main administrative centre and one to the north, centred on Kano. In the latter the British established a system of indirect rule, with emirs and sultans keeping their titles, though at the mercy of the colonial administrations. In effect, this alienated the traditional rulers from their subject populations. The states and emirates of the north had practiced various forms of Sharia law. The new order was forged on colonial law. In 1914 the two protectorates became one,

¹ For more on internal strife in the Sokoto Caliphate see Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton: A History of Nigeria, Cambridge University Press (2008).



and Nigeria was born. A new political and legal system in the north required English speakers and English-educated servants. The colonial administration largely drew these from the Christian population in the south, creating a minority community in most northern cities that lived in separate quarters referred to as Sabon Gari (a new town or strangers' town in Hausa).

The colonial administration stressed secular law and education, as well as English as a lingua franca. Sharia law, traditional education – meaning in practice the study of the Qur'an by young men – and Hausa all became rallying points for anti-colonial sentiments in Northern Nigeria. Roman Loimeier, an anthropologist at the University of Göttingen, has described the cultural shift Northern Nigeria underwent after 1914 as a “modernization shock”² that prompted calls for reform and “Islamization” of modernity. In reaction to “foreign” or “British” influences, northerners clashed with southerners, Hausa with Igbo, and Muslims with Christians. A major incident that took place in Kano in 1953 left at least 36 people dead. There was also tension between moderate Muslims and followers of various “Mahdist” groups. The trans-Saharan phenomenon of Mahdism is derived from the belief that one Mahdi, or saviour, will emerge at the turn of each century, and purify the land. The movement gained many followers after the self-proclaimed Mahdi of Omdurman, Muhammad Ahmad, led a successful campaign against the Turko-Egyptian forces in Sudan in the 1880s. The inspiration came from earlier Mahdist movements in Sudan, and from Saudi Arabian Wahabism. There is a direct route from Omdurman via Darfur to Northern Nigeria, the route taken for centuries by pilgrims wanting to visit Mecca.

At independence in 1960 the debate about the role of Islam in the north continued. The late years of colonial rule had seen new hostility between the two main Sufi brotherhoods, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, with the first group standing behind the colonial administration and the latter adopting an anti-colonial stance.

At independence the north was led by the Sardauna (sultan) of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, a descendant of Usman Dan Fodio. Ahmadu Bello was a reformer who wanted to restore the north's heritage and cultural identity, and to promote Islam. His campaigns to convert “pagan” groups led to even further tensions between minorities and the Muslim majority. The tensions built up to Nigeria's first military coup in 1966, and Bello was among the northern leaders killed. The coup, followed by a counter-coup and ultimately the break-out of the Biafran war, laid bare the tensions between the north and south of Nigeria. Riots following the coups killed thousands, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee.

After Ahmadu Bello's assassination during the coup in 1966, another figure emerged as the main Muslim reformer of the north. Politically well connected, Abubakar Gumi was a Muslim scholar who for years had criticized the Sufi brotherhoods, which he saw as propagators of un-Islamic practices³. Like previous reformers of Nigerian Islam, Gumi was a “purist”; he wanted to purge both the faith and the practice of it. Gumi had travelled to Saudi Arabia and was influenced by its state religion, Wahabism⁴. From 1966 he started broadcasting his tafsir, or exegesis (interpretation of Qur'an), on Radio Kaduna. In 1978, inspired by Gumi's broadcasts, a former army imam, Ismaila Idris, formed the Yan Izala (sons of Izala). It found resonance among the middle class in the north, and among the educated. The Yan Izala was to become the most important opponent to the Sufi orders, and in effect the main opposition to religious authority in the north.

In addition to groups like the Yan Izala, more radical and anti-modern groups emerged in the 1970s. Muhammad Marwa came from Cameroon to Kano in the 1960s and built a following among other migrants in the city. Marwa's followers rejected everything they saw as “western”, including watches and bicycles and even certain clothes. The followers became known as “Yan Taitsine” – those who reject. Marwa, known as

Maitatsine, was not, like Gumi, a purist. The Yan Taitsine movement was loosely based on both Islam and traditional African religions. In addition, it was a movement for the poor, including immigrants to Kano from other parts of West Africa – the society to which Marwa himself belonged. In 1980 Marwa's followers clashed with the military after an attempt by Marwa to storm Kano's major mosque. In the retaliation that followed as many as 6,000 people might have been killed, including Marwa himself. That did not break his movement; military campaigns against the sect continued, with deadly clashes occurring in 1982, 1984 and 1985.

PART 2 - EVOLUTION OF A TERRORIST MOVEMENT

Groups like Yan Izala and Yan Taitsine evolved under military dictatorship. Somewhat paradoxically, it was the end of the dictatorship that led to the “Islamization” of politics in the north. With the advent of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, several northern politicians raised the question of Sharia law. The debate on Sharia is at the heart of the politics in Northern Nigeria. Between 1999 and 2002, 12 states adopted a system of Sharia courts parallel to secular law based on the old colonial law. The debate exaggerated tensions between the majority Muslim population in these states (and elsewhere in Nigeria) and the minorities, especially Christians. The conflict came to a head in the state of Kaduna in February and March 2000, when thousands were likely killed in clashes between Islamic groups and groups of Pentecostal Christians⁵. Although majorities in both faiths have coexisted peacefully for years, radical Islamists and Pentecostals often use inflammatory rhetoric that causes concern among Nigerians of all faiths.

The debate on Sharia law was irresistible to for members of the Yan Izala. At that point the movement was Salafist, and increasingly militant. Many of the members joined the Yan Hisba (militant enforcers of the

law). It was in this political climate that a new radical group emerged around Muhammad Yusuf. Yusuf was a follower of a Yan Hisba leader in Kano named Ja'afar Mahmud Adam. But while Ja'afar Mahmud Adam and other Yan Izala activists stressed the importance of both Islamic and secular or Western education, Yusuf rejected the latter. Also, while Yan Izala had worked inside the political and religious systems to slowly Islamize the north, Yusuf was far more radical. In 2002 Yusuf founded his own group, quickly nicknamed Boko Haram.

Already early on, Yusuf followers clashed with the police. A breakaway faction of the sect set up a commune in Yobe in 2003. This particular faction became known as the “Nigerian Taliban” as security moved in to clear their village. The Taliban reference probably owed more to the Afghan group's notoriety as the ultimate boogeyman of the international community at the time than to ideological kinship.

SUPPORT BASE

But the various factions and followers of Yusuf had something else in common with their Afghan counterpart. It has been said that earlier Nigerian radical groups, like the Maitatsine movement of the 1970s and 1980s, drew upon the ranks of young Islamic school pupils, so-called almajiris. The socio-economic conditions of the northeast have been underscored as a major factor in the rise of Boko Haram. Northern Nigeria, and especially the northeast, has the lowest school-enrolment rates in all Nigeria. The male population has a low success rate in national exams, and only one in five women is literate. The dismal state of the public school system has led many parents to send young boys to traditional Islamic schools; the almajiris are not just pupils but also beggars. It is estimated that about 80 per cent of all pupils between the ages of five and 21 in Kano attend some kind of Islamic school.⁶ These youngsters, begging at intersections, are a feature of every city in the north. Often they form gangs, and some of the boys grow into true gangsters. It has been alleged that former almajiris have been at the core of

² Loimeier, Roman: “Boko Haram, the development of a militant religious movement in Nigeria”, in *Africa Spectrum* 47 (2012), pp. 137-155.

³ Loimeier (2012).

⁴ Walker, Andrew: *Eat the Heart of the Infidel – The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram*, Hurst Publishers (2016).

⁵ ICG 2010, p. 1

⁶ ICG: “Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict” (2010).



both the Maitatsine movement and Boko Haram, but to be certain of this further research is needed.⁷

Yobe, Adamawa and Borno, the three states hardest hit by the violence of radical Islamist groups, also have the highest rates of poverty in Nigeria. In the 1970s the Nigerian economy shifted from agricultural production to dependency on oil exports, a transition that harmed the north, which had no oil and relied economically on cash crops like groundnut and cotton. Cheap imports laid waste the important textile industry and cotton production, and structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s exaggerated the crisis. As rural poverty deepened, more and more youth drifted towards urban areas, mixing with the almajiris to form gangs of adolescents. In Maiduguri, capital of Borno state, a lot of them gathered around the Ibn Tayimiyya mosque, which had been built by Yusuf and his followers with the help of funds from Saudi Arabia. The name was a reference to the Syrian Islamic scholar Ibn Tayimiyah, a scholar often referred to by Salafist-jihadists. Yusuf is said to have visited Saudi Arabia himself in 2003-2004, and his texts and sermons contain passages from hard-line Saudi preachers.⁸ In 2009, Yusuf published a book, *This is Our Doctrine and Our Method in Proselytization*, in which he labelled Yan Izala as heretics, causing a final split between Yusuf and his former comrades. Yusuf now denounced anyone working with the system as unbelievers, adopting the term takfir, false Muslims. And he made it a duty to kill these. Borno, where corruption was rampant, proved fertile ground for such firebrand rhetoric. The sect also offered employment to many of the youngsters, with Yusuf investing in buses, taxis and motorcycle taxis.

But the immediate reason for the transformation of a radical sect into a violent and militant insurgency group was an escalation of violence between Yusuf's followers and security forces. The most commonly stated direct cause was a law passed that required drivers of motorcycle taxis to wear a helmet. The sect got much of its financing from such taxis, and the drivers viewed

the new law as another extortion racket thought up by the police. It did in fact give the police another reason for putting up roadblocks and issuing fines. Clashes followed. In the summer of 2009 the security forces had had enough and besieged the mosque Muhammad Yusuf and his followers had built in Maiduguri. The siege, in July 2009, left more than a 1,000 members of the sect dead, including Yusuf himself and his father-in-law.

After the death of Yunus, there followed a period of calm in the northeast. Days after the death, President Goodluck Jonathan ordered a probe into Yunus's death, and into the death of his father-in-law, Baba Fugu Muhammad. In April 2010 the family of the latter was awarded 100 million naira in damages, an enormous sum in Maiduguri. But other victims' families got nothing, and hundreds of people, both members of their sect and their families were still held by the security services one year on. In August and September 2010, several officials and policemen were killed at the hands of unknown assailants. On 7 September, about 800 people died in a prison break that also freed around 700 alleged Boko Haram members. This is the first major operation attributed to the group, and was followed by several attacks on security personnel and police stations.⁹

This modus operandi continued until December the same year. On Christmas Eve the sect attacked a church in Maiduguri, inciting a new round of Muslim-Christian clashes in the central plateau of Nigeria, especially in the city of Jos. Several hundred people died, both Muslim and Christian. In February 2011, with the sect's focus still on the security forces, one of Yusuf's successors, Muhammad Zakaria Alia Jiddo, was arrested. During that year the killings and attacks spread throughout the north. The targets, as before, were security personnel and local politicians. A series of bombings marked the inauguration of President Goodluck Jonathan in May 2011, but the violence was confined to the country's northern part.

⁷ Loimeier, p. 146

⁸ Walker: Eat the Heart out of the Infidel, p. 145

⁹ For a comprehensive list of Boko Haram operations in 2010-2012, see Yinka Olomjobi: Islam and Conflict in Northern Nigeria, Malthouse Lagos (2013).

In June that year the capital city of Abuja was hit for the first time when a bomb exploded at the police headquarters. A month later, the sect announced its first major split, with a faction calling itself the Yussufia Islamic Movement (after Muhammad Yusuf) seeking a peaceful resolution to what was now a full-blown conflict. A faction led by Abubaker Shekau insisted on carrying out a "jihad", and a month later a suicide bomber breached the security gates at the headquarters of the United Nations in Abuja and killed 19 people, including foreign staff, and injured more than 100. The operation, reminiscent of the 2003 bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad, was a major international "breakthrough" for Boko Haram. What had been a local campaign against local politicians and security forces suddenly hit the world stage, with all the ensuing fame.

EVOLUTION OF A STRATEGY

In subsequent months, several suspected leaders of the sect were arrested as violence continued to escalate. Bombings and gun battles took place in all the larger cities of the north. As the movement grew more confident, its scope and capabilities improved. In January 2012 Boko Haram attacked the north's largest city, Kano, and killed at least 178 people. By setting up checkpoints at various strategic crossroads, the organization actually held the city and its 8 million inhabitants hostage for several days before retreating.

Common banditry continued to be among the core activities of the group. Boko Haram members now preyed upon the local population for food and goods. But its members needed more: they needed families, and they needed new recruits. After the storming of the Ibn Tayimiyah mosque, the security forces rounded up survivors and family members of the sect. Some were freed in the early attacks on prisons, but hundreds remained in state custody. When Boko Haram started its own kidnapping campaign in 2012, it was to get hostages who could be traded for family members. Kidnapping, forced marriages and slavery are endem-

ic in the region even today, and kidnapping victims sometimes get traded. That means revenue, as the sect quickly discovered. In 2012 the Ansaru splinter group held two Western hostages. Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara were executed in Sokoto after negotiations for their release broke down. Then a French family was taken hostage in Cameroon, an act claimed by Boko Haram. The family was later released, probably after a ransom was paid.

But it was, once again, the local population that bore the brunt of what developed into a kidnapping campaign by the sect. In April and May 2013 Boko Haram fighters overran several villages in Borno. Men, women and children were abducted during these raids.¹⁰ Over the summer the strategy evolved again, and by August the sect started attacking student hostels and carrying away young women. Women were also abducted at roadblocks and from their homes. Survivors said later that they were raped and held as wives for the fighters. At the beginning of 2014, Boko Haram attacked several schools and abducted boys and girls alike – the boys to become recruits, the girls forced to marry.

In April 2014 gunmen attacked a school and its hostel in Chibok in southern Borno, and abducted 276 girls. The attack stirred an outcry against Boko Haram, first in Nigeria, then across the world. Despite the group's five-year campaign targeting security services, local communities and foreigners, few people outside the region had paid any attention to the sect prior to May 2014. The outcry, when it came, seemed to take Boko Haram and its leader, by surprise. Suddenly Boko Haram had the attention of world leaders like US President Barack Obama and French President François Hollande. The United States and France both have strategic interests in the region, and both pledged increased military aid after the Chibok abductions. Boko Haram's new leader, Abubaker Shekau, seemed to relish the attention, showing up in videos claiming that the girls would be sold as slaves, then, that they would serve as the militants' own wives.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch: "'Those terrible weeks in their camp' – Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria" (2014).

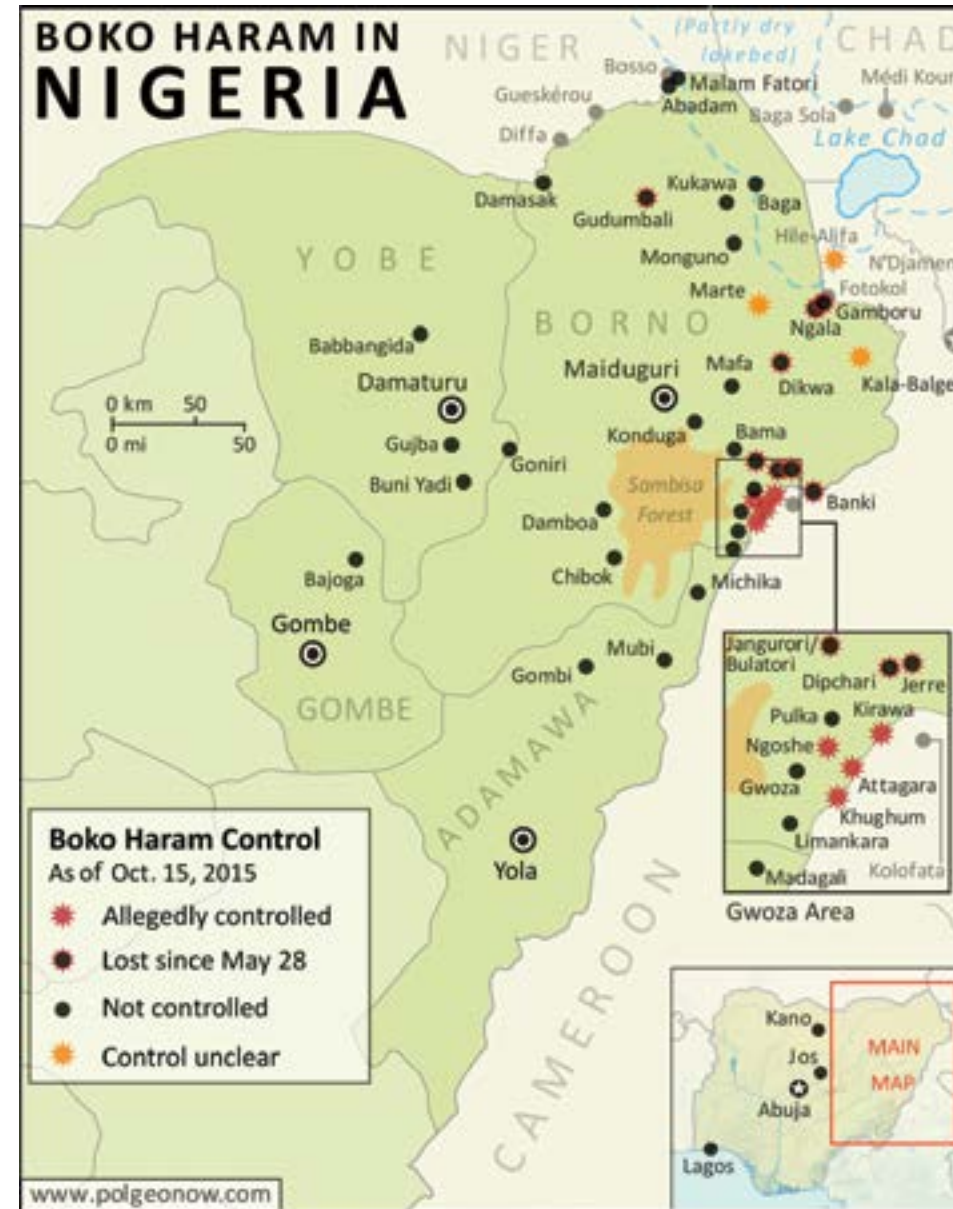
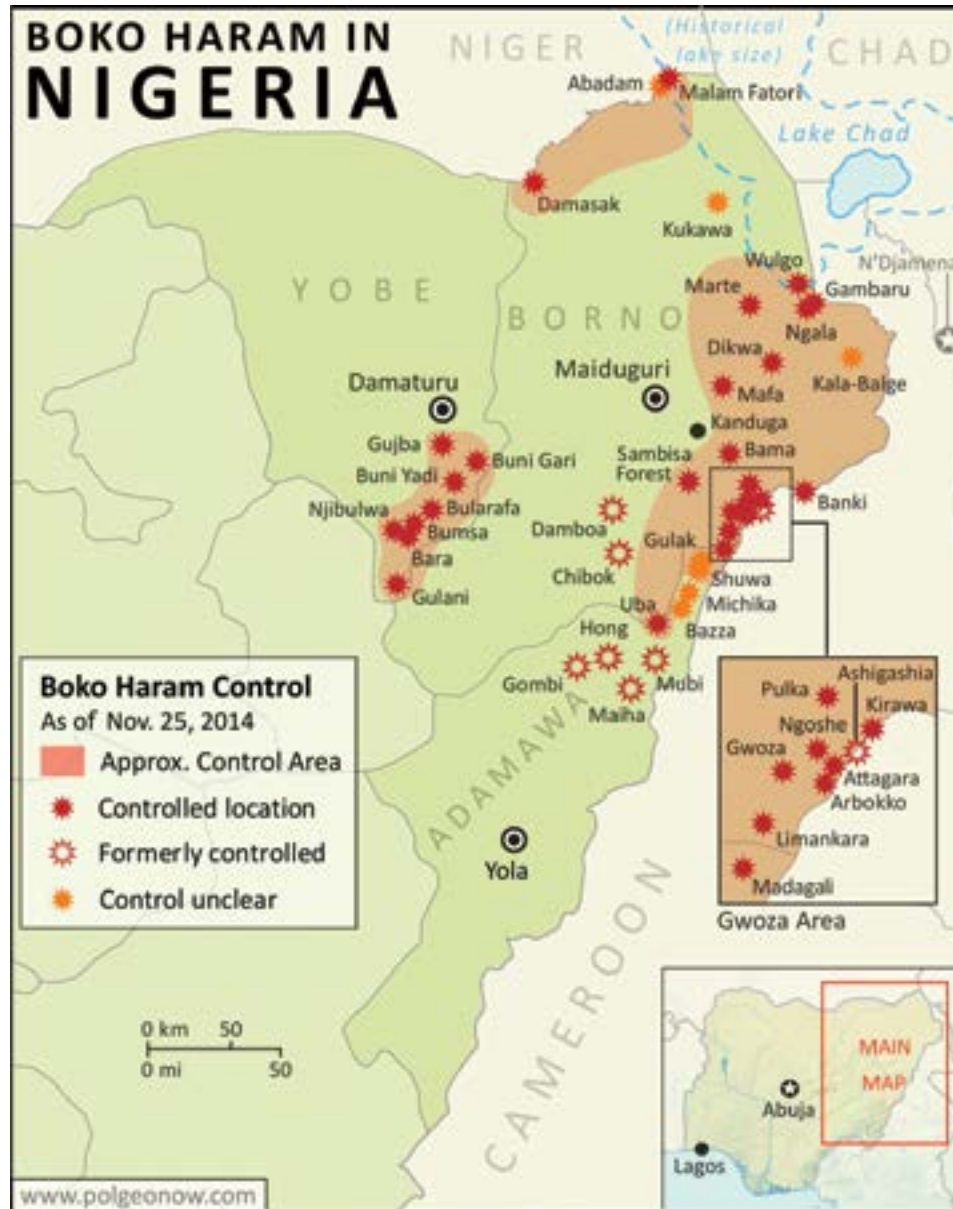




Abubaker Shekau in a still taken from a video released by Boko Haram.

But it was another use of young women that soon would grab attention. During the summer of 2014 several women succeeded in blowing themselves up in cities across the north. And the female suicide bombers soon decreased in age. Sending young girls, some as young as 12 years old, had both practical and symbolic aspects. On the practical side, women in Northern Nigeria tend to wear

loose-fitting conservative garments, called abaya, with a headscarf – ideal for hiding suicide belts. The symbolic side of Boko Haram’s use of young girls as bomb-carriers developed after the Chibok abductions. The message was clear: these girls are ours, and they follow our command. In the fall of 2014 and into 2015, more and more girls and women were sent into crowds with suicide belts, not only in Nigeria, but also in Cameroon. By the end of 2015, more than 90 girls and women had carried out suicide missions on behalf of Boko Haram,



These two maps – made by polgeonow.com – depict the areas held by Boko Haram in November 2014 and in October 2015, showing how the group lost control of most of the areas they controlled. MAPS: POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY NOW

But the guerrillas also overran other areas in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe state. Towards the end of 2014 Boko Haram was said to control an area in Borno roughly the size of Croatia. At the end of the year the group overran several locations in the vicinity of Lake Chad. In January 2015 Boko Haram hit the town of Baga, where a regional force had a base. Human rights groups later reported that up to 2,000 people had been massacred in Baga and surrounding villages.¹² Satellite images of the area show the extent of the destruction of the town of Baga. Boko Haram would continue to expand and hold territory in Borno until the Nigerian government mounted an offensive a couple of months later.

¹¹ Walker: Eat the Heart Out of the Infidel (2016), p. 166

¹² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/14/dispatches-what-really-happened-baga-nigeria>

among the rank and file. Half a year into his tenure, Nigeria's new president, Muhammedu Buhari, himself a northerner, declared Boko Haram "technically" beaten.¹³

An initial surge in suicide bombings in Nigeria and Cameroon does seem to have subsided, but the group has not, in fact, been beaten. Even with its territory lost, its bases broken up, the sect is able to operate in at least four countries. Its tactic of using women and children as suicide bombers has continued to evolve, though large-scale attacks on towns and villages, involving hundred of fighters, seem a thing of the past. For most of 2016, the story of Boko Haram has been one of setbacks – of diminishing territory and internal division. That could result in more violence.

THE ORGANIZATION – PROPAGANDA AND LEADERSHIP

Not much is known about the leadership structures of Boko Haram. According to Loimeier, a 20-man council survived the carnage in Maiduguri in 2009. Among other things they changed the name of the group, adding a reference to the prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622, known as the hijra. In other words, they left the heathen Nigerian state behind, to set up a new community. Around the same time, Abubaker Shekau, with the honorary title of mallam, or teacher, appeared as the leader of the group.

The offensive in 2014-2015 was most certainly led by Shekau, a former student of Muhammad Yusuf himself. Shekau is a Kanuri, but has appeared in videos speaking both Hausa and English as well as some broken Arabic. He is said to have travelled to Mali during the war in 2012, but this is not confirmed. Many observers have remarked on his apparent agitation when speaking in videos. They call him mercurial and say he lacks coherence and balance.

With Boko Haram's leadership such a mystery, it is no surprise that little is known about the group's ties to other jihadist groups. In a somewhat surprising move,

Shekau announced his allegiance to the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) in March 2015, and a month later renamed his group the "Islamic State West Africa Province" (ISWAP).¹⁴ There is little evidence of any real contact between ISIL and the Nigerian group. What contact there is appears limited to the name, with ISIL's propaganda arm adopting the acronym ISWAP when commenting on Boko Haram activities. The name change did not usher in a change in strategy or performance, as one might expect if it reflected real collaboration.

DIVISIONS

There have been many rumours about Shekau's death. Just in the summer of 2016, the Nigerian military claimed his killing three times. The military also claims to have killed a look-alike that has been acting as Shekau. The media landscape of north-eastern Nigeria is somewhat limited, with poor schooling and limited resources for printing making radio the primary mass medium. In June 2016 it was confirmed that the group had set up its own radio station. Until then the group's propaganda apparatus seems to have been a Twitter account and the release of sporadic videos, often showing Abubaker Shekau issuing somewhat disjointed statements and denouncing his enemies. Speaking in Kanuri, Hausa and sometimes Arabic, he comes across as unscholarly, despite his title as mallam. Several videos that have been spread on YouTube also depict his fighters and, in the period since the Chibok kidnappings, some of the kidnapped girls.

Factionalizing has been a feature of Boko Haram since its early days as a sect in Borno and Yobe. When the Nigerian military in 2003 moved against the so-called "Nigerian Taliban" and its commune, popularly known as "Afghanistan", the target was none other than an early Boko Haram splinter group.

There is at least one significant splinter group: Ansaru. Its split from Boko Haram has an ideological dimension and possibly a personal one as well. While Boko Haram has resorted to guerrilla warfare, Ansaru is considered

more "old school", like al-Qaeda. Its members execute bombings and operations against traditional targets (security forces) and are more restrained when it comes to attacking Muslim civilians. Ansaru has several times denounced Boko Haram for targeting Muslims, and is believed to be in contact with Al-Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM). It is also believed that some of the more prominent attacks attributed to Boko Haram against international targets, like the bombing of the UN headquarter in Abuja in 2011, might in fact have been carried out by Ansaru. In any event, that August 2011 attack was one of several attacks in the capital during that period executed with large truck bombs, a tactic more suggestive of al-Shabaab in Somalia than Boko Haram. The sect has since abandoned the method.

In August 2016, with the Nigerian military once again claiming to have killed the elusive Abubaker Shekau, a new split in the movement was announced¹⁵ when ISIL declared that the former spokesperson of the Nigerian group, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, was the new leader of ISIL's West African affiliate. Afterward, an audio recording surfaced in which Shekau – apparently very much alive – rambled about al-Barnawi and his followers, whom he called "polytheists". Shekau also seemed angry about ISIL having cutting ties to him, and backing his rival.

REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Boko Haram is part of a regional network of organizations, but the sect is not known to have developed any extensive links with other groups. As mentioned earlier, Abubaker Shekau might have been in Mali in 2012, fighting alongside various groups associated with Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) and Tuareg rebels. But there has been no conclusive evidence of continued contact between the Malian and Nigerian groups. Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to Islamic State (ISIL) in the summer of 2015 thus represents a break with former potential allies in the region. It should additionally be noted that members of the sect benefit from the ancient smuggling routes through the Sahara. As in Mali, the conflict in Libya represented a golden oppor-

tunity for those in need of more advanced weapons.

Salafist-jihadist groups in the Sahel trace their origins back to the civil war in Algeria in the early 1990s. Thirty years after the country's independence from France in 1962, Algerian politics was still dominated by the liberation movement Front de Liberation de Nationale (FLN). But widespread dissatisfaction after years of economic hardship coupled with the return of young Algerians who had fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s gave rise to Front Islamique de Salut (FIS), the Islamic Salvation Front. FIS entered the 1990s doing well in local elections, a performance that prompted a military coup and suspension of national election schedules for January 1992. The stage was thus set for a brutal and bloody civil war that not only engulfed Algeria but provided experience and training to a new wave of jihadist groups and fighters in North Africa. As the new millennium opened, the most radical Algerian group, the Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat (GSPC), had ties to the al-Qaeda network. According to a report by the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa, the group set up training bases for Sahelians in Chad in 2004.¹⁶ In 2007 the GSPC formally changed its name to Al-Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM).

It was the revolution and subsequent war in Libya in 2011 that brought AQIM and its affiliates to fame. The fall of Muammar Gaddafi in the spring of 2011 led to a massive outflow of mercenaries and weapons from Libya and strengthened AQIM. In Mali, AQIM-affiliated groups joined the Tuareg in their rebellion against the central power in Bamako, and during the winter of 2012 the Islamists captured historic cities like Gao and Timbuktu. Beaten back by an international coalition of forces, the Islamists continue to be a threat in north-eastern Mali.

Boko Haram members might have trained with AQIM groups in Mali. It has also been claimed that Nigerians who later joined Boko Haram received training in Chad and Niger prior to 2009. The unrest in Mali does coincide with a surge in Boko Haram activity.

¹³ The statement was given to, and distributed in, national and international media on 24 December 2015.

¹⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/boko-haram-renames-itself-islamic-states-west-africa-province-iswap-as-militants-launch-new-10204918.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36973354>

¹⁶ Cilliers, Jackie: "Violent extremism and terror in Africa", ISS paper, October 2015.



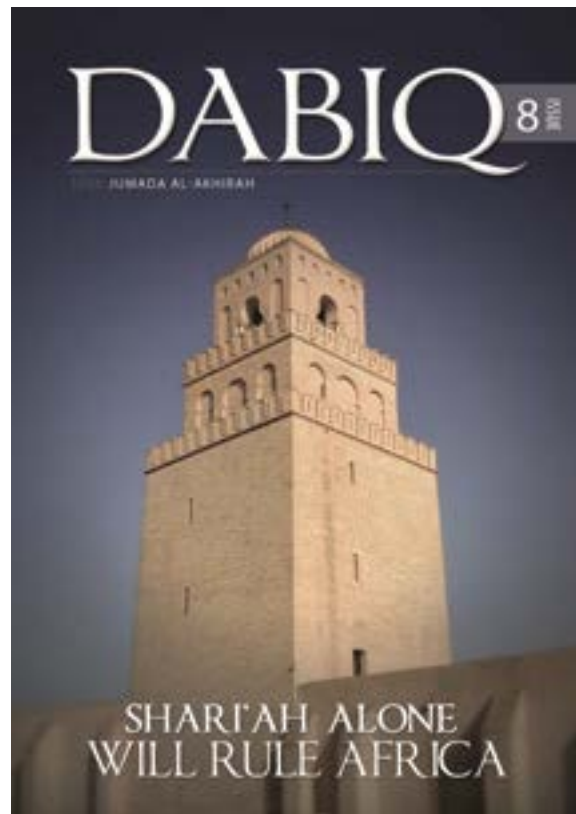
Boko Haram is part of a regional phenomenon. Its portrayal as part of a global jihadist movement has drawn attention from security forces outside the region (the US Africa Command has stepped up activity in Nigeria, France in Chad and Niger) and from other jihadist groups. But unlike groups in the Middle East and North Africa, there are few signs that Boko Haram draws a substantial number of recruits from other parts of the world. Boko Haram fighters are mainly drawn from Kanuri speakers in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon (and some Hausa speakers from Niger). There have been reports of "Arabs" turning up in Nigeria, but few reports of Africans from other parts of the continent or fighters from elsewhere in the world.

Conditions in north-eastern Nigeria are considered harsh, even by Nigerian standards. In addition, the inclusion of elements of local folklore and beliefs in the sect's version of Salafist-jihadism cause affiliated groups outside the region to view Boko Haram as "impure".

POSSIBLE FUTURE

Boko Haram continues to pose a threat to stability in Nigeria and the region. It has shown both the capability and the will to strike in Niger, Cameroon and Chad in addition to Nigeria. Even without its former bases in the Sambisa forest, or around Lake Chad, the movement probably has the capacity to execute bomb attacks and possibly to overrun remote areas of the four countries mentioned.

In October, a negotiated settlement led to the release of 21 of the Chibok girls. This was significant because it was the Chibok kidnappings that gave Boko Haram its international "breakthrough". The girls from Chibok have figured in propaganda by the group since 2014.



The Islamic State propaganda magazine «Dabiq» focused on West Africa in its eighth issue, published in March 2015.

But the release was also significant as the first negotiated settlement between Boko Haram and outside actors. It could pave the way for more releases or even talks between the group and Nigerian authorities. The movement, increasingly divided and possibly lacking any safe bases, might be interested in a political solution.

The Sahel has become a belt of instability, fuelling a flow of internal refugees and other refugees making their way to Libya in an effort to reach Europe. In Nigeria alone, more than 2 million people have been displaced as a consequence of this conflict and other less severe conflicts. In addition, more than half a million Nigerians are

thought to be in flight in Chad, Cameroon, Niger and further afield. Refugees from Nigeria are contributing to the wave of refugees trying to reach Europe from the shores of Libya. In this way the conflict probably both feeds into, and in a way benefits from, the smuggler routes northwards to Libya.

For what is left of Boko Haram, there could be several outcomes. The group might seek a settlement, or it might blend (back) into the semi-legal trade of the trans-Saharan routes, using them to smuggle people or weapons. Although the movement is unlikely to regain much territory, it could still function as a more "traditional" terror group, continuing or even stepping up its suicide missions. There are also other radical groups in the north of Nigeria, so the possibility of new mergers and new recruits exists as well. In any case, Buhari's "technical defeat" must be followed up with a de-radicalisation of both politics and religion in Nigeria's northeast.

BOKO HARAM – THE ISLAMIST INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

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Editor-in-Chief/Executive Director:
Kjetil Stormark

Project Manager for the report:
Øyvind Strømmen

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Superpop

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Superpop (www.superpop.no)



Maren Sæbø is an independent journalist and historian, with focus on African Affairs. She has written extensively on African conflicts, and written a thesis on the Angolan Civil war.



www.hate-speech.org

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