



**COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER**

*at West Point*



# ***Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines:***

*Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*

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*Editor:*  
**Jacob Zenn**



# **Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency**

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy, Department of Defense, or U.S. Government.

May 2018

Cover Photo: A group of Boko Haram fighters line up in this still taken from a propaganda video dated March 31, 2016.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The editor thanks colleagues at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC), all of whom supported this endeavor by proposing the idea to carry out a report on Boko Haram and working with the editor and contributors to see the project to its rightful end. In this regard, I thank especially Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, Jason Warner, Kristina Hummel, and Larisa Baste, who all directly collaborated on the report. I also thank the two peer reviewers, Brandon Kendhammer and Matthew Page, for their input and valuable feedback without which we could not have completed this project up to such a high standard. There were numerous other leaders and experts at the CTC who assisted with this project behind-the-scenes, and I thank them, too.

Most importantly, we would like to dedicate this volume to all those whose lives have been affected by conflict and to those who have devoted their lives to seeking peace and justice.

Jacob Zenn

This report comes at an interesting time in both Boko Haram's trajectory and in the field's research on the group. We at the CTC are aware of the current analytical debates, and as a result, I want to reiterate the CTC's long-standing tradition of publishing rigorous, objective, and policy-relevant research on today's most pressing threats from terrorism. This project is a product of our rigorous reviewing policies and a reflection of our commitment to quality research. Our process includes both internal reviews performed by CTC faculty and external reviews performed by experts in the field, including those known for having countering views from some of the contributors. We believe this project represents an important contribution to our collective understanding of Boko Haram, and we welcome scholarly debate on this volume's various findings to advance our knowledge of the field.

LTC Bryan Price, Ph.D.

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## Executive Summary

Ten years ago when scholars and analysts wrote about security in Africa, northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region rarely registered in their assessments.<sup>1</sup> That may have been understandable: there was still no insurgency in the region, and the group popularly known as Boko Haram,<sup>2</sup> which literally means “Western education is sinful” in the Hausa language, was considered “moderate revivalists attempting to implement social change.”<sup>3</sup> The violent potential of Boko Haram was neither recognized nor anticipated.

Yet the launch of Boko Haram’s insurgency in 2009 immediately forced observers and scholars to reassess the threat it posed. Although some analysts denied at first that Boko Haram was receiving training, funding, and weapons from other jihadi groups, officials and researchers in West Africa recognized early that Boko Haram had cultivated networks to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Shabaab.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence that these two groups, in particular, assisted Boko Haram in rapidly increasing its tactical sophistication, such as with suicide bombings, after 2009.<sup>5</sup>

By 2016, Boko Haram was not only ranked the “most deadly” jihadi group in Africa, but also the world.<sup>6</sup> On the verge of the 10-year anniversary of the group’s launch of its jihad—which will be in 2019—Boko Haram rivals and in some ways has surpassed its jihadi counterparts in AQIM in Algeria and the Sahel and al-Shabaab in Somalia and East Africa in tactical sophistication, lethality, and territory under its control. Boko Haram’s learning curve has indisputably been fast.

The loss of human life as a result of the insurgency is estimated at approximately 30,000 people.<sup>7</sup> Boko Haram has devastated much of the countryside in northeastern Nigeria and neighboring regions of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps are scattered across the border regions of these countries, and the task of returning IDPs to their homes has been as difficult as it has been dangerous.

Attacks and abuses that Nigerians would have never thought possible in the country have become commonplace: girls as suicide bombers, the reinstatement of “slavery,” mass immolation of students in their dormitories, among others. In this sense, Boko Haram has also tested the limits of what is permissible in jihadi ideology.

Nigeria, once considered the Giant of Africa, has seen its influence in West Africa reduced because of

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1 Robert L. Feldman, “The Root Causes of Terrorism: Why Parts of Africa Might Never Be at Peace,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 25:4 (2009): pp. 355–372.

2 Boko Haram’s formal name since 2009 has been Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad, or Sunni Muslim Group for Preaching and Jihad.

3 Ousmane Kane, “Islamic Inroads in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Harvard International Review* 29:2 (2007): pp. 64-67.

4 Alexander Thurston, for example, wrote that links between Boko Haram and AQIM were “not serious” and that it was “more likely” that double agents in the Nigerian Army trained Boko Haram members than AQIM even though such evidence did not exist. In contrast, Nigerian journalists with access to Boko Haram members, such as Ahmed Salkida, and other analysts and officials in West Africa and at the United Nations increasingly expressed concern about Boko Haram training in the Sahel and Somalia starting in 2011. Alexander Thurston, “Quick Items: Boko Haram and al Shabab,” *Sahelblog*, October 22, 2010; Alexander Thurston, “Response to NYT Article on Boko Haram,” *Sahelblog*, August 19, 2011; Lamine Chichi, “Algeria says Nigeria’s Boko Haram tied to al Qaeda,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2011; Laurent Prieur, “Boko Haram got al Qaeda bomb training, Niger says,” *Reuters*, January 25, 2012; “Letter dated January 17, 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council,” *United Nations Security Council*, January 18, 2012.

5 Ahmed Salkida, “The Story Of Nigeria’s First Suicide Bomber - BluePrint Magazine,” *Sahara Reporters*, June 26, 2011; Joe Brock, “Special Report: Boko Haram - between rebellion and jihad,” *Reuters*, January 31, 2013; Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram’s Conquest for the Caliphate: How Al Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2018.

6 “Global Terrorism Index: 2015,” *Institute for Economics and Peace and START*, November 17, 2015; Dionne Searcey and Marc Santora, “Boko Haram Ranked Ahead of ISIS for Deadliest Terror Group,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2015; “Boko Haram has been the most deadly terror group in Africa (2010-2016),” *The Atlas*, 2016.

7 See “Nigeria Security Tracker,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, last updated March 9, 2018.

the insurgency. Not only has the government underestimated Boko Haram, and lost or been denied access to territory by the insurgents, but Nigeria's ability to serve as a security guarantor in the region has deteriorated. Nigeria, for example, played a leading role in peacekeeping in Liberia in the 1990s and 2000s but can no longer deploy large numbers of forces elsewhere in the region because of the need for troops to combat Boko Haram at home.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one of al-Qa`ida's goals in supporting Boko Haram from as early as 2003 was to prevent Nigeria from playing a regional leadership role on behalf of the "Jewish-Crusader alliance."<sup>9</sup> In this regard, al-Qa`ida has apparently succeeded.

Despite President Muhammadu Buhari's efforts to improve the army's efficiency since coming into office in 2015, the insurgency has long exposed problems in the Nigerian government and security apparatus. There have been reports of an under-resourced army suffering from low morale.<sup>10</sup> There have also been reports of Boko Haram commanders arrested in governors' lodges and of other insurgent associations with politicians.<sup>11</sup> The key areas where Boko Haram operates have a rising youth population facing high rates of unemployment and low literacy rates, and this is only worsened by the growing ecological crisis of a shrinking Lake Chad and expanding desertification. None of this makes countering the insurgency any easier.

While Nigerian Muslim leaders are keen to distance themselves from the insurgents, both Boko Haram and the Islamic State-affiliated faction Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) are adamant that they abide by salafi principles and the example of the Prophet and his companions.<sup>12</sup> This has forced Nigerian salafis into a difficult position: on the one hand, they are accused of supporting or sympathizing with Boko Haram because their theological reference points resemble those of Boko Haram, while on the other hand, their work to counter Boko Haram plays into Boko Haram's accusations that they are "palace lackeys" of the Nigerian government who backtracked on the salafi-jihadi project in Nigeria that they initially supported.<sup>13</sup> The most vocal critics of Boko Haram from the Nigerian salafi community have been prime targets for Boko Haram assassinations, which has made it all the more difficult for salafis to challenge the group's ideology in the public sphere.<sup>14</sup>

The Boko Haram and ISWAP ideological campaign is no longer limited to the physical marketplace of ideas. Like the "mainstream" Nigerian salafis, the group's factions have also embraced Facebook, Twitter, and especially Telegram as a means to release their statements and propaganda. Social media allows the various factions to not only share their narratives and objectives to potential recruits but also to debate each other on issues of ideology and strategy.<sup>15</sup> Both Boko Haram and ISWAP have used videos to boast of battlefield successes, refute government claims, and engage in psychological operations against the Nigerian government and people, a tactic particularly evident in the videos released of the Chibok schoolgirls, which succeeded in drawing global attention to Boko Haram leader Abubakr

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8 Andrew McGregor, "Nigerian Army Abandons Peacekeeping Missions in Mali and Darfur to Combat Boko Haram," *Terrorism Monitor*, March 17, 2018.

9 "United States of America against Ibrahim Suleiman Adnan Adam Harun" Case 1:12-cr-00134-BMC-MDG, United States District Court, August 4, 2016; "Al Qaeda Operative Convicted of Multiple Terrorism Offenses Targeting Americans Overseas," Department of Justice U.S. Attorney's Office Eastern District of New York, March 16, 2017.

10 "Nigeria soldiers 'fire at army commander in Maiduguri,'" BBC, May 14, 2014.

11 "How Kabiru Sokoto was arrested," *Premium Times*, February 10, 2012; Emma Ujah, "High-profile Boko Haram member arrested in Ali Modu Sheriff's house," *Vanguard*, October 21, 2012; Abdulkadir Mukhtar, "'Boko Haram commander' is my nephew - Senator Ahmed Zanna," *Daily Trust*, October 21, 2012.

12 Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa eds., *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (London: Hurst, 2018); Katherine Balfour, "Nigerian Group Muslims Against Terror Denounce ISIS, Boko Haram," *naija.ng*, March 18, 2015.

13 Abubakr Shekau discusses how Nigerian salafi clerics "backtracked" in an exclusive audio titled "Shekau da Jafaar," likely from 2007, and is available on request. Alexander Thurston, "Nigeria's Mainstream Salafis between Boko Haram and the State," *Islamic Africa* 6:1 (2015): pp. 109-134.

14 See, for example, "Outspoken religious leader killed in Nigeria," Al Jazeera, February 4, 2014.

15 Jacob Zenn, "Electronic Jihad in Nigeria: How Boko Haram Is Using Social Media," *Terrorism Monitor*, December 9, 2017.

Shekau and the ineffective government response to the kidnapping.<sup>16</sup>

*But what are Boko Haram's goals and objectives?* The leaders have always claimed that they want to govern territory under sharia law and fully eliminate the secular, democratic, and 'un-Islamic' Nigerian political and educational systems. This includes targeting Western education because of the co-educational mixing of the sexes, the promotion of the English language, and the teachings of Darwinian theories of evolution that come along with it. The factions and leaders have at times sought to create their own Islamic state in Nigeria, while at other times they have sought to identify with other Islamic states and groups, such as the Taliban in 2003 or, since 2015, the Islamic State.

There are ongoing debates about whether Boko Haram and ISWAP are on the rise or decline and whether the insurgents are winning or losing. In March 2015 when Boko Haram pledged its loyalty to the Islamic State, the Nigerian government was launching a large-scale counterinsurgency offensive against the insurgents and was confident it would defeat them once and for all. Some analysts mistakenly saw the pledge to the Islamic State as a sign of the group's weakness and an attempt to deflect attention from the group's battlefield losses.<sup>17</sup> But the offensive against Boko Haram did not fully dislodge the insurgents from their territories nor did it undermine their loyalty to the Islamic State, which the group first announced in 2014, was formalized in 2015 and has maintained in 2018 even despite the Islamic State's territorial losses in Syria and Iraq.

The Nigerian government has often claimed that Boko Haram is desperate or on its 'last legs,' or, more recently, that its violence was "the last kicks of a dying horse."<sup>18</sup> Yet ongoing attacks including suicide bombings, abductions, and raids on military convoys do not suggest the movement is demoralized, lacking finances, or near its end. Boko Haram has also received several million dollars from the exchanges for the Chibok schoolgirls in 2016 and 2017 and ransoms from other kidnappings.<sup>19</sup> ISWAP and Boko Haram also still possess tanks, rockets, and other heavy weaponry, some of which has been pilfered from Nigerian barracks and armories.<sup>20</sup> Reports from the United Nations suggest that both factions control territory where they can implement their version of sharia law and deny the Nigerian government access.<sup>21</sup>

One of the impacts of Shekau's 2015 pledge of loyalty to the Islamic State has been on the internal factions of the group. As the longstanding leader and only public face of Boko Haram since 2009, Shekau was appointed by the Islamic State in March 2015 as the group's leader under the new name, ISWAP. However, in August 2016, the Islamic State demoted Shekau in favor of Abu Musab al-Barnawi (alias Habib Yusuf). The internal factionalization of the group was said to be another sign of the group's decline, but, if anything, the continuation of ISWAP under al-Barnawi and a revived Boko Haram under the leadership of Shekau has diversified—and not eliminated—the threat as the factions compete with each other.<sup>22</sup>

16 "Boko Haram Releases Videos Showing Some Of The Remaining Chibok Girls Who Vowed Not To Go Back Home," YouTube, January 15, 2018.

17 Adam Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria," in M. Cahen, M.E. Pommerolle, K. Tall eds., *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015); Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 183.

18 Latifat Opoola, "B/Haram bombings last kicks of dying horse – Buhari," *Daily Trust*, November 27, 2017.

19 "Investigation shows Cameroon paid 2billion FCFA to Boko Haram for hostage release," [journalducameroun.com](http://journalducameroun.com), June 20, 2017; Joe Parkinson and Drew Hinshaw, "Freedom for the World's Most Famous Hostages Came at a Heavy Price," *Wall Street Journal*, December 24, 2017.

20 "Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau sends felicitations to his followers in a new video, claims responsibility for a string of attacks and shows spoils of war," Sahara Reporters, January 1, 2018.

21 "Nigeria North-East: Humanitarian Situation Update," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, January 2018.

22 Hamza Idris, "Boko Haram supremacy battle: Shekau loses grounds to Albarnawi faction," *Daily Trust*, December 14, 2017.

Moreover, even despite Nigerian government claims of Shekau's death, he remains as alive and volatile as ever, taunting Nigerian and world leaders alike. Meanwhile, al-Barnawi and his loyalists present a more 'hearts and minds' tone as compared to Shekau, especially toward the Muslim civilian population, a stance that makes ISWAP somewhat more tolerable to civilians than Boko Haram, but therefore more dangerous in the long-run.<sup>23</sup> Surrender is not an option for either Shekau and his loyalists or al-Barnawi. For example, Ahmed Salkida, the only journalist who has met Shekau face-to-face since the launch of the insurgency, wrote in early 2018 that:

*"Shekau has groomed men and women in their thousands that even he can no longer keep in line; many within the network see him as an obstacle to what they would have accomplished if he was gone long ago. No doubt, he remains the face of the insurgency, but no longer the driver of it ... If we consider one of Shekau's lines in his last video literally, that he is tired of being around and would prefer death than this life, as a sign of complete defeat, then we are still VERY ignorant of the group's corrosive ideology, which is, 'to kill or be killed.'"*<sup>24</sup>

Sources close to ISWAP, meanwhile, claim that al-Barnawi must report to the Islamic State, which means that there is a no possibility for an end to the insurgency via negotiations with the group.<sup>25</sup>

One reality of the insurgency is that its evolution has never been easy to predict. The extrajudicial killing of Muhammad Yusuf—al-Barnawi's father—was one factor in the sudden and unanticipated rise of the insurgency in 2009, for example. If, or when, Shekau is killed, it will certainly be celebrated by many in Nigeria. But some of his loyalists may join ISWAP under the lead of al-Barnawi and strengthen it. Other members of Shekau's faction may even become more unrestrained in their use of violence, thus exacerbating the harm to civilians.

In a conflict that has no easy answers and no solutions in sight, Boko Haram is already and will remain one of Africa's enduring insurgencies. In order to better understand Boko Haram now and in the future, this report challenges some key misconceptions about the insurgency and provides new analyses and insights based on many exclusive primary source materials and datasets. It explores six areas that are increasingly important but under-researched about Boko Haram and ISWAP: ideology, gender, leadership, counterinsurgency, regional dynamics, and terrorist networks.

On ideology, Abdulbasit Kassim argues that:

- By preaching in support of suicide bombings and al-Qa`ida, "mainstream" Nigerian salafi preachers laid the ideological framework that Boko Haram later promoted when it launched the insurgency in 2009.
- The Islamic State has had some level of intervention in the management of the internal civil war between Boko Haram and ISWAP.
- Rigidity in ideology, particularly over the issue of labeling Muslims as infidels and the ethics of war, has been responsible for the factional infighting between Boko Haram and ISWAP.

On gender, Elizabeth Pearson argues that:

- The Islamic State's strict prohibition on female violence was geared toward its 'state' project, with a strict division of male and female roles (violent/non-violent) in order to recruit both men and women, unify its members, and regulate their behavior. And with no similar governance role or

23 Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau," SoundCloud, Sahara Reporters, August 4, 2016; Jacob Zenn, "The Terrorist Calculus in Kidnapping Girls in Nigeria: Cases from Chibok and Dapchi," *CTC Sentinel* 11:3 (2018).

24 Ahmad Salkida, "1/ If we consider one of Shekau's lines in his last video literally, that he is tired of being around and would prefer death than this life, as a sign of complete defeat, then we are still VERY ignorant of the group's corrosive ideology, which is, 'to kill or be killed,'" Twitter, February 8, 2018.

25 "Boko Haram Gives Reason for Release of Dapchi Girls, Denies Ceasefire Talks With FG," Sahara Reporters, April 9, 2018.

recruitment objectives, Boko Haram has been freer to embrace female violence.

- Boko Haram's use of female 'suicide' bombing is not only unprecedented in scale, but also in the absence of symbolic meaning accorded to 'attackers' or consistent public theological justification.
- Boko Haram and the Islamic State engage in gender-based violence in the pursuit of tactical goals, but this changes to suit their aims and context.

On leadership, Atta Barkindo argues that:

- The Nigerian government's inability to defeat Boko Haram is the result of a misplaced security policy that dismisses Shekau as ignorant and clueless.
- Most policymakers, analysts, and academics do not understand the socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic antecedents of the environment within which Shekau operates and therefore struggle to understand why he has been able to be the Boko Haram leader since the start of the insurgency.
- Shekau's ability to strategically build networks and enter into and leave alliances when necessary is a reason for his success.

On counterinsurgency, Idayat Hassan and Zacharias Pieri argue that:

- The familiarity of anti-Boko Haram vigilantes in the Civilian JTF (CJTF) with local languages and the local terrain in northeastern Nigeria makes them uniquely capable of combating Boko Haram at a grassroots level.
- Fears have arisen over the possibility that the CJTF will 'turn bad' as so often happens with civilian-based armed groups (CBAGs).
- The Nigerian government has to address concerns of CJTF members regarding their future employment, education, and training and provide them a legitimate path into the armed forces. Failure to act will only serve to further delegitimize the state.

On regional dynamics, Omar Mahmoud argues that:

- Boko Haram's geographic operations and alliances have increasingly expanded beyond Nigeria's borders over time.
- Despite Boko Haram's evolution, Nigeria continues to remain the locus of the group's operations.
- It is important to examine specific aspects of Boko Haram and ISWAP when determining the geographic trajectory of the insurgency and considering policy responses.

On terrorist networks, Jacob Zenn argues that:

- Al-Qa`ida is no longer operationally active in Nigeria but is still interested in carrying out attacks in Nigeria or allying with some jihadi factions in Nigeria in the future.
- Although both Boko Haram and ISWAP are loyal to the Islamic State, with only the latter recognized as an Islamic State 'province,' some fighters could question that loyalty if Abubakr al-Baghdadi dies.
- In the long-term, the AQIM sub-groups in Mali will connect with ISWAP or Boko Haram defectors, very possibly from the Fulani ethnic group, and reestablish a faction to operate in Nigeria that will carry out attacks on foreign interests.

It is hoped that these analyses of 'Africa's enduring insurgency' will be useful to counterterrorism practitioners, humanitarian organizations, and academia and will assist in understanding and, ultimately, mitigating and resolving the conflict.

## Introduction

As we enter the 10th year of the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria and its neighbors face an ever-evolving threat. Boko Haram is now factionalized, split into Boko Haram led by Abubakr Shekau; the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi; and the formerly al-Qa`ida-aligned, but now operationally dormant, Ansaru. Despite the military's recovery of territory seized by Boko Haram and ISWAP since 2015, both factions remain active. ISWAP continues to raid military barracks and has even engaged in combat with U.S. forces in Niger, while Boko Haram carries out unrestrained violence against the Nigerian population. Since 2014, there has also been an uptick in 'suicide' bombings, especially by females and young girls, and attacks on the most vulnerable civilians in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The factionalization of Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Ansaru has complicated counterinsurgency efforts and prospects for a negotiated resolution to the soon-to-be decade-long insurgency.

While Nigeria and its neighbors Cameroon, Chad, and Niger bear the brunt of the violence as well as counterinsurgency responsibilities, the United States and other international actors also seek to support counterinsurgency and humanitarian relief efforts. This report, *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, strives to provide all actors involved in countering the insurgency, from military to NGO professionals to academics and government officials, with unique, primary source-based, and diverse perspectives on the conflict. This double peer-reviewed report stands in contrast to much of the literature on Boko Haram, which has relied on secondary sources and "catch-all" explanations. Rather, this report engages in deep explorations of six themes related to the insurgency that have often been overlooked and understudied:

- Ideology: the influence of Islamic State theological guidance and notions of *takfir* (excommunication) on ISWAP and Boko Haram leaders
- Gender: the impact and meaning of Boko Haram's deployment of female suicide bombers, contrasted with the Islamic State's caliphate project
- Leadership: the ability of Boko Haram leader Abubakr Shekau to command loyalty in the specific socio-cultural environment where he operates
- Counterinsurgency: the challenges of integrating military and civilian efforts in counterinsurgency efforts
- Expansion: the spillover of the insurgency from Nigeria into the border countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger
- Alliances: the potential for any of the factions to renew an alliance with al-Qa`ida

The authors—three Nigerians, two Americans, and two from the United Kingdom—reflect diverse backgrounds both professionally and in their understandings of the insurgency.

Abdulbasit Kassim is a Ph.D. student at Rice University, focusing on African Islamic movements and international relations in sub-Saharan Africa. His article, "Boko Haram's Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism," evaluates the role of ideology in the insurgency and the Islamic State's management of the factional infighting between Boko Haram and ISWAP.

Elizabeth Pearson is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded Ph.D. candidate in War Studies at King's College London and an Associate Fellow at the London-based think-tank Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Her article, "Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, Islamic State and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber," explores the difference between Boko Haram's unprecedented reliance on female suicide bombing and the Islamic State's contrasting reluctance to adopt female violence. It presents original data on female suicide bombings by Boko Haram and argues that both the Islamic State and Boko Haram are willing to subvert theological rules on female violence, and their

own ideologies, to tactical ends, and that gender-based violence is a core component of their jihads.

Dr. Atta Barkindo is the director of The Kukah Centre in Abuja, Nigeria. His article, “Abubakr Shekau: Boko Haram’s Underestimated Corporatist-Strategic Leader,” provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic environment within which Boko Haram operates and how despite his notorious eccentricities Abubakr Shekau exploits this environment to win and command loyalty from followers.

Idayat Hassan is the director of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), an Abuja-based policy advocacy and research organization with a focus on deepening democracy and development in West Africa. Dr. Zacharias Pieri is a lecturer in International Relations and Security Studies at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee. Their article, “The Rise and Risks of Nigeria’s Civilian Joint Task Force: Implications for Post-Conflict Recovery in Northeastern Nigeria,” evaluates how the counter-Boko Haram vigilante group, Civilian JTF, has been a positive but also, at times, a negative factor in counterinsurgency efforts.

Omar Mahmoud is a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) focusing on the Lake Chad Basin and Horn of Africa regions. His article, “Local, Global or In-Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership and Support Networks,” examines how Boko Haram’s operations have changed over time from an original locus in Nigeria to attacks in all countries in the Lake Chad region, including Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

Jacob Zenn, this report’s editor, is an adjunct assistant professor at Georgetown University’s Security Studies Program (SSP) and a fellow on African and Eurasian Affairs of The Jamestown Foundation. His article, “Boko Haram’s Fluctuating Affiliations: Future Prospects for Re-alignment with Al-Qa`ida,” examines Boko Haram’s transition from a close operational relationship with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb in the beginning of its jihad in 2009 to its loyalty to the Islamic State in 2015 and assesses whether al-Qa`ida will reenter Nigeria and what the impact of al-Qa`ida in Nigeria in the future may be.

The authors hope and expect that these articles will contribute needed analysis and new perspectives to the literature on Boko Haram and the insurgency in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, and al-Qa`ida and Islamic State activities more broadly.

## CHAPTER 1: Boko Haram's Internal Civil War: Stealth Takfir and Jihad as Recipes for Schism

*By Abdulbasit Kassim*

The jihadi insurgent movement Boko Haram has established itself as one of the relatively few jihadi movements to succeed in the capture, control, and governance of territory in Africa. Over the course of less than two decades, Boko Haram has morphed from a jihadi movement operating within Nigeria to a movement with a regional presence across multiple countries in West Africa and beyond. Since the internal civil war within the group shot into the news following the war of words between Abubakr Shekau and Muhammad Mamman Nur in August 2016, sundry observers have remained puzzled over how to describe the open competition and outright hostility that fractured the group into two factions. What is the current state of Boko Haram's internal civil war in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region? This is the most frequently asked question by policymakers, scholars, and the general public interested in understanding the trajectory of the decade-old insurgency. The answer to this question has often focused on a stationary analysis of the mutual recrimination between Shekau and Nur in August 2016. Nonetheless, many events are taking place behind the scenes that can only be grasped through a close reading of the constant stream of primary sources produced by the two factions. Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi's camp together with Nur in the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) holds an advantage over Shekau's faction, which is still known as Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad (The Sunni Group for Preaching and Fighting), but the internal civil war is not yet over.<sup>26</sup>

### Background

In his lecture on March 15, 2009, at the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State, Muhammad Mamman Nur, who was then considered to be third-in-command in the group that would later be popularly known as Boko Haram, vowed that "whether you [oppositional salafi clerics] like it or not, whether you love them [the secular political rulers] or not, we will commence the jihad! If you choose not to be bellicose and you depart from us, we will be aggressive towards you. This task [jihad] is obligatory. This is the main reason we made it clear that our proselytism is not just verbal proclamation. It is not the type of proselytism of Ibrahim Zakzaky."<sup>27</sup><sup>28</sup> Nur's lecture, which was delivered three months prior to the July 2009 Boko Haram uprising, was especially filled with incitement and threats. As the leader of the group, Muhammad Yusuf, explained in his address after Nur's lecture, Nur's irascible tone was apparently brought on by the report that one of the members of the group had been killed by the Nigerian security forces and his body dumped in Gwange Cemetery in Maiduguri.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the raucous disposition of Abubakr Shekau, who succeeded Yusuf after his extrajudicial killing by the Nigerian security forces in July 2009, Nur maintained a strict sense of secrecy. Nothing was heard directly from Nur after the July 2009 uprising, even when the Nigerian government placed a bounty of \$175,000 on him for his alleged masterminding of the August 2011 United Nations Building

26 Shekau's faction is commonly referred to as Boko Haram in the popular press. Al-Barnawi's faction is commonly referred to as ISWAP or the "ISIS faction," but it is sometimes also still referred to as Boko Haram.

27 Ibrahim Zakzaky is the leader of the Shiite group the Islamic Movement in Nigeria. He has been in detention since the aftermath of the 2015 Zaria massacre where hundreds of his followers were extrajudicially killed for allegedly planning an assassination attempt of Nigeria's Chief of Army Staff Tukur Buratai. For further detail on the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, see Jacob Zenn "The Islamic Movement and Iranian Intelligence Activities in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* 6:10 (2013), pp. 13-18. See also Alexander Thurston, "Shi'ism and Anti-Shi'ism in Nigeria," *Maydan*, May 15, 2017.

28 See "Returning to the Qur'an and Sunna: Lecture by Muhammad Mamman Nur and Muhammad Yusuf" in Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa eds., *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (London: Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 156.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 159-164.

bombing in Abuja.<sup>30</sup> On August 4, 2016, more than seven years after his voice was last heard publicly in the March 2009 lecture, Nur's tactic of reticence inadvertently ended following the public disclosure of his privately recorded two-part audio lecture entitled "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau." In the lecture, Nur launched a scathing attack on Shekau for Shekau's violation of the Islamic ethics of jihad. Nur also presented the inner workings of Boko Haram and portrayed Shekau as a power-drunk, arbitrary, and capricious person who had degenerated into a Joseph Kony-like figure in the way he holds court in the Sambisa Forest, and periodically kills off his relatives, friends, and supporters for trivial offenses and rails against everyone who opposes him. Nur said:

"You were the person that killed Mustapha Chad and Kaka Allai inside your center as well. Go and ask the women about Mustapha Chad and Kaka Allai—they will tell you that they were martyred in battle, whereas the people from within will tell you that they were stoned to death. It is a lie. You were the person that killed them in Fath al-Mubin (Manifest Victory)<sup>31</sup> ... Were you not the person that killed Mujahid, Mallam Umar and Abu Maryam? Abu Maryam and Mujahid were killed when they went to the area under his [Shekau's] control. What was the crime of these servants of Allah? What did they do to you [Shekau]? Is it that a person cannot tell you the truth? That is the reason why, when we realized that we cannot tell you the truth while we were close to you, lest you kill us, we decided to go far away to tell you the truth [by audio messages]. Now it is impossible for you to kill us, rather we will kill each other. Our reliance is on Allah. If it is about the army, everyone has his own army. If you wish you can send your spy to our gathering to kill us. If you are a spy, you should come to us, and wait for the consequence."<sup>32 33</sup>

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30 "Nigeria Sets \$175,000 Bounty for Mamman Nur, The Alleged UN Office Bomber," Sahara Reporters, September 18, 2011.

31 Fath al-Mubin is possibly a name of the one of Boko Haram's camps.

32 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 453-455.

33 The images of Mujahid, Abu Maryam, Mustapha Chad, and Kaka Allai that follow were extracted during an online ideological altercation between members of Boko Haram and revisionists that parted ways with the group in April 2017. The images of Muhammad Mamman Nur and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi were extracted from the videos of Boko Haram. On December 1, 2015, the United States Department of the Treasury sanctioned Muhammad Mamman Nur and Mustapha Chad pursuant to Executive Order 13224. However, the accuracy of the details provided about Muhammad Mamman Nur can be contested. See "Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, December 1, 2015. On February 27, 2018, the United States Department of the Treasury added Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi to the Office of Foreign Assets Control's Specially Designated Nationals List. See "Specially Designated Nationals List Update," U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, February 27, 2018.

*Mujahid**Abu Maryam**Mustapha Chad**Mamman Nur**Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi**Kaka Allai*

In retrospect, the schisms in Boko Haram's leadership disclosed in Nur's lecture in August 2016 have an extended trajectory that dates back to the ideological infighting over the appropriate time to declare jihad in Nigeria—an infighting that commenced in the early 2000s between Muhammad Yusuf and Muhammad Ali, the latter whom was the first leader of the Nigerian Taliban, the predecessor group to Boko Haram. Nur's revelations also validated the repeated charges of the counterproductive strategy of targeting Muslim civilians leveled at Shekau and the leadership of Boko Haram by Abu Usama al-Ansari,<sup>34</sup> the leader of Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands) popularly known as Ansaru, in the video debut of his group delivered on June 2, 2012.<sup>35</sup> Through the writings and sermons of the key ideologues that contributed to the ideational capital of Boko Haram, this article examines how rigidity in the interpretation of jihadi ideology prompted Boko Haram's internal civil war. This article chronicles Boko Haram's internal civil war—situating it within the broader spectrum of infighting among other jihadi groups, particularly al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State—and the way both 'parent groups' have managed, or failed to manage, Boko Haram's requests for mediation in its own schisms.

34 Abu Usama al-Ansari is a pseudonym that has appeared in the publications and audio-visuals of Ansaru, but it is unclear if the pseudonym is specific to an individual or generic to anyone who leads the group. However, a prominent salafi cleric who now heads one of the government agencies in Nigeria identifies Abu Usama al-Ansari as Muhammad Auwal Ibrahim Gombe. The salafi cleric claims that Muhammad was killed in Michika, Adamawa State, in July 2013 by the lieutenants of Abubakr Shekau. The salafi cleric also claims that Ansaru produced a document of more than 60 pages at the time they started their campaign in 2012. The document, which explains the objectives, mission, and religious positions of the group, was distributed to selected religious leaders in northern Nigeria in a brown envelope.

35 "Important Message from Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan" Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, June 2, 2012. Nur is believed to have been associated with Ansaru, although not necessarily a member of the group.

### Internal Civil Wars within Jihadi-Salafi Ranks

In her book *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction*, Nelly Lahoud argued convincingly that “the rigid nature of the doctrinal framework the jihadis are advocating makes them prone to internal schisms and infighting.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the ideological fissures in Boko Haram fit into Lahoud’s prophecy. Ideological infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues seem to have become more common in recent years following the split between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. Jihadi groups and ideologues have participated in heated debates with their brothers-in-arms on various issues related to jihad.<sup>37</sup> Different typologies of ideological infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues can be identified as follows.

#### *Infighting over Jihadi Strategy*

Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer had previously discussed a new genre of jihadi strategic studies with little theological exegesis and highly pragmatic arguments of why some types of operations and targeting may have a more desirable political outcome than others.<sup>38</sup> This genre of strategic literature identifies the political, economic, and cultural factors in jihadism and recommends realistic strategies, some of which have prompted warring factionalism, inter-jihadi fratricide, and jihadi revisionism rather than unity in the jihadi ranks. Some examples of infighting over jihadi strategy include Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz’s (Sayyid Imam) “Denudation of Ayman Zawahiri’s al-Tabria (‘Exoneration’);”<sup>39</sup> Sayf al-`Adl, Abu Hafis al-Mauritani, and Abu Walid al-Masri’s criticisms of al-Qa`ida attacks on 9/11;<sup>40</sup> Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s criticism of the brutal tactics of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq;<sup>41</sup> al-Zawahiri’s criticism of al-Zarqawi’s attacks on Shiites in Iraq;<sup>42</sup> Abu Mus`ab al-Suri critique of al-Qa`ida’s hierarchical structure and his support for the strategy of ‘Nizam la Tanzim’ (System, not Organization);<sup>43</sup> Abu Basir al-Tartusi’s critique of suicide operations on both theological and strategic grounds;<sup>44</sup> the recantation document by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) titled “Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Accountability and the Judgment of People,” which offered a fun-

36 Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2010), p. xvii.

37 For an earlier study of jihadi schisms, see Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 107-109 and 197-199; Vahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa`ida 1989-2006* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), pp. 1-71; Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions Within Al-Qa`ida And Its Periphery* (West Point, NY, Combating Terrorism Center, 2010), pp. 1-257.

38 Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27:5 (2004): pp. 355-375. See also Steven Brooke, “Jihadist Strategic Debates before 9/11,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:3 (2008): pp. 201-226.

39 See the first installment of the “Denudation of Exoneration” available at [almasry-alyoum.com](http://almasry-alyoum.com). See also Paul Kamolnick, “Al Qaeda’s Sharia Crisis: Sayyid Imam and the Jurisprudence of Lawful Military Jihad,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36:5 (2013), pp. 394-418, and Meir Hatina, “Contesting Violence in Radical Islam: Sayyid Imam al-Sharif’s Ethical Perception,” *Islamic, Law and Society* 23 (2016), pp. 120-140.

40 See “Sayf al-`Adl letter to Khalid Shaykh Muhammad” available at [ctc.usma.edu](http://ctc.usma.edu); “Talk to Al Jazeera - Former al-Qaeda Mufti: I condemn ISIL attacks,” Al Jazeera, posted on YouTube, November 21, 2015; Vahid Brown, *A Profile of Abu’I-Walid al-Masri* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, January 1, 2008), p. 13.

41 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “Az-Zarqawi: Advocating and Advising,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, July 2004. See also Joas Wagemakers, “Reclaiming Scholarly Authority: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s Critique of Jihadi Practices,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34:7 (2011), p. 525.

42 “Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi,” *Global Security*, July 9, 2005.

43 Paul Cruickshank and Mohanad Hage Ali, “Abu Mus`ab al-Suri: Architect of the New Al Qaeda,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30:1 (2007), pp. 1-14.

44 Abu Basir al-Tartusi, “The Dangers of Martyrdom or Suicide Operations,” August 24, 2005; Abu Basir al-Tartusi, “Statement on the Bombings that took place in the City of London,” July 9, 2005.

damental reevaluation of the group's understanding of jihad;<sup>45</sup> and the ruling issued by al-Shabaab leaders Mukhtar Rowbow (now an ex-member), Hasan Tahir Aways, Abu Bakr al-Zayla`i, Zubayr al-Muhajir, and Abdihamid Hashi Olhaye critiquing the assassination attempt of Abu Mansur al-Amriki (Omar Hammani) and his companions, Khatab al-Masri and Usama al-Britani.<sup>46</sup>

### Infighting over 'National' vs 'Global' Model of Jihad

The participants in the ideological debates surrounding jihad—including the leaders of jihadi groups, jihadi ideologues, strategic thinkers, and active militant groups involved in jihad—have also recorded schisms over the divergence of preference between a nation-state-oriented model of jihad or a global jihad. The former focuses on national issues with mere declaratory and rhetorical support for global jihad, and the latter refers to interconnected affiliates fighting for the same objectives and against the same adversaries. Examples of infighting over the two models of jihad include al-Maqdisi's rebuke of Mullah Umar's depiction of the Taliban as an Islamic nationalist movement;<sup>47</sup> the infighting between Hassan Hattab and Abu Mus`ab Abd al-Wadud of the defunct Algerian GSPC;<sup>48</sup> al-Maqdisi's denunciation of the methodology of Hamas and the crackdown on the Army of Islam;<sup>49</sup> Abu Yunis al-Abbasi's criticism of Hamas' neglect in implementing strict sharia law in Gaza;<sup>50</sup> and Abu `Abdallah al-Maqdisi's criticism of Hamas' participation in democracy, its cooperation with secular Palestinian parties and organizations under the guise of national unity, and its loyalty to 'apostate' Arab regimes, Christians, and Shiites like Iran and Hezbollah.<sup>51</sup>

### Infighting over the Arab Spring

The turmoil that engulfed the Arab world following the Arab Spring in 2011 created security vacuums that al-Qa`ida leaders sought to exploit through its local affiliates. However, as they filled the security vacuums, the infighting over the approach to be adopted to further the turmoil along a jihadi path split the jihadi movement. Examples of the infighting over the Arab Spring include Abu Basir al-Tartusi's criticism of Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen,<sup>52</sup> the refutation of Abu Basir al-Tartusi's criticism of Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen by Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, Abu Zubayr `Adil al-`Ubab, and Abu Hummam Bakr b. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Athari.<sup>53</sup>

45 This document was authored by `Abd al-Hakim Balhaj (Emir of the LIFG), Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa`idi (Spiritual leader of the LIFG), `Abd al-Wahhab al-Qayed (the elder brother of late Abu Yahya al-Libi), Khalid al-Sharif, Miftah al-Duwdi, and Mustafa Qanaifid. It was endorsed by the Mauritanian salafi Sheikh Muhammad al-Hasan Ould Dedew and the Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi.

46 See "About the Attempted Assassination of Abu Mansur al-Amriki and His Companions Khatab al-Masri and Usamah al-Britani," *Jihadology*, April 30, 2013. See also Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabab in Somalia: The Resilience of Al-Qaeda's East African Affiliate," in Aaron Zelin ed., *How al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2017), p. 69.

47 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Questions about the statements attributed to the Emir of the Faithful Mullah Omar in the `Id al-Fitr Message," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, September 24, 2009.

48 Gwendal Durand, *L'Organisation d'Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique: Réalité ou Manipulations?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011), p. 23-24. See also Anneli Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism," *Institute for Security Studies Monographs* 144 (2008).

49 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Hamas: correct the basis and fear God, not people," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, December 29, 2008; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "We and Hamas are not upon the same methodology," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, June 28, 2009; Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "Refutation of the statements of al-Astal, the Mufti of Hamas," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, August 19, 2009.

50 See Scott Sanford, "When Hamas is not Islamic Enough (Part 1)," *Jihadica*, May 27, 2009.

51 Abu `Abdallah al-Maqdisi, "The Fundamental Proclamation in the Government of Hamas," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, April 19, 2009.

52 See Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "To the Brothers in Ansar al-Shari`a in Yemen," March 10, 2012.

53 Joas Wagemakers, "Al-Qaida advises the Arab Spring: Yemen," *Jihadica*, June 5, 2012; Cole Bunzel, "Jihadism's Widening Internal Divide: Intellectual Infighting Heats Up," *Jihadica*, January 29, 2013.

### *Infighting over the Islamic State's Declaration of a Caliphate*

Since the open rivalry between al-Qa`ida's leadership and the Islamic State began in 2013, several jihadi movements have declared their allegiance to one side or the other, splitting the jihadi-salafi movement into two competing factions.<sup>54</sup> Examples of the internal civil war that ensued following the declaration of a caliphate by the Islamic State include the dispute between Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State and Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani of Jabhat al-Nusra (now Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham);<sup>55</sup> the disavowal of the Islamic State by al-Qa`ida;<sup>56</sup> the civil war of words between the Ghuraba' Media Foundation and Minbar al-Tawhid wa`l-Jihad;<sup>57</sup> the civil war of words between Abu Qatada al-Filistini, `Umar Mahdi Zaydan, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi;<sup>58</sup> the condemnations of the beheading of journalists and foreign aid workers by Abu Qatada, al-Maqdisi, and Abu Mahmud al-Filistini;<sup>59</sup> al-Maqdisi's war of words with the Islamic State over the death of the Jordanian pilot al-Kasasbeh;<sup>60</sup> and more recently, the Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham and al-Qa`ida dispute as explained in the testimonies of the Jordanian jihadi jurist Sami al-Oraidi, Abd al-Rahim Atoun, Abu al-Qassam al-Urduni, Abu al-Harith al-Masri, Abu Malek al-Shami, and Abu Humam al-Shami.<sup>61</sup>

### *Other Miscellaneous Infighting*

Other examples of jihadi infighting include the 'copyright controversy' between Abu Harith Mihdar al-Shadhili, the administrator of Madad al-Suyuf, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi<sup>62</sup> and the 'copyright controversy' between al-Fajr media and Madad al-Suyuf over the distribution of the second issue of the Arabic language magazine Turkistan al-Islamiyya produced by the Uighur jihadi group Turkistan Islamic Party.<sup>63</sup>

Infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues have weakened jihadism from the inside, thus rendering impossible the emergence of a unified jihadi movement.<sup>64</sup> In recent years, jihadis have been weakened not only by government counterterrorism operations but also by their own squabbles and internal disputes. In view of these internal and potentially endless disputes, Lahoud was right when she argued that "jihadism may well be on the path of self-destruction."<sup>65</sup> In the next section, this article will situate Boko Haram's internal civil war within some of the typologies of infighting among jihadi groups and ideologues outlined above.

54 See J.M. Berger, "The Islamic State vs. al Qaeda: Who's winning the war to become the jihadi superpower?" *Foreign Policy*, September 2, 2014; Daniel L. Byman and Jennifer R. Williams, "ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War," Brookings Institution, February 24, 2015; Daniel L. Byman, "Will ISIS and al-Qaida always be rivals?" Markaz Brookings, May 27, 2016; and Barak Mendelsohn, "Jihad's Civil War: The Battle Between ISIS and al Qaeda Simmers On," *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2016.

55 Cole Bunzel, "Introducing the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria," *Jihadica*, April 9, 2013; Cole Bunzel, "The Islamic State of Disobedience: al-Baghdadi Triumphant," *Jihadica*, October 5, 2013.

56 Aaron Zelin, "Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," Washington Institute of Near East Policy, February 4, 2014. See also Ahmed Hamdan, "Methodological Difference Between ISIS and Al Qaida: Who are the ones that deviated?" Al-Muwahideen Media, 2015.

57 Cole Bunzel, "The Ghuraba' Media Foundation and Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad," *Jihadica*, October 21, 2014.

58 See Cole Bunzel, "Caliphate Now: Jihadis Debate the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, November 25, 2013.

59 See Joas Wagemakers, "IS's beheadings of Western hostages: Jihadi ideologues speak out," *Jihadica*, September 22, 2014.

60 See Abdullah bin Khaled al-Saud, "The Spiritual Teacher and His Truants: The Influence and Relevance of Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2017).

61 See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham-al-Qaeda Dispute: Primary Texts (I-VI)," aymennjawad.org, December 15, 2017.

62 See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, "al-Maqdisi's response to Madad al-Suyuf," *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, January 28, 2009.

63 Thomas Hegghammer, "Infighting over Distribution of New Uighur Magazine," *Jihadica*, February 20, 2009.

64 See Cole Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms," *Islamism and the International Order Working Group*, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, May 17, 2017, pp. 8-11.

65 Lahoud, p. 24.

### Boko Haram's Route to Jihad: Doctrinal Cracks in the Foundation

The petri dish in which the ideological fissures in Boko Haram's leadership were created can be traced back to the warring factionalism that ensued between Muhammad Yusuf and Muhammad Ali over the appropriate time to declare jihad in Nigeria. Before leaving his studies at the International University of Africa in Khartoum, Muhammad Ali reportedly met Usama bin Ladin during his stay in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, during which time bin Ladin asked Ali to organize a cell in Nigeria with a budget of 300 million naira (approximately \$3 million).<sup>66</sup> Around the same time, an Agence France-Press intelligence report relayed that bin Ladin had ordered the dispatch of aid to Philippine jihadis who in the 1980s had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan with bin Ladin, including possibly a sum of \$3 million.<sup>67</sup>

The channeling of funds to Ali for setting up a jihadi infrastructure in Nigeria was consistent with al-Qa`ida's interest in sub-Saharan Africa. Al-Qa`ida has always made explicit its long-term goal of establishing a jihadi battlefront in Nigeria as illustrated in a tape released by bin Ladin in 2003 where Nigeria was mentioned as a country where Muslims needed to be liberated.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Abubakr Naji in *Idarat al-Tawahhush* (Management of Savagery) classified Nigeria as a region of priority together with Jordan, the countries of the Maghreb, Pakistan, and the countries of the Haramayn (Saudi Arabia and Yemen) as a result of the readiness of their people to accept the initiative of jihad, the weakness of their ruling regimes, and the existence of a history of jihadi expedition.<sup>69</sup>

When Muhammad Ali arrived back to Nigeria in 2002, he traveled to many states in Nigeria preaching his newfound ideology with selected religious leaders, particularly in Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe, Borno, and Yobe states.<sup>70</sup> With the help of the funding from bin Ladin, Ali exerted much effort toward the establishment of a solid foundation for jihad and "the revival of a jihadi culture in the hearts and minds of Muslim youths in Nigeria."<sup>71</sup> He did not record a substantial level of success in his attempt at winning the support of Nigerian religious leaders, most of whom, at that time, supported jihad in Muslim lands considered to be under occupation like Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq, and Afghanistan but took a cautious approach in the declaration of jihad in Nigeria.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, Ali gained the audience and support of Muhammad Yusuf, a prominent critic of the secular political system in Nigeria, an advocate for the implementation of sharia law in northern Nigeria, and a one-time member of the Borno State Sharia Implementation Committee under Governor Mala Kachallah (1999-2003).<sup>73</sup>

The first schism in the circle of Muhammad Ali broke out when his teacher and mentor, Abu al-Bara al-Daurawi (from Daura in Katsina State), out of his fear of being arrested at that time, fled to Saudi Arabia with the funds provided by the members of al-Qa`ida residing in the Arabian Peninsula, which were initially intended to support the jihad in Nigeria.<sup>74</sup> Despite this setback, Ali migrated with his

66 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," *Crisis Group Africa Report N°216*, April 3, 2014, p. 23.

67 See Ray Arquiza, "Interpol Alerts RP on Bin Laden's Men," *Philippine Star*, July 10, 2001, and Jim Gomez, "Philippine Rebels, bin Laden Linked," Agence France-Press, June 20, 2000.

68 See Neil MacFarquhar, "Tape Ascribed to bin-Laden Urges Muslims to Stand with Iraq," *New York Times*, February 12, 2003.

69 Abubakar Naji, *Idarat al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhala Sa-Tamurr bi-ha al-Umma* (2004), translated by William McCants as *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass* (Cambridge, MA: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, 2006), p. 37.

70 Isa Ali Pantami, "Theology and Jurisprudence in the Ideological Framework of Current Insurgencies: Towards an Alternative Islamic Discourse," paper presented at the Regional Conference on "Islam, Youth Militancy and the Challenges of Peace-Building," International Conference Center, Abuja, Nigeria, August 10-11, 2015, p. 5.

71 Abu Usama al-Ansari, "A Message from Nigeria," *Al-Risala*, Issue 4, January 2017, p. 19.

72 See Andrea Brigaglia, "Ja'far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf, and Al-Muntada Islamic Trust: Reflections on the genesis of the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 11 (2012): pp. 39-40.

73 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria," p. 7.

74 Abu Usama al-Ansari, "A Message from Nigeria."

followers to Zaji-Biriri in Tarmuwa Local Government Area and then later to Kanamma in Yunusari Local Government Area of Yobe State where they engaged in religious proselytism and the preparation for jihad in Nigeria under a new group called the ‘Nigerian Taliban.’<sup>75</sup>

Shortly after his first schism with his teacher al-Daurawi, Ali engaged in his second schism with Muhammad Yusuf, who at that time had become one of his disciples. Ali and Yusuf both argued against two positions that other salafi clerics in the region commonly accepted. First, Ali and Yusuf argued against the position that ruling by any source other than God’s laws or replacing the sharia with secular laws was only ‘minor unbelief.’ It was, according to them, a major unbelief and polytheism that can lead to excommunication from Islam. Second, Ali and Yusuf argued against the position that *takfir* cannot be declared on political rulers who govern by secular laws until the Islamic scholars investigate (*tafsil*) to confirm whether the rulers have made their acts of legislation permissible or whether they consider ruling by secular laws to be superior or equal to God’s laws. It was acceptable, according to them, to declare *takfir* prior to *tafsil*.<sup>76</sup>

However, unlike Ali, Yusuf further argued that although the political rulers who govern by secular laws can be declared apostates (*murtaddun*), it is imperative to take into consideration the objections to declaring *takfir* (*mawani al-takfir*) on them by taking off the potential excuse of ignorance (*al-`udhr bi-l-jahl*) that political rulers can invoke to defend themselves. Yusuf reasoned that before fighting the apostate rulers through jihad, Islamic evidence should be established (Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja) against them through proselytism. For his part, Ali argued that it is not obligatory to establish the Islamic evidence on the political rulers before declaring jihad against them because none of them can claim to be ignorant of God’s command to rule with His laws as opposed to secular laws.<sup>77</sup>

The schism between Ali and Yusuf on the topic of *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* and Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja has been discussed in detail by virtually all jihadi-salafi scholars. Among the jihadi-salafi scholars who support Ali’s argument, there is a consensus that the present-day political rulers cannot use the excuse of ignorance to account for their ruling with secular laws because none of them can claim to be oblivious of the impermissibility of ruling according to something other than what God has revealed. For example, the British-Syrian jihadi scholar Abu Basir al-Tartusi argues<sup>78</sup> that the scholarly debates on *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* and Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja do not apply to the secular political rulers, and any attempt to include them as a category in the debate is a mockery of the religion.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi also argues that the authentic opinion from the classical Islamic scholars rules out the right of establishing evidence for infidels who fight against Islam like the present-day political rulers.<sup>80</sup>

75 The best treatment of the Kanamma episode and the Nigerian Taliban is the article written by Andrea Brigaglia where he brilliantly argued that the Nigerian Taliban should not be viewed as a group of youths who migrated into local commune but as an extension of the salafi network mainly in Yobe and Borno states. See Andrea Brigaglia, “The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram,” *Diritto & Questioni Pubbliche* 15 (2015): pp. 193-197.

76 *Takfir* is the ability or willingness to designate an apparent Muslim to be an unbeliever. For a detailed study of *takfir*, see Camilla Adang, Hassan Ansari, Maribel Fierro, and Sabine Schmidtke eds., *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfir* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), pp. 1-17. See also Abdulbasit Kassim, “Defining and Understanding the Religious Philosophy of jihadi-Salafism and the Ideology of Boko Haram,” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 16 (2015): pp. 177-179.

77 See “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 37. See also “History of the Muslims by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 96-97.

78 For the biography of Abu Basir al-Tartusi and his role in the construction of the jihadi-salafi ideology, see Joas Wagemakers, “Between Purity and Pragmatism? Abu Basir Al-Tartusi’s Nuanced Radicalism” in Rüdiger Lohlker and Tamara Abu-Hamdeh eds., *Jihadi Thought and Ideology* (Berlin: Logos Verlag Berlin, 2013), pp. 16-36.

79 Abu Basir al-Tartusi, “The Excuse of Ignorance and the Establishment of Evidence,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, November 20, 2001, pp. 140-143.

80 Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “Misconception: Exempting the Political Rulers based on Ignorance and Coercion,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, n.d. See also Joas Wagemakers, “An Inquiry into Ignorance: A Jihadi-Salafi Debate on Jahl as an Obstacle to Takfir,” in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers eds., *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), pp. 301-327.

Tellingly, Ali's position is in line with the mainstream belief system in the jihadi-salafi community, while Yusuf's position was more lenient than the standard of the ideology in that community. Unlike Ali, Yusuf believed that by establishing the Islamic evidence on the political rulers through proselytism, it would attract a large followership and support communities that would be ideologically immune to the arguments put forth by the salafi clerics in their defense of the political rulers. These communities would then be better indoctrinated to fight jihad against the secular rulers. In an interview conducted in April 2017 for a documentary on Boko Haram, Abu Aisha—who was then the leader of the group in Zaria, Kaduna, Kano, and Katsina before he was arrested by the Nigerian Security Service and later released—also recounted the dispute between Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Yusuf over the appropriate time to declare jihad. Abu Aisha said:

“We encountered differences of opinion when we started the struggle. Some of us understood that it was not yet the appropriate time to declare jihad while those who fought in Kannama during the administration of Obasanjo believed it was the appropriate time to declare jihad. Our reason for postponing the declaration of jihad at that time is because we reason that the people are yet to fully understand the religion, and we thought they should be given an excuse since our main goal is the elevation of the religion. So, we considered it as a necessity for us to propagate the religion and convince the people with evidence from the sharia until the time when they have no excuse before what should happen happens.”<sup>81</sup>

After all attempts to convince Yusuf on the issue of al-`udhr bi-l-jahl and Iqamat al-dalil/al-Hujja failed, the Nigerian Taliban declared *takfir* on Yusuf and the group moved ahead by migrating to local communes and making preparation for the declaration of jihad. Yusuf recounted how the Nigerian Taliban declared him an apostate for delaying jihad against an ‘infidel’ government in an audio lecture entitled “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars,” which was recorded in Kano State around late 2006 or early 2007.<sup>82</sup> From December 2003 to September 2004, the Nigerian Taliban launched a jihad starting with the attack on police stations and government buildings at Kanamma, the burning down of the local government secretariat and a government lodge at Babbangida town, and raids on police stations in Damaturu, Gwoza, and Bama before fleeing to the Mandara Mountains along the Nigeria-Cameroon border.<sup>83</sup> The Nigerian troops engaged the group in series of battles, killing scores and arresting those who did not escape. After the death of Ali, his followers dispersed throughout the various northern Nigerian cities, while others migrated to join the Algerian fighters of the Salafist Group for Preaching Combat (al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb's, or AQIM's, predecessor) operating in the Sahara Desert.<sup>84</sup> During this period, Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia after the Nigerian police declared him wanted for his connection to the Nigerian Taliban.

While in Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Yusuf held a series of discussions with salafi clerics including Ja`far Adam (d. 2007), Muhammad Sani Rijiyar Lemo, and Ibrahim Jalo where they charged him with sowing discord among the Sunni followers in Nigeria. During his discussion on the Nigerian Taliban with Ja`far Adam at Mina in Saudi Arabia, Adam advised Yusuf to narrate all that transpired between him and the Nigerian Taliban to the Nigerian security agencies, but Yusuf did not act upon the advice and thought it was a trap, about which he had been forewarned by a Maiduguri-based cleric, Muhammad Abba Aji (d. 2009).<sup>85</sup> While taking precautions not to be identified with Yusuf, who was declared wanted back home in Nigeria, the salafi clerics came to his rescue, trusting that he was

81 Author's translation of a colleague's interview, Abu Aisha, April 2017.

82 “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 35-41.

83 “Curbing Violence in Nigeria,” p. 10.

84 Abu Usama al-Ansari, “A Message from Nigeria,” p. 19.

85 “Clearing the Doubts of the Scholars by Muhammad Yusuf,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 39. Ja`far Adam also spoke about his engagement with Yusuf in his lecture “I-Me Yasa suke cewa book Haram ne?-Sheikh Ja`afar Mahmud Adam da khabir Gombe.wmv,” YouTube, July 26, 2016.

innocent of the violence initiated by the Nigerian Taliban. Ja`far Adam advised Yusuf to hire a lawyer and write a letter to prove his innocence. With the help of the Deputy Governor of Borno State, Adamu Dibal, who was also in Saudi Arabia at the same time as Yusuf for pilgrimage, Yusuf was granted the permission to return to Maiduguri.<sup>86</sup>

Shortly after his return to Maiduguri, Yusuf called for an internal truce between the dispersed members of the Nigerian Taliban in December 2004, and they later pledged their allegiance to hear and obey Yusuf's commands and to support him upon the proselytism to which he called.<sup>87</sup> From this time forward, Yusuf followed an incremental process of proselytism that would eventually lead to the July 2009 uprising. Yusuf continued his debates with the salafi clerics, wrote the first and second edition of a book expounding the creed of his group, established the Islamic evidence for ruling by God's laws for the 'apostate' political rulers, and extolled the fortitude of Abdallah Azzam,<sup>88</sup> bin Ladin, and the Muslims imprisoned in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prison while simultaneously training his followers upon spirituality, preparation for jihad, and the virtues of martyrdom.<sup>89</sup>

For example, in his lecture on the exegesis of Qur`an 9 verses 9-16 delivered around early 2008, Yusuf said, "By Allah, we want to wage jihad even if we do not reach that stage; if we see those who have reached the stage we will join them in the jihad. There is nothing we hide from you. The *taghut*<sup>90</sup> should know, and you, too, (the salafi clerics) should know."<sup>91</sup> Elsewhere in another lecture, "History of the Muslims," delivered around December 2008, Yusuf stated the clear goal of his group:

"What will stop them from insulting the Prophet or killing the Muslims is jihad. But how are we going to carry out the jihad? With whom are we going to carry out the jihad? Allah made me to understand that first and foremost, we must embark upon the preaching towards Islamic reform. Then, we will have to be patient until we acquire power. This is the foundation of this preaching towards Islamic reform. It was founded for the sake of jihad, and we did not hide this objective from anyone."<sup>92</sup>

In the same lecture, Yusuf went further to explain that the requirements of establishing Islamic evidence on the political rulers and officials of the Nigerian security agencies has been fulfilled:

"We establish *iqamat al-hujja* for them, but you might not know since you have never gone to the presence of the Divisional Police Officer to discuss this issue. On the other hand, I have been called several times to their office. There was a time I was invited by the Director-General of the State Security Service—look at Ibrahim and others were the people who escorted me. I went to their office, and we sat with him to discuss the mission of our preaching towards Islamic reform ... Anyone about whom we are certain to have establish evidence upon is an apostate from Islam. If it is the *taghut*, you should present evidence to him, but once you present your evidence, it is over."<sup>93</sup>

By the end of 2008, Yusuf and his deputies had reached a verdict that the Nigerian political rulers

86 Ibid., p. 39. See also "Curbing Violence in Nigeria," p. 10.

87 See "Curbing Violence in Nigeria," p. 10. See also Abu Usama al-Ansari "A Message from Nigeria," p. 19.

88 For detailed analysis of Abdullah Azzam and some of his intellectual works cited by Muhammad Yusuf, see Youssef Aboul-Enein's reports in "The Late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam's Books," including "Part I: Strategic Leverage of the Soviet-Afghan War to Undertake Perpetual Jihad," "Part 2: Remedy for Muslim Victimization," and "Part III: Radical Theories on Defending Muslim Land through Jihad," Combating Terrorism Center.

89 See *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 27-33, 49-57, and 67.

90 Originally in the Qur'an the name of an idol, but in salafi terminology, meaning "illegitimate ruler, authority, one associated with an intrinsically evil system," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. xvi.

91 "Exegesis of Surat al-Tawba (Qur`an 9 Verses 9-16) by Muhammad Yusuf," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 55.

92 "History of the Muslims by Muhammad Yusuf," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 94.

93 Ibid., pp. 94-97.

understood Yusuf's proselytism and could no longer invoke the excuse of ignorance. The opposing salafi clerics were well-informed of the trajectory of Yusuf and his group, and they exerted all efforts to counter the growing acceptance of his ideology among the youths. For instance, prominent Kano-based salafi cleric Muhammad Sani Rijiyar Lemo delivered a lecture on April 2, 2009, entitled "History of Jihadi Movements" in Maiduguri, the nerve center of Yusuf's proselytism and followership. Rijiyar Lemo presented a detailed history of jihadi movements from Palestine, Kashmir, Afghanistan to Egypt, their past mistakes, infighting among jihadi groups as well as statements of revisionism from jihadi leaders such as Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz and Abbud al-Zumar of 'Tanzim al-Jihad'<sup>94</sup> in Egypt.<sup>95</sup> Rijiyar Lemo went as far as to strip Abd al-Qadir b. Abd al-Aziz, Ayman Zawahiri, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, and those who follow a similar ideology in Nigeria of their salafi credentials and affiliation to salafi clerics, while arguing that their ideology stemmed from youthful exuberance, deficient knowledge of Islam, a reductionist interpretation of jihad confined only to warfare, and the experience of torture from the Tora Liman prison<sup>96</sup> in Egypt.

Rijiyar Lemo's denunciation of jihadi-salafi ideology is in line with the global pattern of counter-arguments developed by other salafi clerics, and without any doubt, he had a good command of the jihadi literature. In his lecture, he stated that, "I studied the history of jihadi movements seven years ago (2002) in Saudi Arabia without knowing that I will be confronted with the same ideology in Nigeria."<sup>97</sup> Rijiyar Lemo argued that the desired Islamic change would not be achieved through revolution from the top, which failed to achieve any positive result, but rather through the path of seeking Islamic knowledge and reformation of Muslims from the grassroots:

"Did the combat executed by Abdulsalam Faraj, Yahya Hashim, and Khalid al-Islambouli<sup>98</sup> change anything? No, it did not change anything. They killed so many youths for no cause. This is not the goal of Islam. It is not the objective of Islam that we should be killed arbitrarily. This is not our objective. This is not the reason why jihad was mandated. Jihad was mandated for you to be more honored and become more powerful."<sup>99</sup>

### Scholarly Paradigms on Intra-Salafi Debates between Yusuf and Mainstream Salafis

At this juncture, it is important to review the two major scholarly paradigms in the literature on the intra-salafi debates between Muhammad Yusuf of Boko Haram and the mainstream salafis. The first paradigm is presented by scholars like Alexander Thurston who argued in his book on Boko Haram that Muhammad Yusuf "tried to smuggle jihadist thought into a Salafi community that had originally been oriented more towards non-jihadi Salafism."<sup>100</sup> But is this really the case? Was the salafi community originally oriented toward non-jihadi salafism? Thurston may have been right if he was referring to the fact that Yusuf was the first salafi figure who preached the jihadi ideology as espoused by scholars like Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Nonetheless, the weakness of Thurston's paradigm lies in what appears to be the subtle dismissal of the oscillation of the mainstream salafi clerics, particularly Yusuf's mentor Ja`far Adam, in the support of al-Qa`ida's global jihad against the far enemy and their call for restraint in the declaration of jihad against the near enemy (i.e., the Nigerian state), which was

94 Tanzim al-Jihad, also known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad, is an Egyptian jihadi group established in 1980 but merged with al-Qa`ida in June 2001. For detailed history of this group, see Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaeda: The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 29-73.

95 See "Kungiyoyin Jihadi" in the series "Dawla Uthmaniyya," available at dawahnigeria.com.

96 Tora Liman Prison is a maximum-security prison complex in Tora, Egypt, for criminal and political detainees.

97 Author's translation of "Kungiyoyin Jihadi."

98 Abdulsalam Faraj, Yahya Hashim, and Khalid al-Islambouli were members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

99 Author's translation of "Kungiyoyin Jihadi."

100 Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 109.

judged as a “hypocritical double standard” by Muhammad Yusuf.<sup>101</sup> Thurston would have captured some of the nuances in the intra-salafi debates if, like other scholars who use the same paradigm, he did not depend mostly on sources that date after the mid-2000s when the split between Muhammad Yusuf and the salafi clerics had already clearly emerged. The attempt to remedy this weakness is the reason why the following second paradigm seems plausible and more accurate.

The second paradigm on the intra-salafi debates between Muhammad Yusuf and the mainstream salafis is presented by Andrea Brigaglia who argued that the rift between the two parties should be viewed “as a gradual process that probably involved complex strategic considerations as well as local and global negotiations.”<sup>102</sup> Brigaglia’s paradigm challenges the one postulated by scholars like Thurston where Muhammad Yusuf and his followers are portrayed as the actors who made a gradual movement toward jihadism while the mainstream salafis are assumed to have maintained a stable, quietist persuasion. For his part, Brigaglia argued that it was indeed the mainstream salafis who withdrew from their flirtation with the jihadi project and that Yusuf and his followers should not be viewed as the actors who abandoned the quietist strategy for jihadism.<sup>103</sup>

Brigaglia’s paradigm is more plausible and accurate on account of the audio lectures that have recently been unearthed affirming that the mainstream salafis previously preached the type of jihadism that would later be embraced by Yusuf and his followers. Indeed, it is ironic that as early as 2001, when the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Abd al-Aziz bin Abdullah Al Ash-Shaykh condemned the use of suicide bombing as a warfare tactic by Islamic countries subjugated through occupation, some Nigerian salafi clerics like the Kano-based Aminu Daurawa, who now serves as the Commander General of Kano’s Hisbah board, preached vehemently in support of suicide bombing to the extent that he described God as a suicide bomber.<sup>104</sup> By preaching in support of suicide bombing as early as 2001, Aminu Daurawa and his salafi colleagues laid the ideological framework that Muhammad Yusuf would later implicitly sanction in his last public lecture in 2009. More recently, Abubakr Shekau who succeeded Yusuf, also unearthed one of the old lectures of Yusuf’s mentor, Ja`far Adam, where Ja`far Adam stated that “the jihad in Nigeria is coming; either they, the infidels chase us out of Nigeria or we chase them out.”<sup>105</sup> Shekau used this statement from Ja`far Adam to make the point that it was indeed the mainstream salafi clerics who backtracked from the jihadi project they had previously supported.

Whatever the case may be, by 2009 the majority of the mainstream salafi clerics could rightly be described as jihadi revisionists, but despite their revisionism and denunciation of jihadism, Yusuf and his followers had already grown deaf to their counter-arguments. Rather than responding to his critics, Yusuf advanced to the next stage on his checklist before the declaration of jihad, which involved observing the level of preparedness of his followers so that they could grasp the stakes that would await them once the jihad was declared. This next stage presented itself on June 11, 2009, when the Nigerian security forces associated with the anti-crime initiative called Operation Flush indiscriminately shot some members of Yusuf’s group during a funeral procession at Gwange cemetery in Maiduguri for their noncompliance with the law instructing all motorcycle drivers and passengers to wear helmets as a safety precaution.<sup>106</sup> Yusuf’s followers had not complied with the law due to their belief that obeying it was an affront to God equivalent to polytheism.

In his last official lecture before the July 2009 uprising, “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government,”

101 Yusuf lamented extensively about the “hypocritical double standard” of the mainstream salafis in his exegesis of Surat al-Baqara (Q2:284-286). See *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 111-116.

102 Brigaglia, p. 193.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 194.

104 See Abdulbasit Kassim, “Shaykh Aminu Daurawa, Boko Haram and the Theological Discourse on Suicide Bombing,” available at “Shaykh Aminu Daurawa, Boko Haram and the Theological Discourse on Suicide Bombing,” Medium, August 19, 2017.

105 Author’s translation of “Audio Lecture on the Book of Monotheism,” Abubakr Shekau, October 2017.

106 See “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government by Muhammad Yusuf (Part 2),” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 161-164.

Yusuf decried the iniquitous treatment of his followers in Maiduguri and other cities in northern Nigeria such as Argungu, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Bauchi where they were arbitrarily arrested by the State Security Service (SSS) and banned from preaching. While all these events were taking place, Yusuf was satisfied with the reaction of his followers and their level of preparedness for the stakes of jihad ahead. He said:

“Glory be to Allah—this is a lesson to us. We had initially thought that our brothers have not reached this stage, but I can confirm they have reached it. When I approached the brothers, I asked each of them when they were shooting, “Where were you?” One of them replied me, “I was here, I took this brother, and that brother.” I asked him, “Did the brothers flee?” He replied me that no, rather than fleeing they were advancing towards them [the security forces]. You never know when brothers have reached this level except in a state of oppression. This is a lesson and a gift from Allah. It is a sign of progress.”<sup>107</sup>

Conceivably, the perceived satisfactory level of preparedness of Yusuf’s followers inspired his “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government.” The proximate cause of the July 2009 uprising was the indiscriminate attack on Yusuf’s followers by Operation Flush, but this was merely a pretext. Yusuf had already issued an implicit call for jihad in his “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government” with exact instructions to his followers:

“Whatever you are instructed to do, even if you will die, go and do it, do not return and say, “When I went...?” No! When you go, even if you will die, go and do it. Do you not see how they [suicide bomber masterminds] put bombs on people, instructing them to go and explode and yet they are happy? You should be like that. Whatever they [the leaders of his group] prohibit you from doing, even if you will die, do not do it.”<sup>108</sup>

From July 26-29, 2009, approximately 1,000 Nigerians, mostly members of Yusuf’s group, were killed in Maiduguri as well as other cities, and their complex at the Ibn Taymiyya Center in Maiduguri was destroyed. Yusuf was taken captive and interrogated on July 30, 2009, before his extrajudicial killing by the Nigerian security forces.<sup>109</sup>

### **‘Our Only Problem Right Now is the Imamate of Abubakr Shekau’**

This subtitle is the closing statement of a letter written in early 2011 as a critique of the ideological deviations of Abubakr Shekau, which strongly echoed the themes that were later broadcasted in August 2016 by Muhammad Mamman Nur in his lecture “Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau,” mentioned at the beginning of this article. This 2011 letter was addressed to the sharia advisor of AQIM, `Abdallah al-Shinqiti, from would-be leaders of Jama` at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, popularly known as Ansaru, including Khalid al-Barnawi, Abu Muhammad al-Hawsawi, Abu Ahmad al-Kishnawi, Abu al-Bara’ al-Nurini al-Akinawi, Abu `Ubayda al-Kanawi, Abu `Abdallah al-Imam, Abu Muslim al-Ibrahimi, Abu Khalid al-Yerawi, Abu Nusayba al-Bushawi, Abu Maryam al-Ya`qub, and Abu `Asim al-Hasani. The context of this 2011 letter stems from the aftermath of Yusuf’s final interrogation with the Nigerian security forces, where he confirmed Abubakr Shekau as his second-in-command. Before his death, Yusuf nominated Abubakr Shekau, Muhammad Auwal, and Salisu Wudil as those who were qualified to succeed him. Muhammad Auwal died in the 2009 uprising while the whereabouts of Salisu Wudil remain unknown, leaving Shekau as the only choice among the people nominated by Yusuf. Shekau was therefore elected by the Consultative Council to succeed Yusuf and assume the leadership position of the group, which he named Jama` at Ahl al-Sunna

107 Ibid., p. 185.

108 See “Open Letter to the Nigerian Government by Muhammad Yusuf (Part 5),” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 196.

109 See “Interrogation of Muhammad Yusuf by Nigerian Security Forces,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 199-201.

li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihad, or JAS, but which remained popularly known as Boko Haram.

Several scholarly reports and analyses of Boko Haram's undertakings between the period of 2009 to 2011 are crowded with conspiracy theories and inaccurate speculations.<sup>110</sup> Before 2016, it was difficult to explain the inner workings of Boko Haram between the period immediately after the July 2009 uprising and the first Boko Haram attack on the Bauchi Federal Prison on September 7, 2010, where 721 prisoners were set free, among whom approximately 150 were members of Boko Haram.<sup>111</sup> This mystery can now be properly unraveled from three documents: two files in "Bin Laden's Bookshelf" released in August 2016 and January 2017 by the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence – "Letter from `Abdallah Abu Zayd `Abd-al-Hamid to Abu Mus'ab `Abd-al-Wadud" and "A Letter to Osama Bin Laden"—and, most importantly, one file titled "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction by Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi to the Fighters in Nigeria," which was released on April 13, 2017, by a representative of AQIM, Abu Num`an Qutayba al-Shinqiti.<sup>112</sup>

The letter dated August 24, 2009, from `Abdallah Abu Zayd `Abd-al-Hamid ('Abu Zayd,' leader of Tariq Ibn Ziyad Battalion<sup>113</sup>) to Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud (leader of AQIM), stated that Abubakr Shekau sent three members of Boko Haram—Khalid al-Barnawi, Abu Muhammad, and Abu Rayhana (except Abu Rayhana, the other two were signees of the 2011 letter)—to AQIM requesting a union between the two groups with the establishment of a safe house in Niger, training for Nigerian fighters in the Malian desert, weaponry and financial support, and advice on how to carry out jihad in Nigeria.<sup>114</sup> In his response dated on September 30, 2009, Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud welcomed the arrival of Shekau's delegation, saying that "we see it as an initiative for good towards a new era which will confound the Crusader Jewish plan of aggression towards Islam and its people in the Sahelian [African] nations and in Africa generally."<sup>115</sup> Thereafter, Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud affirmed his willingness to effectuate Shekau's request and promised "to distribute the speeches and communiques of the group," but he cautioned against a hasty declaration of jihad without adequate preparation:

"The question of the proclamation of jihad in Nigeria, we advise you not to take any decision or to proclaim anything under the influence of shock, but to put it off until the time is ripe from all perspectives with calm nerves, together with a comprehensive consultation with the jihad leaders in the Islamic world. The present stage is one of good preparation, watching and planning. It is necessary to mobilize the Muslim community in Nigeria to embrace the mujahidin; then it is necessary to prepare well by training and educating the mujahidin, and gathering all the requisite military equipment, especially explosive materials."<sup>116</sup>

During this same period, Shekau wrote another letter where he implicitly sought an al-Qa`ida imprimatur: "There is nothing remaining than for us to know more about your order and organization, because the one who does not know his path will be helpless after the journey."<sup>117</sup> The letter was not addressed to anyone in particular, but Jacob Zenn argued that by the context of the letter, it was likely

110 For a detailed analysis of the conspiracy theories on Boko Haram, see Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," in Abdul Raufu Mustapha ed., *Sects and Social Disorder: Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Suffolk, United Kingdom: James Currey, 2014), pp. 157-166.

111 See "Letter from the Bauchi Prison Break," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 225-226.

112 See "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction by Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi to the Fighters in Nigeria," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 209-213 and 235-239.

113 The Tariq ibn Ziyad Battalion is one of the battalions that formerly operated under the leadership of AQIM. It was named after Tariq ibn Ziyad who led the conquest of Iberia in 711. For further detail on the battalion, see Jeffrey Halverson, "The Tariq ibn Ziyad Master Narrative," Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, July 7, 2011.

114 "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 210.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

117 See "A Letter to Osama bin Laden's Deputy by Abubakar Shekau," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 234.

intended for Abu Mus`ab Abd al-Wadud to forward to Atiyatullah al-Libi and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Zenn further explains that al-Zawahiri had been more open than bin Ladin to enlisting new affiliates, which was evidenced by al-Zawahiri's acceptance of the GSPC's affiliation with al-Qa`ida in 2006 when bin Ladin presumably could have done so himself and of al-Shabaab's affiliation with al-Qa`ida in 2012 when bin Ladin declined to do so publicly before his death in May 2011. This may be the reason why Shekau was advised to communicate with al-Zawahiri instead of bin Ladin on matters of "joining the organization" of al-Qa`ida. However, a loyal courier may have nonetheless delivered Shekau's letter to bin Ladin, which is why it was found in his compound in Pakistan in 2011.<sup>118</sup>

In a letter dated July 5, 2010, Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud wrote to Abu Zayd instructing him to disburse the sum of 200,000 Euros to Shekau's group.<sup>119</sup> There is strong evidence to conclude that this initial funding played a major role in the first Boko Haram attack on the Bauchi Federal Prison on September 7, 2010.<sup>120</sup> As Abu Mus`ab `Abd-al-Wadud earlier promised, al-Andalus Media of AQIM also published Shekau's `Id al-Fitri sermon, which was the first AQIM dissemination of an official message attributed to a group other than al-Qa`ida or an affiliate. This was followed by the release of three videos from al-Qa`ida affiliates offering condolences for the extrajudicial killing of Muhammad Yusuf and other members of the group including al-Andalus Media's "The Raid of al-Damous,"<sup>121</sup> al-Kata`ib Media's (al-Shabaab) "A Gift to the people of Tawhid in Nigeria,"<sup>122</sup> and al-Furqan Media's (al-Qa`ida in Iraq) "Fursan al-Shahada."<sup>123</sup> An article titled "The Misery of Muslims in Nigeria" also appeared on the back cover of the 16th issue of Sada al-Malahim Magazine produced by al-Malahim Media of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula and distributed by al-Fajr Media Center.<sup>124</sup> The article described the conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, precisely Jos, as an organized "Crusader attack against Muslims sponsored by the International Union of Churches in Nigeria with the support of U.S. Microsoft corporation." The article ended with an outline of five duties of Muslims toward the Muslims in Nigeria, which included the provision of support with money and weapons, the preparation of the Muslims on a military and faith level, and the spread of the culture of martyrdom.

On October 7, 2010, Shekau responded to Abu Zayd with a letter of gratitude for the financial generosity and training offered by AQIM.<sup>125</sup> The relationship between Boko Haram and AQIM flourished until Shekau began to manifest signs of deviation on the issues of *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* and *takfir al-Muthlaq*<sup>126</sup> by declaring the entire Muslim population of Nigeria as infidels on the basis that they did not disbelieve in *taghut*, their children still attended government schools, and they participated in democratic elections.<sup>127</sup> Shekau's farthest level of extremism on the issue of takfir spurred his launching of an indiscriminate campaign of violence and confiscation of the wealth and properties of the Muslim population that did not pledge allegiance to him, according to the 2011 letter.

At this juncture, it is important to explain the ideological schisms between Shekau and the previously mentioned would-be leaders of Ansaru, as explained in the latter's 2011 letter of appeal to AQIM, some of which are related to the typologies of infighting among jihadi groups outlined in the second section

118 Jacob Zenn, "Demystifying al-Qaida in Nigeria: Cases from Boko Haram's Founding, Launch of Jihad and Suicide Bombings," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11:6 (2017), p. 179.

119 "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 213.

120 See "Letter from the Bauchi Prison Break," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 225-226.

121 Video was uploaded to YouTube but has since been removed.

122 Video was uploaded to YouTube but has since been removed.

123 "Id Gift – Knights of Martyrdom #8," *Jihadology*, November 18, 2010.

124 "Sada al-Malahim Issue 16," *Jihadology*, February 15, 2011.

125 "Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 213.

126 *Takfir al-Muthlaq* is a general statement of takfir in regard to an action. For example, "Whoever vote in an election is an infidel" or "the Shiites are infidels" without specifying the individual.

127 Abu Usama al-Ansari, "A Message from Nigeria," p. 20.

of this article. In the letter, the following ideological deviations of Shekau were listed:<sup>128</sup>

1. Labeling (Muslims) who participate in elections as infidels while disregarding the principles and rules of *takfir*, where it said, “Shekau embraces an uncompromising stance on al-`udhr bi-l-jahl and he relies on the writings of `Ali Khudayr al-Khudayr, Diya` al-Din al-Qudsi and Bashir `Abdallah. The latter previously debated with Muhammad Yusuf and later declared *takfir* on him before his death.”<sup>129</sup> The letter also equated Shekau’s extremism to the fanaticism exhibited by Antar Zouabri of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria.
2. Shekau’s claim to be treated as a Caliph in addition to his demand for obligatory obedience, his abuse of leadership, and the impermissibility of travel by his followers to the lands of jihad like Somalia and Algeria without his permission, a violation of which would attract a death sentence from Shekau.
3. High-handedness and complete rejection of the group’s Consultative Council.
4. Spreading secrets, and even betraying confidences, withholding money, and refusing to prepare for battle.
5. Loose morals, dividing families, incorrect religious practices, and encouraging lying and deceit.

According to the 2011 letter, instead of paying attention to these issues, Shekau spent his time “proclaiming *takfir* rather than cleaning up the behavior of his supporters.”<sup>130</sup> The would-be leaders of Ansaru inveighed Shekau privately, but not only did Shekau maintain his intransigence on *takfir al-Mutlaq*, but he also went further to declare as apostates those who opposed him or chose to leave Boko Haram. The intervention of AQIM sharia scholars like `Abdallah al-Shanqiti and Abu al-Hasan Rashid al-Bulaydi, both of whom wrote a lengthy letter of advice to Shekau, failed to influence Shekau.

However, none of these criticisms of Shekau should downplay the jihadism of his critics. Prior to the official announcement of Ansaru, early signs of the group’s evolution manifested in the kidnapping of western expatriates in Nigeria. On May 12, 2011, a British expatriate and an Italian expatriate, Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara, were kidnapped in Kebbi State and later killed on March 8, 2012, in Sokoto State after a failed rescue attempt by British and Nigerian forces.<sup>131</sup> On January 26, 2012, German expatriate Edgar Fritz Raupach was kidnapped in Kano. AQIM claimed the kidnapping with a video filmed in Kano and produced by al-Andalus media<sup>132</sup> in which they explained that Raupach would be freed only if the German government freed Umm Saifullah al-Ansariya (Filiz Gelowicz) from a German prison.<sup>133</sup> Raupach was later killed on May 31, 2012.<sup>134</sup>

On June 2, 2012, Ansaru officially announced its formation in a video debut released on YouTube in Hausa and English.<sup>135</sup> The group reiterated its critique of Boko Haram’s attacks on Muslims, and it presented itself as a vanguard to defend the Muslims. The kidnapping of western expatriates continued

128 “Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 235-239. Some of the ideological deviations mentioned in the letter were also responsible for the split between the followers of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi starting from the mid-1990s during the period al-Maqdisi wrote “Al-Risala al-thalathiniyya fi’l-tahdhir min al-ghuluw fi’l-takfir” (An Epistle Warning Against 33 Types of Exaggerations in Takfir) and “Waqafat ma’a thamarat al-jihad” (Reflections on the Fruits of Jihad). See Eli Alshech, “The Doctrinal Crisis Within the Salafi-Jihadi Ranks and the Emergence of Neo-Takfirism,” *Islamic Law and Society* 21:4 (2014), pp. 425-449.

129 Al-Maqdisi has a section for this topic in his book. See Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi “Al-Risala al-thalathiniyya fi’l-tahdhir min al-ghuluw fi’l-takfir,” *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*, 1999, pp. 312-320.

130 “Documents from Advice and Shari`a Instruction,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 238.

131 See “Nigeria rescue bid: Kidnapped Briton and Italian killed,” BBC, March 8, 2012.

132 See “Save my life: Appeal of the German Prisoner to his Government,” *Jihadology*, March 23, 2012.

133 See “To the German Government: Release ‘Umm Saifullah Al-Ansariya,’ We’ll Release Your Prisoner,” *Jihadology*, March 23, 2012.

134 See “On the Killing of the German Prisoner in Nigeria,” *Jihadology*, June 12, 2012.

135 Video was uploaded to YouTube but have since been removed.

unabated with the abduction of Frenchman Francis Collump<sup>136</sup> and the killing of seven foreign hostages.<sup>137</sup> However, the fate of Ansaru took a new turn with France's intervention in Mali, code-named Operation Serval, in 2012, which cut short Ansaru's connection to AQIM. But despite an Ansaru attack on Nigerian soldiers heading to Mali, the transnational link between the group and AQIM weakened over time.<sup>138</sup> This negative condition for Ansaru expedited the rapprochement between some members of the group and Shekau, but there were other members who remained in Ansaru and from time to time dissociated themselves from Boko Haram's attacks on Muslims via statements from Ansaru.<sup>139</sup>

### What's Old is New Again: Shekau's Mutual Recriminations with Nur and al-Barnawi

A new wave of schism emerged with the audio lecture of Mamman Nur "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau" in August 2016, discussed at the beginning of this article. Although Nur swore his allegiance to the Islamic State, the old voice of Ansaru also echoed in his Exposé, but with a predilection toward al-Qa`ida consistent with the publication of the article "A Message from Nigeria" in January 2017 in al-Risalah, a magazine produced by Jabhat Fath al-Sham (which rebranded itself as Hay`at Tahrir al-Sham in February 2017 and was originally al-Qa`ida's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra). The prelude to Nur's Exposé commenced with the announcement of Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi as the new Governor (wali) of Islamic State's West Africa Province (Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya) (ISWAP) in the Islamic State's al-Naba newspaper Issue 41 published on August 3, 2016.<sup>140</sup> The sudden announcement of Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi as the new governor of ISWAP gave an early indication that the actors in the upper echelon of the group were not united. As Nur himself revealed, the path of the group's transmutation from Boko Haram to ISWAP was fraught with newfound agreements at the Consultative Council on issues of ideology and strategy as well as the persuasive efforts intended to discipline the megalomaniac idiosyncrasy and highest level of extremism of Shekau.

Evidence suggests that a Consultative Council meeting was held on February 9, 2015, when the decision to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State was scheduled to be agreed upon by factional leaders of Boko Haram.<sup>141</sup> Less than a month after the Consultative Council meeting, Shekau pledged allegiance to the Islamic State on March 7, 2015, and from then on, he assumed the position of Governor of ISWAP, while Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi maintained his position as the official spokesman of ISWAP, which was first announced in a video released on January 27, 2015, through a Twitter account called al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa coordinated with media representatives of the Islamic State.<sup>142</sup> It now seems clear that all the parties that converged to support Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State withheld their unsettled ideological differences, which were otherwise bound to threaten the marriage of convenience of the leaders of the new ISWAP group.

One frequently finds assumption in the research on Boko Haram that the primary motivation for

136 See "Open Letter to the Governments of France and Nigeria," *Jihadology*, September 27, 2013.

137 See "Killing the Christian Prisoners As A Result of the Joint Nigerian-British Military Operation," *Jihadology*, March 9, 2013.

138 See "Claiming Credit for Targeting Nigerian Soldiers Heading to Mali," *Jihadology*, January 22, 2013.

139 See "Innocence of the Mujahidin From the Blood of the Innocent Muslims," *Jihadology*, May 14, 2013; and "Al-Hidayyah Foundation presents a new video message from Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin Fi Bilad al-Sudan: 'God Is Our Master,'" *Jihadology*, January 29, 2015. See also Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate: How Al Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2018), pp. 10-20.

140 Al-Naba interview with Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi. See al-Naba Issue 41, *Jihadology*, August 2, 2016, pp. 8-9. See also Alexander Thurston, "Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's Interview with the Islamic State's Al-Naba Magazine," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 36 (2018): pp. 257-275.

141 "Boko Haram Communiques with African Media," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 351-352.

142 "Interview with Official Spokesman Abu Mus`ab Al-Barnawi about the Events in the City of Baga," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 369-372.

the group's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State was weakness.<sup>143</sup> Although there is a possible coincidence in timing, the assumption that Boko Haram's pledge was on account of its own weakness does not take into account the communication between both groups, which commenced through a go-between named Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad<sup>144</sup> in 2014 when Boko Haram was at its peak of territorial expansion. By mid-2014, an earlier indication of Boko Haram's adoption into the larger family of jihadi-salafi groups had been reflected in the inclusion of Abubakr Shekau alongside Nasir al-Wuhayshi of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Abu Zubayr of al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Abu Fadl Iyad Ag-Ghali of Ansar Dine in Mali as recipients of the letter on al-Qa`ida/Islamic State rivalry dated July 4, 2014, and written by Abu Iyad al-Tunisi of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia in which he pleaded that Ayman al-Zawahiri should pledge allegiance to the Islamic State to save the jihadi movement from disarray.<sup>145</sup>

Whatever the case may be, starting from November 2014, Boko Haram's territorial conquests were documented with pictorial evidence and forwarded to Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad who in turn forwarded it to the Islamic State. In a document translated in *The Boko Haram Reader*, Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad narrated a reminiscing account of how he facilitated the union between Boko Haram and the Islamic State and how he acted as something of a clearing house in connection with a wide range of West African and European groups, probably because Tunisia during the period 2011-14 allowed freedom to jihadi-salafis.<sup>146</sup> However, al-Hamad's line of communication to Boko Haram came from the circle of Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, and this later played a significant role in the way Shekau's letter to the Islamic State will eventually be stymied.

In his interview with al-Naba newspaper, al-Barnawi discussed jihad in West Africa and how Boko Haram was founded; the reasons for Boko Haram's pledge to the Islamic State; and the nature of the war between ISWAP and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF - coalition forces from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (Civilian JTF, also known as 'Yan Kato da Gora' or 'the men with clubs'). Furthermore, al-Barnawi made clear the group's mission against "Christianizing" activities in Africa and responded to the charge of takfirism being leveled at his group by the oppositional Nigerian Islamic establishment.<sup>147</sup> Although al-Barnawi mentioned Shekau as Yusuf's first successor, he did not comment on Shekau's position following his own emergence as Governor.

On August 3, 2016, less than a day after al-Barnawi's interview was published in al-Naba, Shekau delivered a 10-minute audio speech in Arabic and Hausa under the old group label of Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihad (JAS). In his speech, Shekau railed against his demotion as the Governor of ISWAP and the promotion of al-Barnawi to the position. In stating his refusal to follow al-Barnawi, Shekau explained the ideological differences between the two men:

"My brothers in Allah, I received a message you sent regarding the selection of a new Governor. My brothers, Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi and those with him are saying that if a Muslim enters a land of unbelief, but does not manifest his enmity to the unbelievers there, he is not an unbe-

143 Thurston, Boko Haram, p. 271-272. See also Terje Ostebo, "The Virtual Significance of Boko Haram's Pledge of Allegiance to ISIS," *The Conversation*, March 19, 2015.

144 Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad is a former member of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia and a pro-al-Qa`ida poet and writer on prominent jihadi websites, including Ansar al-Mujahidin, al-Fallujah, and al-Tahaddi. He defected from Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia and became pro-Islamic State and subsequently administered the Africa Media outlet that published Boko Haram Daily Communiques from November 18, 2014, to February 9, 2015, and other military reports of Boko Haram's 'General Command' before Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State. See Jacob Zenn, "Wilayat West Africa Reboots for the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 8:8 (2015): pp. 10-16.

145 The author wishes to thank Jacob Zenn for sharing this document with him.

146 See "Jumbled words and Authentication for the Important Period prior to Shaykh al-Shekwawi's Allegiance which made the Umma Happy by Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 403-405.

147 Takfirism is the act of accusing other Muslims of unbelief and, as a result, condemn them as infidels whose blood is permissible to be shed.

liever. However, we say that such a person is an unbeliever. Afterwards, they said that if he (a Muslim) does not show his enmity to the *taghut* who rules by [something] other than Allah's revealed law, he is not an unbeliever. However, we say that such a person is an unbeliever. We found this in Allah's Book and the Sunna of His Messenger. We wish to follow the Sunna of our Messenger. Patience after patience, O Shaykh! [i.e., al-Baghdadi] It is obligatory upon you to show us the truth of the matter in the Book, the Sunna and according to the understanding of the pious predecessors. Allah knows my brothers in Allah. As a result, we cannot follow a person who commits a major [act of] unbelief or polytheism, knowingly, with an explanation, and not based on misinterpretation. No, this is not possible. **You do not know the condition of this group, yet we have sent you many letters, eight letters [in total], to show us the truth of this matter in the Book and the Sunna** (bold added for emphasis). However, you did not say anything [in response] nor did you answer, except for us to hear this news [of substituting Shekau as governor for al-Barnawi].<sup>148</sup>

Three underlying issues typically come up from Shekau's polemical outbursts after the demotion: 1) Shekau's labeling of al-Barnawi's faction with the Murji' a<sup>149</sup> label based on their ideological differences on *takfir*; 2) Shekau's disclosure of writing eight letters between nine to ten pages to al-Baghdadi explaining that the ideology of al-Barnawi is based upon *irja'*; and 3) Shekau's appeal to al-Baghdadi for mediation between him and al-Barnawi. In the first part of a follow-up video released on August 7, 2016, four days after Shekau delivered the audio speech, a masked speaker (Man Chari) known to be Shekau's military head further expounded on Shekau's polemic:

"The news was delivered to us through the infidels' media about the change to a new governor. On this issue, we say the man whom you appointed to this position does not follow a sound doctrine from authentic salafism. On this basis, we will not follow him. **Our leader, Shekawi (Shekau), wrote eight letters to you where he explained that those people follow the ideology of irja'. You asked him about the meaning of irja', and he explained to you in his third message, but you did not respond** (bold added for emphasis). Before these issues, we had already informed you that they split away from us, becoming isolated from us, but you did not do anything. We have also sent you several questions, but did not receive any response from you—except that suddenly, we heard this news. As a result, we say that we are with our Imam, Abu Muhammad b. Muhammad Abubakar al-Shekawi, may Allah preserve him."<sup>150</sup>

What really piqued Shekau and Man Chari from the follow-up video is the fact that Shekau provided an explanation for his claim that Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's ideology is based upon *irja'* in his third letter to the Islamic State, but Shekau did not receive further response from the Islamic State. As Nur explained in his "Open Letter," the Islamic State sent theological treatises followed by a command that forbade Shekau from capturing Muslims who engage in actions of unbelief as slaves. Nur's revelation suggests that the contents of Shekau's first two letters to the Islamic State revolved around Shekau's ideological differences with al-Barnawi on the issue of capturing Muslims who engage in actions of unbelief as slaves and declaring *takfir* on refugees fleeing Boko Haram's caliphate.

Nur's claim that the Islamic State sent theological treatises to solve the internal schisms between Shekau's faction and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's faction was later proven to be accurate following the

148 See "Message to the World by Abubakar Shekau," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 442.

149 Murji'a was a group in early Islam that believed in postponing judgment as to the truth of an apparent Muslim's belief or unbelief. Contemporary mainstream salafis are often accused by jihadi-salafis of being Murji'a. See Joas Wagemakers, "Seceders and Postponers? An Analysis of the Khawarij and Murji'a Labels in Polemical Debates between Quietist and Jihadi-Salafis," in Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi eds., *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought* (London: Hurst & Co., 2012), pp. 145-164.

150 See "Message from the Soldiers by Man Chari and Abubakar Shekau," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 468.

official release of the response of Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan) to the questions from Nigeria, specifically from ISWAP.<sup>151</sup> The official response of al-Tamimi was dated March 31, 2015, two weeks after Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State, but the response was officially released by al-Turath Media Foundation of the Islamic State on March 1, 2018. Judging from the tribute to the death of al-Tamimi written by Abu Jarir ash-Shamali in Issue 10 of Dabiq in July 2015, Abu Malik al-Tamimi wrote the response to the questions from ISWAP while he was working in the Office for Research and Studies (Maktab al-Buhuth wa'l-Dirasat), which was previously known as the Committee for Research and Fatwas (Hay'at al-Buhuth wa'l-Ifta'), and before that as the Department of Research and Fatwas (Diwan al-Buhuth wa'l-Ifta'). The Office, headed by the late Turki Bin `Ali, is responsible for preparing the religious texts studied in the Islamic State's training camps, which are published by its printing press, as well as investigating issues of the sharia and replying to questions referred to it by the various bodies and provinces of the Islamic State.

Abu Malik al-Tamimi responded to four questions from ISWAP: 1) the verdict on a Muslim who lives in the land of unbelief; 2) the appropriate policy to employ in waging attacks against jihadi adversaries in markets located in a commercial city without attacking the other traders in the markets; 3) the issue of *takfir* of those who possess national identity papers such as a passport, except in cases of necessity like the jihadis who need passports to travel for jihad (the case for *takfir* here is based on the interpretation that the possession of national identity papers demonstrates an approval of a country of unbelief and its national symbols); and 4) the ruling on targeting Western secular schools.<sup>152</sup> These questions and other issues not touched upon in al-Tamimi's response constitute the major faultlines that fractured Boko Haram into Shekau's faction and al-Barnawi's faction.

According to the response of Abu Malik al-Tamimi to ISWAP, living in the land of unbelief itself is not tantamount to *takfir* except if it is accompanied with the obligation to approve acts of unbelief or declare alliance to the people of unbelief. Al-Tamimi further explains when emigration becomes mandatory, desirable, and permissible. In his response to the second question on waging attacks in markets, al-Tamimi invokes 'the principle of Tatarus' to explain when it is permissible and not permissible to attack jihadi adversaries who immerse themselves within the civilian population that are predominantly non-Muslims or predominantly Muslims.<sup>153</sup> For the third question, al-Tamimi argues that the possession of national identity papers should only lead to *takfir* if it is accompanied with a show of loyalty and support to the country of unbelief as well as subservience to its laws. This question was most likely prompted by Mamman Nur's accusation that Shekau killed Ba`ana Banki, the Boko Haram leader of the town of Banki in Borno State, due to his possession of a Nigerian identity card.<sup>154</sup> On the question of attacking Western secular schools, al-Tamimi responds that it is permissible to attack them in Europe and other Crusader countries in Africa if the students from the schools are commissioned into military service to fight against the jihadis. He also claims that it is permissible to attack the Western secular schools if the students are non-Muslims, but the benefit of the attack should be determined by the people of authority in the jihadi circle. Al-Tamimi, however, claims that if the students enrolled in the Western secular schools are Muslims, it is best not to attack the schools except when the jihadi adversaries immerse themselves within the schools and there is no available option to attack the jihadi adversaries except by attacking the schools.<sup>155</sup>

151 In his tribute to the death of Abu Malik al-Tamimi, which appeared in Issue 10 of Dabiq magazine, Abu Jarir ash-Shamali gave a biographical account of Abu Malik al-Tamimi's jihadi history from his arrival in northern Afghanistan—where he worked as a judge for four years—to his death at the battle in the city of as-Sukhna. See Dabiq, Issue 10, July 13, 2015, available at Jihadology.

152 Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan), "The Nigerian Questions," al-Turath Media Foundation, March 1, 2018, available at Jihadology.

153 The principle of Tatarus is a doctrine rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence and was traditionally used to establish the permissibility of a Muslim army attacking a non-Muslim enemy. See Jack Barclay, "Al-Tatarus: al-Qaeda's Justification for Killing Muslim Civilians," *Terrorism Monitor* 8:34 (2010).

154 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 452.

155 See Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan), "The Nigerian Questions."

The remaining back and forth questions and answers from ISWAP to the Islamic State is left implicit, but it is nevertheless striking that the leadership of the Islamic State had some level of intervention in the management of the internal civil war between Shekau and al-Barnawi at its initial phase just like AQIM's interventions in 2011 between Shekau and the would-be Ansaru members. This claim can be further supported by the statement of Nur: "We do not oppose the Islamic State. We are together with the Caliph. The way we are approaching this issue is by forwarding our objections to the Caliph who is also your [Shekau] leader. **Whatever they tell us is what we will accept as appropriate** (bold added for emphasis). We will forward our objections since you are also expecting their message."<sup>156</sup> It remains unclear why the Islamic State halted its response to Shekau after Shekau's first two letters and proceeded to declare al-Barnawi the new Governor of ISWAP. Perhaps the Islamic State received a report from Shekau's opponents in ISWAP that despite the response to ISWAP from al-Tamimi on behalf of the Office for Research and Studies of the Islamic State, Shekau persisted in flouting some of the religious code of conduct outlined by the Islamic State. This is probably why Mamman Nur claims that Shekau is a rebel for his refusal to obey the instruction of the leaders of the Islamic State.<sup>157</sup> In some cases, Shekau's theological position concurs with the religious ruling issued by the Islamic State. For example, on December 16, 2014, the Islamic State declared travel to the lands of unbelief impermissible generally, and to the lands under the control of the Syrian regime specifically, except on the condition that the traveler openly disavow and show hatred toward the unbelievers.<sup>158</sup>

More importantly, however, it is critical to note that al-Barnawi's faction had closer proximity to communication channels with the Islamic State than Shekau's faction. Following the creation of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa media agency in early 2015, which upgraded the quality of video production for Boko Haram before Shekau's pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi, there was clear evidence that the Islamic State provided media support to al-Barnawi.<sup>159</sup> Al-Barnawi himself appeared in the first high-quality video produced under the label of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa on January 27, 2015, when he was addressed as the official spokesman.<sup>160</sup> What seems odd in the video and a subsequent high-quality video produced on January 28, 2015, under the same label of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa is that the two videos made no mention of Shekau.<sup>161</sup> During this period of the operation of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa media agency, Shekau featured simultaneously in "A Message to the African Leaders, Specifically, Idriss Déby," a lower-quality video produced on February 9, 2015, under the label of Boko Haram. Shekau appeared in his first video under the label of al-`Urwa al-Wuthqa on February 17, 2015, a week after the Consultative Council meeting was held during which the final decision to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State was made by Shekau, al-Barnawi, Nur, and other upper echelon of the group.

From the foregoing, it is also possible to conclude that Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi's faction blocked Shekau's letters from reaching the Islamic State after his first two letters. This explains why Shekau did not receive further response from the Islamic State and why the decision was made for al-Barnawi to be the new governor of ISWAP. In the follow-up video delivered by Man Chari on August 7, 2016, after expounding on Shekau's polemic, he went on to hint that there were other private issues that required secrecy and needed to be discussed during the suggested mediation to be presided over by al-Baghdadi:

**"There are other issues, but this is not the place to discuss them because they require**

156 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 462.

157 Ibid., p. 450.

158 See "32 Islamic State Fatwas," p. 3, available at Jihadica.

159 "The Clairvoyant: Boko Haram's Media and The Islamic State Connection?" *Jihadology*, January 27, 2015.

160 "Interview with Official Spokesman Abu Mus`ab Al-Barnawi about the Events in the City of Baga," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 369-372.

161 "Message from a Mujahid," *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 373-374.

**secrecy** (bold added for emphasis). We say that we are still in accord with our allegiance, nor do we remove our hands from the pledge of allegiance to the Caliph, but we will not follow the one who does not follow the doctrine of the Sunnis, nor do we want a mediator between us and the Caliph, unless there will be a meeting with you [i.e., al-Baghdadi], or an audio message from you, without a mediator. At that time, we will discuss those private issues that are not discussed at this moment.<sup>162</sup>

Undeniably, the private issues that could not be discussed because they required secrecy were part of the shocking revelations in the “Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakr Shekau” delivered by Nur, which also had a follow-up speech by Abu Fatima, who was a former Ansaru member and, like Nur, sided with al-Barnawi in his conflict with Shekau. Some contents of Nur’s lecture are examined in the next section, but it will suffice to mention the nine ideological deviations Nur accused Shekau of introducing into the group: 1) declaration of *takfir* on refugees; 2) fighting the ‘protected’ civilians; 3) interpretation of Qur’anic verses based on personal opinions and fabrication of hadiths; 4) execution of un-Islamic punishments; 5) killing without a just cause; 6) uncaring attitude toward the welfare of Boko Haram soldiers and weak people in his caliphate; 7) non-compliance with orders from the Islamic State; 8) issuing rulings that contradict the sharia; and 9) withholding the materials of war.

All the ideological deviations Nur mentioned in his lecture echo the same deviations stated by Ansaru in 2011. Four months after Nur’s “Exposé,” on December 18, 2016, Shekau delivered a private audio lecture in which he refuted Nur’s allegations, specifically that he murdered close associates for trivial offenses. As far as Shekau was concerned, the close associates he killed undermined his authority and they violated the laws that they all pledged to follow in the group. While reaffirming that he was on the right path, Shekau lamented the previous schisms that took place inside the group: “You want us to focus on this type of back and forth explanation so that the infidels can hear, right? You want us to preoccupy ourselves with this type of conversation, and abandon the study of tawhid, right? This was the same thing they did in the past.”<sup>163</sup> The mutual recriminations between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi did not end with the war of words; it progressed into the textbooks, guidance literature, and indoctrination materials circulated by both factions to win over the mid-level and foot soldiers of the group as well as new recruits.

### **The Struggle for Jihadi Authority in the West African Islamic State**

From the end of 2016 until April 2018 as this article was finalized, Abubakr Shekau faced a crisis of legitimacy with the other top echelons of ISWAP and Boko Haram. The competition by factional leaders to win the support of the mid-level and foot soldiers of the group as well as new recruits was also quite evident. In addition to the constant production of videos and images showing the resilience of both factions and their battlefield gains in their war against the Nigerian Army, the competition for the hearts and minds of Boko Haram followers also influenced the production of internal study sessions where textbooks, guidance literature, and indoctrination materials published by the factional leaders or republished from Maktabat al-Himma of the Islamic State and al-Naba newspaper also of the Islamic State were directed towards the group’s followers. These study sessions provide an extraordinary window to further understand the ideological differences of both factions through their own lenses and a unique knowledge of how the factional leaders mold the thinking of their followers to endure in the group’s campaign. Most importantly, the study sessions reveal the educational training the factional leaders provide to their followers in an attempt to attenuate the competing narratives that target the followers of the group and other counter-messaging campaigns offered by the opposi-

162 “Message from the Soldiers by Man Chari and Abubakar Shekau,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 468.

163 “Shekau Responds to His Critics,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 477.

tional mainstream Islamic establishment as well as the deradicalization programs sponsored by the Nigerian government.

The study sessions of Abubakr Shekau are produced by Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan, an online publishing press and a media center with an office in the territory controlled by Shekau. Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan issued its first release on January 17, 2017, through an audio lecture delivered by Abubakr Shekau in which he claimed the suicide bombing at the University of Maiduguri that killed Professor Aliyu Mani, the director of the university's Veterinary Teaching Hospital, and four others.<sup>164</sup> After its initial release, Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan also published the sermons and guidance literature authored by Abubakr Shekau where he reinforced Boko Haram's ideology, situating it within the canons of salafism, specifically the literary tradition of the scholars of Najd. The literature published by Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan also extensively cited the literature of Uthman Dan Fodio and other pre-colonial Muslim leaders in northern Nigeria on the issues of jihad, *takfir*, and Dar al-Islam/Dar al-Kufr (abode of Islam/abode of unbelief). The literature also covered the critique of the ideological differences between Shekau and his rivals in ISWAP, specifically on issues of *takfir* and the verdict on those who live outside the Boko Haram's controlled territory.

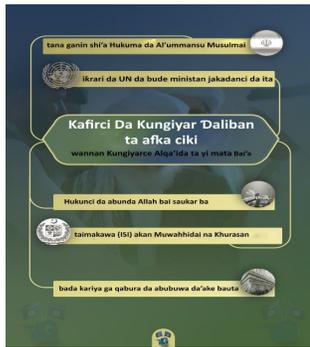


*Images of Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan*

ISWAP, whose governor is Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, produces study sessions, most of which are based on Hausa and Kanuri translations of theological books from Maktabat al-Himma of the Islamic State and al-Naba newspaper also of the Islamic State. The ISWAP media center also produces Hausa versions of the bulletins released by Amaq News Agency affiliated to the Islamic State. There is also a possibility that the media center operates a shadowy radio station, al-Bayan radio station 92.5 FM, modeled after al-Bayan Radio of the Islamic State. Whether or not the radio station is functional in territories controlled by the group could not be ascertained at the time of the research for this article, but the flyer of the radio station was shared online by ISWAP members. ISWAP is specifically unique for its Islamic State-ization program through which a unity of ideology is fostered between the members of ISWAP in West Africa and the Islamic State.<sup>165</sup> The Islamic State-ization program of ISWAP is potent evidence that the leaders of the group are in constant communication with the Delegated Committee of the Islamic State (al-Lajna al-Mufawwada), "a select group of knowledgeable, upright individuals with perception and leadership skills delegated by the caliph for the supervision of all the Islamic State's provinces, departments, committees, and offices."

164 Ibrahim Sawab, Omirin Olatunji, Isiaku Bara'u, Zakka, Maiduguri, and Isiaka Wakili, "Suicide bomber kills Prof, 4 others in Maiduguri," *Daily Trust*, January 17, 2017.

165 For the meaning of Islamic State-ization program and analysis of the guidance literature produced by the Islamic State, see Jacob Olidort, "Inside the Caliphate's Classroom: Textbooks, Guidance Literature and Indoctrination Methods of the Islamic State," Washington Institute of Near East Policy, August 2016.



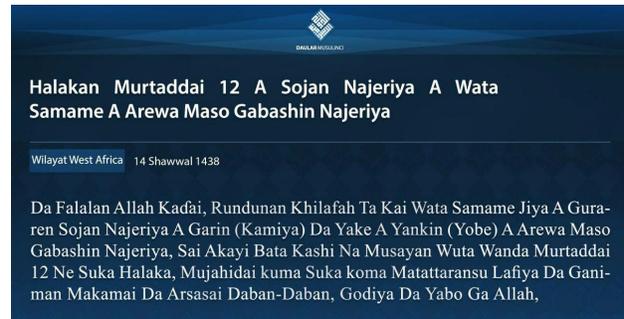
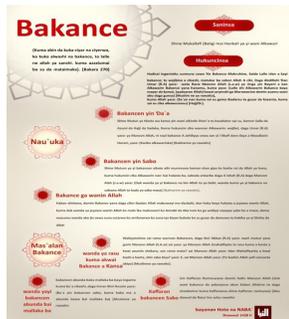
Critique of al-Qa`ida/Taliban



Radio al-Bayan IS



Radio al-Bayan ISWAP



Selected Hausa Translations of al-Naba Newspaper Issue 89 and Amaq Bulletin

Unlike Shekau’s faction that has now been reduced to a ‘jihadi loner’ with no significant ties to other transnational jihadi movements, be it al-Qa`ida or the Islamic State, ISWAP still maintains its ties to the Islamic State. The attacks, ambushes, and battlefield spoils of ISWAP are publicized by Amaq News Agency affiliated to the Islamic State, al-Naba Newspaper as well as the official Telegram channels of the Islamic State. For instance, the Islamic State reported in Issue 92 of its al-Naba newspaper that ISWAP was responsible for the killing of nearly 70 apostates in an attack on an oil exploration team in northeast Nigeria on July 25, 2017.<sup>166</sup> Four lecturers from the University of Maiduguri were abducted during the attack on the oil exploration team,<sup>167</sup> but they were later released on February 10, 2018, following the payment of ransom and mediation from the Swiss government and the International Committee of the Red Cross.<sup>168</sup> The Islamic State also publicizes other news from ISWAP such as the group’s harvest of crops in the Lake Chad region and the obituaries of its members who have died in battles against the Nigerian Army. On April 9, 2018, one of the leaders of ISWAP, Abu Bashir, also confirmed in an audio statement that they released the Dapchi schoolgirls who were abducted on February 19, 2018, based on the instructions from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps the real advantage ISWAP has over Shekau’s faction is the fact that the group is being led by leaders who do not personalize their jihad like Shekau, who possess better governance and propaganda capabilities, and who are camera-shy

166 “Ambush Near Lake Chad in West Africa killing 70 apostates,” al-Naba, Issue 92, August 2017, p. 11, available at Jihadology.

167 “One Of 4 UNIMAID Lecturers in Boko Haram Captivity Writes, Laments FG’s Failure to Rescue Them,” Sahara Reporters, September 4, 2017.

168 “Boko Haram ‘Frees’ 10 Abducted Police Women and UNIMAID lecturers,” Sahara Reporters, February 10, 2018.

169 “Boko Haram Gives Reason For Release Of Dapchi Girls, Denies Ceasefire Talks With FG,” Sahara Reporters, April 9, 2018.



*Harvest of ISWAP in Lake Chad and obituary of one of ISWAP's media representatives published by the Islamic State*

and savvy in the way they appeal to their followers to befriend the local communities within and outside the areas of their control.<sup>170</sup>

### Brothers at War: The Hazimis and Bin`alis in the West African Islamic State

The debate on the subject of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi is akin to the debate between the followers of Turki al-Bin`ali, one of the Islamic State's foremost religious authorities killed on May 31, 2017, in an airstrike carried out by the U.S.-led coalition in Mayadin, Syria and the followers of the Meccan-born Ahmad ibn `Umar al-Hazimi, a Saudi salafi scholar imprisoned by the Saudis since April 28, 2015.<sup>171</sup> Like the Hazimis, Abubakr Shekau argued that ignorance is no excuse for *takfir* and those who excuse people on the basis of ignorance are themselves infidels. The 2011 AQIM letter previously mentioned and Nur's "Exposé" mentioned this position of Shekau as part of the ideological deviations Shekau introduced into Boko Haram. But how did Shekau arrive at the same position as the Hazimis? The 2011 AQIM letter mentioned that Shekau relies on the books of `Ali Khudayr al-Khudayr 'al-Mutammima' and Diya' al-Din al-Qudsi 'La `udhr bi-l-jahl fi al-shirk al-akbar' in his understanding of *takfir*. Nonetheless, Shekau's position will be better understood by examining the contents of his Friday sermon, which he delivered on May 19, 2017, and was published by Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan. In the sermon, Shekau extensively cited classical Islamic literature written by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Abd al-Rahman b. Hassan, Abd al-Latif b. Abd al-Rahman, Ishaq b. Abd al-Rahman, and other scholars of the Najd to prove the point that a Muslim who falls into major polytheism is not excused due to ignorance or misinterpretation except when he is coerced by the enemies.<sup>172</sup>

The implication of Shekau's understanding of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* shapes his interpretation that the people who participate in democracy, elections, or any affairs related to ruling by other than God's laws are infidels and there is no excuse of ignorance for them. Not only are they infidels whose blood is permissible to be shed according to Shekau, but those who doubt their unbelief are also infidels based on the principle "Whoever does not make *takfir* against an infidel is himself an infidel." Prior to Shekau's civil war of words with Nur and al-Barnawi on the issue of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl*, the would-be leaders of Ansaru had previously engaged Shekau on this issue as stated in their letter to AQIM in 2011. Ansaru leaders were in agreement with Shekau that democracy and elections are

170 This claim can be supported with the press statement issued by the spokesperson of the Nigerian Army Sani Usman Kukasheka on January 8, 2018. See Abdulkareem Haruna, "Boko Haram: Shekau alive but 'in a terrible state of health' – Nigerian Army," *Premium Times*, January 8, 2018.

171 Tore Hamming, "The Extremist Wing of the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, June 9, 2016; Cole Bunzel, "Caliphate in Disarray: Theological Turmoil in the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, October 3, 2017.

172 Abubakr Shekau, "Is there excuse based on Ignorance in Major Polytheism or Not," Maktabat Wadi`u al-Bayan, May 19, 2017. See also Tore Hamming's interview with Ahmad Hamdan, "The Increasing Extremism Within the Islamic State," *Jihadica*, November 19, 2016.

major polytheism, but they argued that the rules of *takfir* must be followed before declaring Muslims who engage in democracy and elections as infidels. These rules of *takfir* were previously outlined by the founding leader of Boko Haram Muhammad Yusuf in his debate on June 25, 2006, with salafi cleric Isa Ali Pantami. In the debate, Yusuf said:

“All the followers of Sunna have reached a consensus on the principle of declaring a Muslim as an infidel. Anything that constitutes unbelief, if an unbeliever does it; he is already an unbeliever, no query. He does not have to do it to become an unbeliever. But if a person is a practicing Muslim and he performs the actions of unbelief, then we need to follow the principles [of apostasy]. First and foremost, it should be that the person does not have an interpretation that he hides behind, whether it is a verse or hadith, even if it is weak, as long as he does not know it is weak. Second, it should be clear that he does not have doubt that makes him see his action as good and there is no reason to eliminate that doubt. Third, we also need to be clear that he received no message at all notifying him that his action is wrong. Fourth, there is also the case of doubt, misinterpretation, and coercion.”<sup>173</sup>

Ansaru leaders lamented that Shekau not only flouted the principles of *takfir* as outlined by Muhammad Yusuf, but he also matched his belief with actions by permitting bloodshed and attacks against Muslims, which made him a “graduate of the school” of the Algerian GIA leader Antar al-Zouabri.<sup>174</sup> Shekau’s understanding of *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* led him to sanction the January 20, 2012, attack in the city of Kano during which approximately 185 people were killed; the March 18, 2013, attack in Kano during which approximately 65 people were killed; the April 13, 2013, first Baga massacre during which at least 187 people were killed; and many other attacks against the Muslims that were condemned by the leaders of Ansaru.<sup>175</sup>

The debate on *takfir* and *al-`udhr bi-l-jahl* persisted even after the declaration of the Islamic caliphate by Shekau on August 23, 2014. Mamman Nur and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi became the main antagonists of Shekau, and they followed the arguments previously explained by Ansaru leaders. Like the Bin`alis, Nur and al-Barnawi are in agreement with Shekau that secular political rulers, the soldiers of the Nigerian Army, and the members of the Civilian JTF are all infidels and it is permissible to shed their blood. But they argued that *takfir* cannot be declared on Muslims who do not view these actors (secular political rulers, the soldiers of the Nigerian Army and the members of the Civilian JTF) as infidels except after clarifying the matter with the Muslims regarding the actions of unbelief as stated in the sharia and not until the doubts have been removed and the matter explained to the Muslims. Therefore, for Nur and al-Barnawi, unless the actions of unbelief have been clearly explained to the Muslims and the widespread ignorance on the issue has been clarified with knowledge from the sharia, they cannot be declared as infidels whereas Shekau would instantly declare *takfir* on Muslims who doubt the unbelief of the secular political rulers, soldiers of the Nigerian Army, and members of the Civilian JTF without any need to clarify the matter to the Muslims and remove the doubts. But how does this disagreement lead to infighting and bloodshed between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi?

- Secular political leaders, soldiers of the Nigerian Army, and members of the Civilian JTF are all infidels. There is an agreement on this issue.
- Mamman Nur and Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi do not issue *takfir* on Muslims who do not view the actors above as infidels as long as they do not provide active or passive support for those actors in their war against Boko Haram. They excuse the Muslims until the actions of unbelief of the actors

173 See “Debate on the Status of Western Education and Working for the Nigerian Government between Mallam Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami and Mallam Muhammad Yusuf Maiduguri,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 23.

174 For a detailed discussion of Antar Zouabri and the GIA, see Alexander Thurston “Algeria’s GIA: The First Major Armed Group to Fully Subordinate Jihadism to Salafism,” *Islamic Law and Society* 24 (2017): pp. 412-436.

175 See “Disassociation of the Jama`at AnDar al-Muslimin from Targeting Muslim Innocents,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, pp. 275-278.

above have been clearly explained to the Muslims.

- According to Shekau's interpretation, Nur and al-Barnawi have also become infidels because of their position. The *takfir* of Nur and al-Barnawi is lawful in Shekau's view based on the permissibility of 'Takfir al-Adhir' (making *takfir* on the one who gives the excuse of ignorance on an individual engaging in acts of polytheism). Therefore, it is permissible to shed the blood of Nur and al-Barnawi and those who follow them in ISWAP. It is also permissible to shed the blood of anyone who doubts the permissibility of killing Nur, al-Barnawi, and their followers in ISWAP.

This chain or endless series of *takfir* (al-takfir bi'l-tasalsul), which runs the risk of fragmenting the group, is exactly what Nur and al-Barnawi aim to forestall. In his "Exposé," Nur lamented how God has tested Shekau with the love of killing people without a 'just cause.' "Did you not hear his cassette where he said: 'I will kill, I will kill' so if you kill, will you also live forever? You are also going to die."<sup>176</sup> Nur also explained that the ruling on *takfir* cannot be dictated by Shekau because Islam is not his personal possession where he can admit or expel whoever suits him. Nur went further to critique Shekau's extremism in *takfir* stating that Shekau's belief that "whoever is not with him is an infidel whose blood is permissible to be shed" is not only erroneous, but Islam has not been understood in that way. Nur said:

"In some cases, they will find the yam-sellers in the towns and detonate bombs amongst them. We are not bothered by the yam-sellers. Rather, we are bothered with killing the *taghut* for now. When we finish with the *taghut*, the yam-sellers will even fetch water for you. O Shekau! You don't have to kill them. Likewise, look at the way they are planting explosives and bombing the people even in the mosques! Look at the churches [as targets]! Look at the [military] barracks! This is a waste of Allah's property because we are not the ones who bought those explosives with our money. That is Allah's property, and He will ask us how it was utilized. Allah will ask you because we have disassociated ourselves from your actions, unless you repent ... Therefore, you should not personalize Islam. You cannot order that someone be killed because that person insulted you. You cannot order that someone be killed because someone criticized you. You cannot order that someone be killed because they narrated a dream to you. Even if he dreamt that you are among the people of hellfire, what is expected from you is to do good deeds, so that they will have another dream where you will be in paradise. Killing them should not be the next line of action. Everyone should practice the religion. We came out solely for the sake of practicing Allah's religion. Those misconceptions of yours and the killings you committed, there is no gain in them."<sup>177</sup>

Abu Fatima who sided with Nur and al-Barnawi in their conflict with Shekau also lamented on how Shekau's ideological deviations on the issue of *takfir* has led to the group's territorial losses:

"We are tired of being chased by the infidels. It is because of all these issues that the infidels are chasing us. We have deviated from Allah's path. Are we not the ones that in the past, twenty of us would go out raiding the security centers of the infidels to obtain guns for each one? Something must have happened that for almost a year we are being chased by these animals. We are seeing that if these issues are not resolved, there is no way we will become victorious. Have we become rebels? How come they will fight against the infidels and not achieve victory? Brothers, if we are not animals, we need to sit and think. Why is it that we are being chased? The reason why these things are happening is because of the misconduct of Mallam Abubakar Shekau. If he mends all these issues, the religion's dignity will be restored. If the caliph instructs us to follow him, we will agree to follow him, but he should repent for his actions, and return to the religion. Let him return to This is our Creed (a book written by Muhammad Yusuf) upon

176 See "Exposé: Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau by Mamman Nur," *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 448.

177 Ibid., pp. 450-457.

which we were all nurtured, and the Prophet's methodology that was laid out by the scholars. If he returns, we will follow him. I hope it is understood."<sup>178</sup>

The *takfir* debate between Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi will be better understood by briefly examining the competition between the Bin`alis and the Hazimis within the Islamic State. As Cole Bunzel clearly explained in his research, in September 2014, the Islamic State took a harsh position toward the Hazimis with the execution of sharia officials like Abu Ja`far al-Hattab and Abu`Umar al-Kuwaiti who had adopted the Hazimis view of *takfir*. On May 29, 2016, the Central Office for Overseeing the Sharia Departments of the Islamic State (al-Maktab al-Markazi li-Mutaba'at al-Dawawin) published an official statement on *takfir* in which it affirmed that there is no excuse for hesitation in *takfir*, a position the Bin`alis considered to be in support of the Hazimis. On May 17, 2017, the Delegated Committee of the Islamic State published a memorandum acknowledging that *takfir* is an "unambiguous foundation of the religion." On May 19, 2017, Turki Bin`ali addressed a long letter to the Delegated Committee with his critical "observations" of the memorandum that he noted was intended to appease the Hazimis within the Islamic State. On May 31, 2017, Bin`ali was killed in an airstrike. On May 23, 2017, Abu`Abd al-Barr al-Salihi, a Kuwaiti-born Islamic State scholar also refuted the memorandum with advice for the Delegated Committee to withdraw the memo "in its entirety." Abu`Abd al-Barr al-Salihi was imprisoned for his dissent and ultimately died in an airstrike like Bin`ali. The Saudis Abu`Uthman al-Najdi and Khabbab al-Jazrawi also urged the Delegated Committee to retract the memorandum. On July 5, 2017, Abu Muhammad al-Husayni al-Hashimi, a Saudi of Syrian origin, also wrote a letter al-Baghdadi in which he lamented that the Kharijites 'the Hazimis' have taken up the most important positions within the Islamic State. At the end of August 2017, Abu`Abd al-Malik al-Shami also wrote an open letter in which he blamed the territorial loss of the Islamic State on the 'Hazimi extremists.' On September 15, 2017, the Delegated Committee of the Islamic State rescinded the May 17, 2017, memorandum, and al-Baghdadi appointed Abu`Abd al-Rahman al-Shami, a veteran Islamic State scholar and opponent of the Hazimis, to clarify the group's official doctrine on issues of *takfir*.<sup>179</sup>

Although the competition between the Bin`alis and the Hazimis within the Islamic State fluctuated on the group's position on *takfir*, this ideological fluctuation did not spill over to the West African Islamic State. Shekau has consistently supported the position of the Hazimis while Nur/al-Barnawi consistently supported the position of the Bin`alis. Both factions have also been unwavering in the way they label each other as Kharijites and Murjites. It is rather strange that even when the Islamic State issued memoranda and statements in support of the Hazimis and while Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi was teaching some of the books of the Islamic State, which have now been withdrawn for their extremist content and perceived ideological leanings to the Hazimis, al-Barnawi interpreted those books not in the favor of Hazimis but the Bin`alis.<sup>180</sup> *Takfir* is not the only issue that divided Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi, however.

### Verdict for the People Residing Beyond the Boko Haram's Caliphate

Closely related to the disagreement on the issue of *takfir* is the debate over the verdict for the people residing beyond the Boko Haram's caliphate. Abubakr Shekau explicitly believes that anyone residing beyond the territories controlled by Boko Haram cannot be regarded as a Muslim unless he is actively fighting against Boko Haram's adversaries with complete disavowal from the Nigerian state. In his response to his critics from ISWAP, Shekau said:

178 Ibid., p. 464.

179 Bunzel, "Caliphate in Disarray." See also R. Green, "Dispute Over Takfir Rocks Islamic State," *MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1324*, August 4, 2017.

180 For example, see the 15-parts audio series on the book "You Should Know the Commands of Your Religion" delivered by Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi via ISWAP Media Center in February 2017.

“We believe that it is impossible for a Muslim to reside in the lands of the infidels (Dar al-Kufr) without the public manifestation of his religion, and still claim to be a Muslim. This is not the practice of the Prophet [Muhammad]. Likewise, it is impossible for a Muslim who has not fought against the *taghut* who rules by means of a constitution to claim to be a Muslim or for him not to be labeled an infidel. This is also not possible. These are the type of creeds they wrote to us with the claim that they emanated from the caliphate [Islamic State]. They said I should agree and work with these creeds because that is how the caliphate is governed. Afterwards I said that these beliefs, if I did not hear them directly from the spokesman of the caliphate, I will not accept them as truth nor will I agree to work with them. Whoever accepts these beliefs has committed apostasy. This is my creed.”<sup>181</sup>

Based on Shekau’s interpretation, since the people living beyond the territories controlled by Boko Haram are infidels, they can also be classified as legitimate targets of attacks by the group. Those who doubt the unbelief of those residing beyond the Boko Haram territories are themselves infidels. Shekau’s position is sterner against the people who were initially living within the territories of Boko Haram and who later fled from the group’s territory to territories under the control of the Nigerian state. These refugees, according to Shekau, are infidels, and it is permissible to bomb their camps, their mosques, markets, or anywhere they reside until they repent and migrate back to Boko Haram’s caliphate. It is only by understanding Shekau’s line of reasoning, which evolved from his interpretation of *takfir*, that one can understand the current trends of mosque attacks in northeast Nigeria. According to Shekau, the attacks on IDP camps and mosques are legitimate because it is an attack against infidels in “Masjid ad-dirar”—i.e., the mosques built not for the purpose of piety but for the purpose of combining the worship of God with the polytheism of calling for the support of democracy, secular constitution, and man-made legislation all of which according to him constitute unbelief.

For his part, Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi argues that the people who were initially living beyond the territories controlled by Boko Haram cannot be declared as infidels as long as they do not provide active or passive support for the Nigerian Army or members of the Civilian JTF in their war against Boko Haram. In his November 19, 2017, lecture based on the article “The Desertion of the Renegade: Rejection of the Filth and the Purification of the Ranks,” which was published in al-Naba newspaper Issue 94,<sup>182</sup> al-Barnawi argues that the difference between himself and Shekau is the fact that Shekau believes that everyone residing in the land of unbelief where sharia is not the ultimate source of law is an infidel, and there are no monotheists residing in the lands of the infidels. Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi explains that Shekau’s interpretation is akin to the interpretation of the Kharijites. He further states that only those who were initially living within the Boko Haram’s caliphate and who later fled to the territories of the Nigerian state because they became fatigued with warfare or preferred the laws in the land of the infidels above the laws in the Islamic State can be declared as infidels. These people, according to Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, are the renegade who should be expelled out of the ranks of ISWAP and fought against as infidels.

In a similar lecture titled “Living in the land of unbelief,” Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi rebukes the people who migrated from the Islamic State to the land of unbelief with the claim that they repented from fighting jihad and they have now been deradicalized.<sup>183</sup> Unlike Shekau, al-Barnawi admonishes the people living beyond the territories controlled by ISWAP to migrate to the Islamic State. He delivers a lengthy lecture on the virtues of residing in the Islamic State, and he encourages those who are yet to migrate to do so not for the purpose of allying themselves with the winning forces but solely for the purpose of the conviction that living in the Islamic State where the sharia is the source of law is

181 “Shekau Responds to His Critics,” *The Boko Haram Reader*, p. 472.

182 “The Desertion of the Renegade: Rejection of the Filth and the Purification of the Ranks,” al-Naba, Issue 94, August 2017, p. 14, available at Jihadology.

183 Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, “Living in the land of unbelief,” October 16, 2016.

preferable than living in the land of unbelief. Some of the more moderate Muslims might accept—however reluctantly—the propaganda of al-Barnawi and his attempt to win over the sympathy of the local communities, but it remains to be seen if his alternative will eventually be preferred over the alternative offered by the Nigerian state. Whatever the case, it is clear from the foregoing that the internal civil war in Boko Haram is mainly influenced by the interpretation of *takfir* and the ethics of jihad. There are no indications yet that the theological house of Shekau and Nur/al-Barnawi will ever come into agreement with each other. Until then, the civil war will continue to claim casualties both within and outside the ranks of the group. Those who kill know why they kill, but majority of those about to be killed will hardly understand why they are being targeted.

### Conclusion

The internal civil war in ISWAP and Boko Haram has claimed casualties both within and outside the group. Notwithstanding the schisms, Nur, Abu Mus`ab al-Barnawi, and Shekau preserved their allegiance to the Islamic State. Despite Shekau's demotion as the Governor of ISWAP, a video released by Boko Haram in March 2017 titled "Exposing the Secrets of the Hypocrites" showed images of al-Qa`ida-sympathetic scholars and critics of the Islamic State, such as the Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the Britain-based Hani Siba`i, and the Canada-based Tariq `Abd al-Halim, who were portrayed as apostate scholars.<sup>184</sup> The portrayal of al-Qa`ida-sympathetic scholars as apostates is an indication that Shekau also supported the Islamic State in its ideological rivalry with al-Qa`ida. Shekau has, however, discontinued his reference to the Islamic State, and he now seems comfortable forging ahead as a 'jihadi loner' without acting as an affiliate to any of the global jihad movements, be it al-Qa`ida or the Islamic State.

On the other hand, AQIM has re-advertised itself as an alternative to members disaffected by Shekau, frustrated with Shekau's level of extremism, and not too comfortable with the union between Nur, al-Barnawi, and the Islamic State. This disaffected faction, which comprises of the remnants of the quiescent Ansaru, often voices its criticisms of the Islamic State and support for al-Qa`ida's model of jihad. The only feasible choice for this disaffected faction will most likely be an accommodation with the recently established Jama`at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), consisting of Ansar Dine, Al Murabitun, Macina Liberation Front, and AQIM's Sahara branch. The internal civil war in the ranks of jihadi movements in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region has led to the evolution of three distinct factions: the Shekau-led faction in Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad; the al-Barnawi-led faction in the Islamic State in West African Province; and the remnants of the quiescent Ansaru. In conclusion, whether the different factions will survive the current wave of schism or not is yet to be seen, but for the foreseeable future the internal civil war is nowhere near over.

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184 "New video message from Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da'wah wa-l-Jihad's Abu Bakr Shekau: "The Secret of the Hypocrites," available at Jihadology.

## CHAPTER 2: Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber

*By Elizabeth Pearson*

### Introduction

In the three years since then Boko Haram leader Abubakr Shekau pledged allegiance to Islamic State ‘Caliph’ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, both movements have experienced a change in fortunes. In March 2015, Boko Haram’s pledge led to the movement’s rebranding as Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP). The Islamic State at that time was attracting global recruits with its vision of a utopian Islamist state. It boasted of well-functioning education, health, and police services, and a growing amount of territory acquired through violent jihad. Boko Haram was led, meanwhile, by an increasingly ambitious Shekau, known worldwide for the group’s April 2014 abduction of more than 270 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, and monitoring the changing landscape of global jihad. Just two months after al-Baghdadi declared the ‘Islamic State’ in June 2014, Shekau had announced his own ‘Dawla Islamiyya,’ or Islamic state, in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>185</sup> Boko Haram leadership appeared to emulate Islamic State rhetoric and operations, from the holding of territory in northeastern Nigeria, which was new to Boko Haram, to integrating its media team with the Islamic State’s.

Yet in June 2014, Boko Haram also introduced a tactic directly at odds with both al-Qa`ida Central and Islamic State doctrine and practice: female “suicide” terrorism (FST). By late 2015 the scale of Boko Haram female suicide attacks was already globally unprecedented.<sup>186</sup> Boko Haram deployed its first female suicide bomber in an attack on a military barracks in Gombe State in June 2014, and since then it has far outstripped any previous terrorist group’s deployment of FST, whether religious or secular. As of February 28, 2018, a recorded 469 female “suicide bombers” have been deployed or arrested in 240 incidents, and they have killed more than 1,200 people across four countries: Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon.<sup>187</sup> Almost 3,000 more people have been injured. Meanwhile, the Islamic State reportedly only first used FST in Syria and Iraq in 2017, as its caliphate project succumbed to sustained attack. Since then, there has been an October 2017 newsletter directive and a February 2018 propaganda video endorsing female violence as part of the Islamic State jihad.<sup>188</sup> However, FST is controversial—and mostly not approved of—in violent jihadi ideology.

Through an analysis of the aims and organization of both Boko Haram and the Islamic State, this chapter explores this anomalous use of FST in West Africa. It argues that, as Gonzalez-Perez claims of female bombing in other groups, Boko Haram FST can also be understood as a tactic employed to

185 At the time of Shekau’s pledge in March 2015, the new “West Africa Province” held almost 12,000 square miles of territory across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in northeastern Nigeria, an area the size of Belgium. David Blair, “Boko Haram Is Now a Mini-Islamic State, with Its Own Territory,” *Telegraph*, January 10, 2015; Brandon Jones, “New video: Abubakar Shekau announces Boko Haram ‘Islamic State’ caliphate in Nigeria,” *Global Dispatch*, August 28, 2014.

186 Elizabeth Georgina Pearson, “Boko Haram and Nigeria’s Female Bombers,” RUSI, September 25, 2015. There are NGO reports of female bombers before 2014, however the author has been unable to triangulate them through media sources.

187 All figures on Boko Haram FST are drawn from a database maintained since June 2014 and initially collated with Jacob Zenn. Data is drawn from triangulated English- and French-language media reports, both national (Nigerian) and international, where possible. This database was also augmented with figures from UNICEF. “Failed” attacks, killing only the bomber, or where a bomber is “intercepted,” arrested (with or without later conviction), or shot, are included in the data. Open source media reports often cite officials from emergency services, but error in numbers is likely. The inclusion of French-language media data and contemporaneous data collection may explain the higher bomber figures than those in the CTC’s August 2017 report. Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, *Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational And Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram’s Suicide Bombers* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2017).

188 Lizzie Dearden, “Isis Propaganda Video Shows Women Fighting for the First Time,” *Independent*, February 8, 2018; Rita Katz, “How do we know ISIS is losing? Now it’s asking women to fight,” *Washington Post*, November 2, 2017.

“legitimize acts that are strategically and militarily utilitarian.”<sup>189</sup> This chapter explicitly contrasts the gendered practices of the Islamic State and Boko Haram, showing the importance of a prohibition on Islamic State female violence until 2017 and the collapse of the Islamic State’s ‘state project.’ It seeks to understand Boko Haram’s prolific use of female suicide bombers, despite otherwise emulating the Islamic State. The central argument is that for both movements, female suicide bombing and female violence—or its absence—are primarily linked to the material needs and objectives of the group. When Boko Haram relied on female violence and the Islamic State did not, the discrepancy lay in the importance of the state project and symbolic male violence to the Islamic State, versus the absence of a similarly coherent governance project for Boko Haram. While it had territory, the Islamic State operated a strongly codified gender ideology, wherein male violence was legitimized and female violence was not, and benefited from this in three key ways: recruitment, regulation, and unification. Without a similar state project, Boko Haram had greater freedom to improvise. The chapter also argues that Boko Haram’s tactical use of FST differs from that of any previous group because Boko Haram gives these women and girls no symbolic status.

The argument proceeds in four sections. The first sets out the organizational advantages of FST and how these are evident in five evolving waves of Boko Haram female suicide bombing since June 2014. The second section explores the issue of coercive female bombing within Boko Haram and its implications for the ‘symbolic role’ of the bomber. The third section examines the prohibition on female violence in Islamic State ideology as central to the ‘state project,’ until its 2017 collapse. The fourth section discusses similarities in the approach to women by Boko Haram and the Islamic State, despite differences regarding FST. In particular, it emphasizes that both movements instrumentalize women and gender-based violence (GBV) for tactical gain. The focus on the relationship between these two movements means detailed comparison with other groups using FST is not undertaken in this chapter.

### Organizational and Tactical Perspectives in FST: The Case of Boko Haram

What was new to Boko Haram in June 2014 was not new to global terrorism. In 1985, the secular Syrian Nationalist Army sent 16-year-old Sana’a Mehadli to kill herself and two Israeli soldiers in Jezzine, southern Lebanon.<sup>190</sup> In the coming decades, FST was adopted by at least 16 other groups, including the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK); Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which conducted an estimated 26-75 female attacks between 1994 and 2009; the Black Widows of the Chechen rebels, which carried out 26 attacks from 2001 to 2013; Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ); Hamas; and al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), which under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi carried out between 50-174 attacks in the mid-2000s.<sup>191</sup> Yet by the end of February 2018, Boko Haram almost exceeded these groups’ female suicide attacks combined, through incidents involving single, double, and multiple bombers. In August 2017, Warner and Matfess additionally noted that Boko Haram, which first used a male bomber in 2011, was reliant on female bombers in preference to males.<sup>192</sup>

Boko Haram’s use of FST is prolific. The data shows that Boko Haram deployed 469 female suicide bombers in 240 total incidents from June 2014 to the end of February 2018, killing an estimated 1,259 people (bombers excluded), 1,673 people (bombers included), and injuring 2,967 more people (see

189 Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, “The False Islamization of Female Suicide Bombers,” *Gender Issues* 28:1-2 (2011): p. 62.

190 Mehadli is remembered today as “Bride of the South,” a legacy she left through a video martyrdom message in which she justified the attack. See Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists* (London: Hurst, 2011), p. 23.

191 Claudia Brunner, “Female Suicide Bombing,” in Jill Steans and Daniela Tepe-Belfrage eds., *Handbook on Gender in World Politics* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), p. 215; Bloom, *Bombshell*, p. 216; Yoram Schweitzer, “Introduction,” in Yoram Schweitzer ed., *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), p. 8. Figures vary due to discrepancies in criteria used in counting incidents as well as the inclusion/exclusion of failed attacks.

192 Warner and Matfess, p. 28.

Figure 1).<sup>193</sup> Most incidents affect Nigeria (179, 75% of attacks), with the majority of those in Borno State (133, 55% of attacks). The second-most affected area, the Far North of Cameroon (48, 20% of attacks), has experienced almost as many attacks as the rest of Nigeria. Chad has seen six attacks (2%) and Niger seven (3%). The female suicide bombers are scarcely identified by name in the press, nor are their basic demographic details provided. In the majority of reported cases (53%, 250 bombers), the attacker's age is not stated. However, media reports describe 29% (136) as “teenagers” (13-19 years, i.e. including some adults), and 6% (29 so-called “bombers”) as younger girl children. Only 12% (54 people) were reportedly “adult,” perhaps because age is only mentioned if attackers are perceived as very young. The engagement of minors suggests existing definitions of “suicide terrorism,” which emphasize bomber complicity, cannot easily be applied.<sup>194</sup> While this chapter uses the terminology of existing literature on suicide bombing/bombers/terrorism, it is important not to assume that a Boko Haram “attacker” is always complicit or even “self-aware” during attacks.

## FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISM (FST) BY MONTH

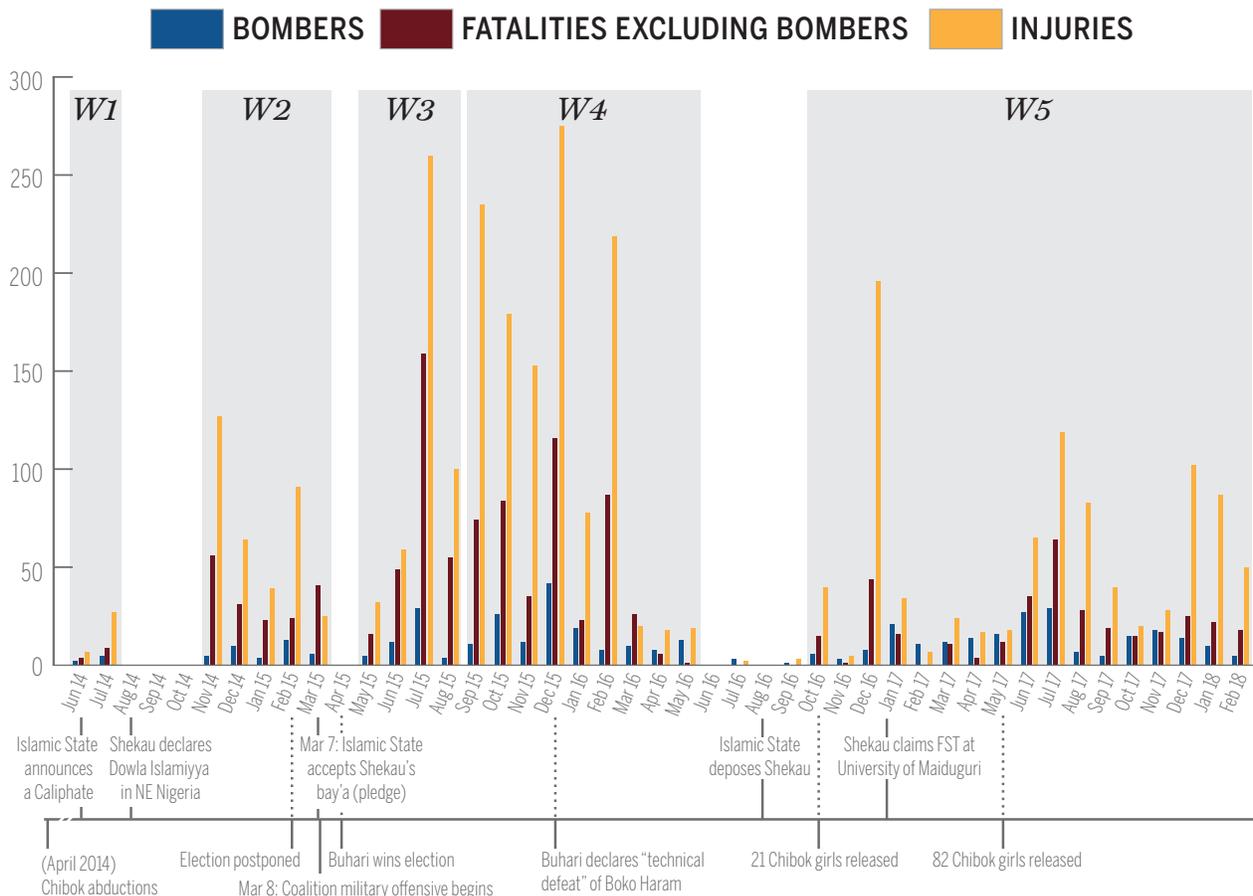


Figure 1: Suspected Boko Haram female suicide attacks by month

Scholars seeking to understand FST in other groups typically adopt a multi-level approach, considering individual, societal, organizational (strategic and tactical), and ideological factors, which may

<sup>193</sup> See footnote 187 for notes on data collection.

<sup>194</sup> See, for example, the definition offered by Yoram Schweitzer, “Suicide Terrorism: Development & Characteristics,” in *A Lecture Presented in the International Conference on Countering Suicide Terrorism*, February 21, 2000.

overlap.<sup>195</sup> Contrasted with male suicide attacks, FST has been subject to greater analysis at the individual level. This is due in part to bias tending to frame female violence as apolitical and assuming more personal motivations; additionally, some primary source interviews emphasize motivations such as loss or revenge.<sup>196</sup> There is little academic data on the motivations of Boko Haram female suicide bombers. Journalists frequently cite coercion, with many accounts from women and girls who have refused to detonate devices.<sup>197</sup> Some 4,826 females including 2,438 children have reportedly been arrested for links to Boko Haram—more females than males.<sup>198</sup> It is unclear how many were bombers, and how many were coerced into Boko Haram, as few personal stories are known. The data in this chapter cannot offer personal motivations; it can only reveal patterns.

These patterns are consistent with organizational-level analysis that explains FST in terms of tactical and strategic advantage for a terrorist movement.<sup>199</sup> FST has five key advantages. First, the ‘shock value’ of initial use of female attackers may ensure publicity and therefore have a propaganda effect. Second, women and girls can have easier access to targets because females are less often “suspected, inspected, or detected” as attackers.<sup>200</sup> This can be especially true in Islamic societies where there are strong social barriers to predominantly male security officers subjecting Muslim women to checks.<sup>201</sup> This ultimately renders FST a short-term tactic since security forces can and do adapt.<sup>202</sup> Third, the use of female suicide attackers avoids disrupting predominantly male lines of leadership, particularly if men see women as “burdensome.”<sup>203</sup> Fourth, militant groups suffering shortages of male recruits amid, for example, an intensification of external pressures can resort to FST in an act of “desperation.”<sup>204</sup> Fifth, FST can be used to shame men to fight.<sup>205</sup>

Organizational capacity and strategic motivations also impact when and why groups use suicide bombing. Pape suggests suicide terrorism is a matter of “strategic logic,” aimed at coercing liberal democracies out of territorial occupation.<sup>206</sup> While rigorously challenged,<sup>207</sup> his research was significant in deemphasizing the role of religion and emphasizing strategy. Yet religious ideology has been central

195 Mohammed M. Hafez, “Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29:2 (2006): p. 166.

196 Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 145; Patricia Pearson (1997) cited in Jeffrey P. Rush and Elizabeth Schafluetzel-Iles, “Fem Fatales: The Evolution and Significance of Female Involvement in Terrorist Networks and Suicide Bombing,” *Professional Issues in Criminal Justice* 2:1 (2007): p. 60; Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor, “Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31:4 (2008): pp. 304–326; Bloom, *Bombshell*.

197 See, for instance, Ruth Maclean, “Dressed for Death: The Women Boko Haram Sent to Blow Themselves Up,” *Guardian*, May 5, 2017; Dionne Searcey, “Boko Haram Strapped Suicide Bombs to Them. Somehow These Teenage Girls Survived,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2017.

198 Olatunji Omirin, “Army parades 3 female bombers, 8 foreigners,” *Daily Trust*, March 2, 2017.

199 Gonzalez-Perez; Debra D. Zedalis, “Female Suicide Bombers,” Strategic Studies Institute, June 2004.

200 Jacob Zenn cited in Morgan Winsor, “Boko Haram Enlists Female Suicide Bombers To Kill 100,000; Violence Now Akin To ISIS,” *International Business Times*, December 6, 2014.

201 David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith and Politics of Martyrdom Operations* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), p. 134; Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill* (New York: Columbia University Press; New Ed edition, 2007) p. 108.

202 Jeffrey William Lewis, *The Business of Martyrdom* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), p. 255.

203 Jessica Davis, “Evolution of the Global Jihad: Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36:4 (2013): p. 288; Lewis, p. 138.

204 Cindy D. Ness, “In the Name of the Cause: Women’s Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28:5 (2005): p. 357; Brigitte L. Nacos, “The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28:5 (2005): p. 436.

205 Bloom, *Bombshell*; Anne Speckhard, “The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31:11 (2008); Davis, pp. 284, 288; Ness, p. 357; Nacos, p. 436; Lewis, p. 138.

206 Robert A. Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review* 97:3 (2003): p. 355.

207 Assaf Moghadam, “Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of Dying to Win,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29:8 (2006): p. 707.

to moral and theological arguments by salafi-jihadi groups encouraging male suicide bombing, and prohibiting female violence. For example, female suicide bombers will in death reveal their bodies, and unaccompanied, young and ‘attractive’ females are not permitted among men. This is despite historical precedent for the female fighter from the time of the Prophet Muhammed.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, the requirements of defensive jihad do not, in theory, disbar women.<sup>209</sup> Nonetheless, leading ideologues, including Abdullah Azzam, Anwar al-Awlaki, and Usama bin Ladin, as well as influential Islamist scholars such as Abu Basir al-Tartusi and Abu Umar as-Sayf have repeatedly refused to sanction violent jihad for women.<sup>210</sup> In particular, al-Qa`ida Central was always unwilling to condone female suicide bombers,<sup>211</sup> a legacy that the Islamic State maintained until the summer of 2017 and the fall of Mosul.<sup>212</sup>

Gonzalez-Perez argues that in the exceptional cases where FST has been used by Islamist groups, it is rarely more than a tactically opportunistic act. For example, in Palestine, Hamas followed PIJ in permitting female suicide bombers, which in turn had followed al-Fatah. Competition between the groups to recruit Palestinian women prompted the spread of the tactic.<sup>213</sup> When al-Zarqawi instituted a campaign of female suicide bombing for AQI in the mid-2000s, he knowingly challenged AQI doctrine. He exploited local patriarchal dynamics to engage minors and women into tactically expedient attacks, without even justifying them theologically or allowing martyrdom videos.<sup>214</sup> His aim was to shame men into action and innovate regionally. His tactic quickly became predominant.<sup>215</sup> With FST, as Brachman notes of terrorism, “winning comes first.”<sup>216</sup>

Boko Haram might share this motto, and indeed Shekau has openly sought to emulate al-Zarqawi. Analysis of the FST data until the cut-off date of the end of February 2018 reveals five distinct waves (see Figure 1),<sup>217</sup> each giving the movement a particular tactical advantage as internal and external (military) pressures change.<sup>218</sup> Waves are identified through either a clear gap in suicide bombing campaigns (Waves One to Two, Two to Three, and Four to Five) or a significant regional shift (Wave Three to Four, which is contiguous in time). The shifts can be contextualized with knowledge of internal and external dynamics and events. Analysis of “waves,” therefore, yields more insight into FST’s evolution as a tactic than analysis of specific “years” because looking at years renders invisible significant changes in bombing patterns occurring *within* years. For instance, Figure 2, which shows casualties per bomber *by years* reveals a steadily uniform decline, while patterns by waves indicate a more complex dynamic.

208 Cook and Allison, p. 130; Nelly Lahoud, “The Neglected Sex: The Jihadis’ Exclusion of Women From Jihad,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26:5 (2014): pp. 780-802.

209 Lahoud, “Neglected Sex,” p. 792; David Cook, “Women Fighting in Jihad?” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28:5 (2005), p. 376; Farhana Qazi, “The Mujahidaat: Early Female Warriors of Islam;” in Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry eds., *Women, Gender and Terrorism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), pp. 33-35; Davis, pp. 279-291.

210 Lahoud, “Neglected Sex;” William F. McCants ed., *Militant Ideology Atlas* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), 99–106, 127–28.

211 Davis.

212 Jack Moore, “ISIS Unleashes Dozens of Female Suicide Bombers in Battle For Mosul,” *Newsweek*, July 5, 2017.

213 Gonzalez-Perez, p. 58.

214 Bloom, *Bombshell*, 209–11; Alexandra Zavis, “Grooming a Female Suicide Bomber - Latimes,” accessed *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 2017

215 Bloom, *Bombshell*, 210; Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Doubleday, 2015), p. 271.

216 Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, first edition (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 82.

217 Data collection is ongoing. The end February point marks the final submission date of this chapter.

218 Elizabeth Pearson, “Nigeria’s Female Suicide Bombers: A Show of Strength,” *War on the Rocks*, October 16, 2014.

## BOKO HARAM'S CASUALTIES PER BOMBER

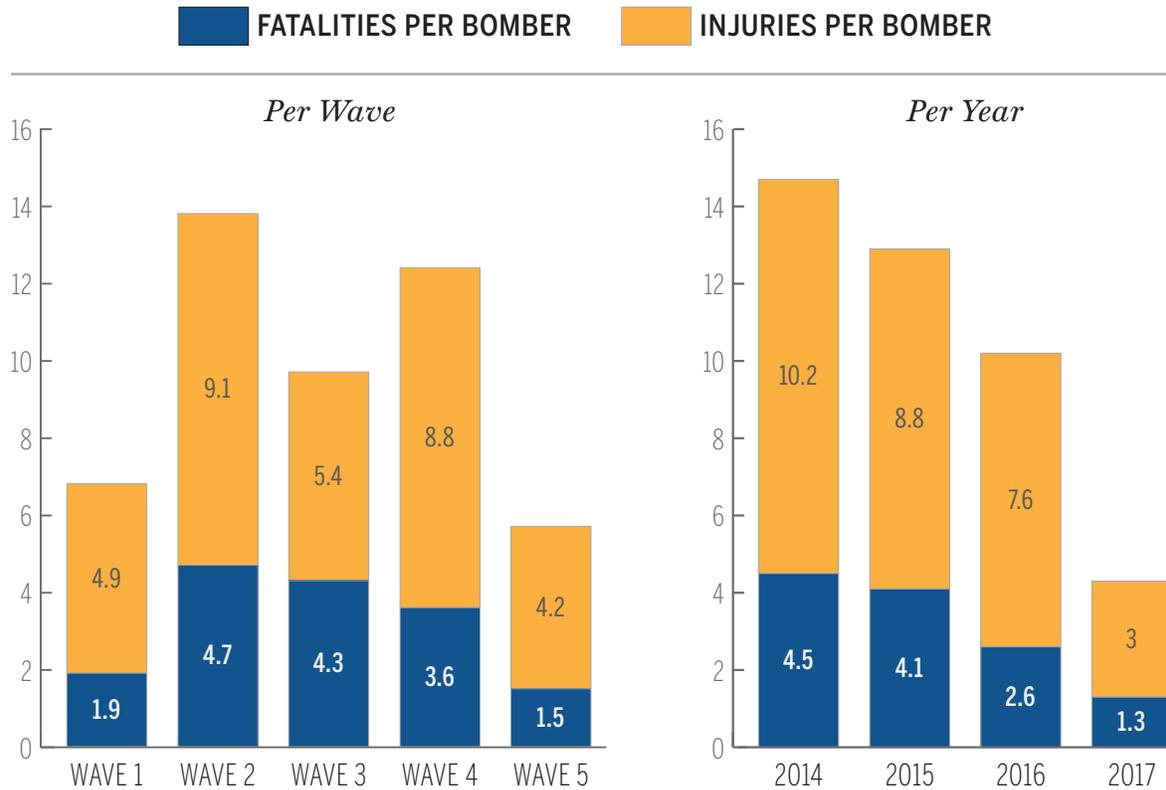


Figure 2: Casualties per bomber, per wave and per year

**Wave One: Publicity [7 attackers in 6 successful and 1 failed attack: See Figure 5 for locations]**

The first wave, which took place in June and July 2014, saw six female suicide attacks in two months, and one other arrest, of a young girl wearing a suicide vest in Katsina State. Targets were diverse: a military barracks, educational facilities, a market, and a gas depot. As first noted in 2015, and re-emphasized by Warner and Matfess, this may have been an opportunistic ‘publicity wave,’ capitalizing on the global interest in Boko Haram following the Chibok kidnappings of more than 270 schoolgirls in April 2014.<sup>219</sup> Fatalities and injuries per attack, all engaging single (lone) bombers, were low (2.2 fatalities and 5.7 injuries) (see Figure 3). However, the impact was amplified by the timing, with fears that the female suicide bombers were ‘Chibok girls.’ At the same time, Boko Haram made incursions in northeastern Nigeria and acquired towns and destroyed roads and bridges, largely out of the spotlight of the media, ahead of Shekau’s August 2014 declaration of a Dawla Islamiyyah.

219 Elizabeth Pearson, “Boko Haram and Nigeria’s Female Bombers,” *RUSI Newsbrief* 35:5 (2015): p. 20; Warner and Matfess, p. 24.

## BOKO HARAM'S CASUALTIES PER ATTACK

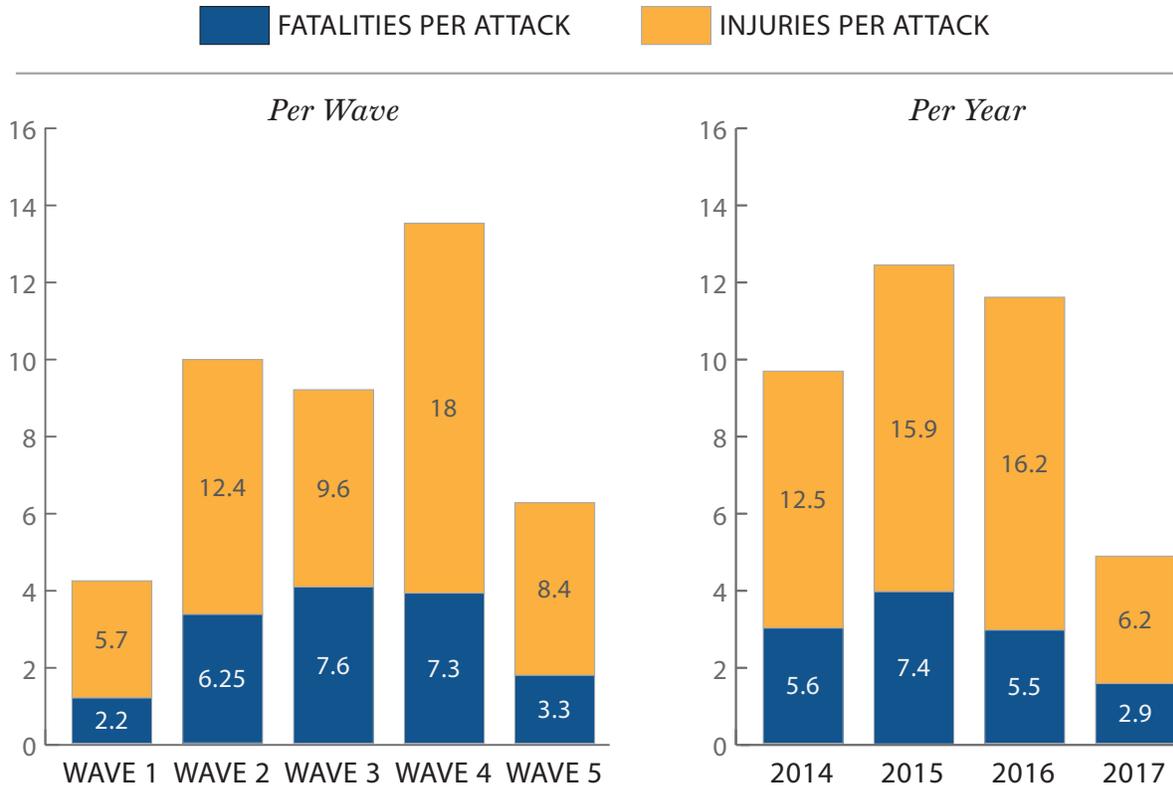


Figure 3: Casualties per attack, per wave and per year

**Wave Two: Innovation [38 attackers in 18 successful and 10 failed attacks]** A clear gap of three months followed Wave One, until November 7, 2014, when a second wave commenced that lasted until March 10, 2015. The wave spanned the postponement of the presidential elections scheduled for February 14, 2015, until the acceptance of Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi on March 7, 2015, and the Nigerian and sub-regional offensive against the insurgents, which commenced on March 8, 2015.<sup>220</sup> The wave almost trebled fatalities per attack through a number of innovations. Firstly, although reliant on single attacks, this wave introduced tandem female suicide bombings; secondly, active attacks used children and young girls for the first time; and thirdly, the geographical reach of the attacks spread to Borno State and two female suicide attacks were in Niger near the Nigerian border, as well as incorporating Bauchi, Gombe, Kano, Taraba, and Yobe states. This wave represented a highly effective response to security checkpoints instituted in Nigeria late in 2014 because child female suicide bombers were able to subvert military expectations and gain access to soft targets, such as markets, which accounted for 62% of targets in this wave.

**Wave Three: Resistance [32 attackers in 16 successful and 2 failed attacks]** Following a temporary cease in FST due to the Nigerian and sub-regional military offensive, which put Boko Haram under significant pressure, the militants launched Wave Three from May 2015 to July 2015. This wave shifted

220 "Islamic State 'accepts' Boko Haram's Allegiance Pledge," BBC, March 15, 2013; "Allies Begin Push against Boko Haram," BBC, March 8, 2015.

focus to security targets (at 22% of Wave Three attacks, now equal to markets) and also included three mosques and a church. Boko Haram continued to innovate, with three attackers or more a feature of attacks, and single attacks now 60% of all incidents, down from 71% in Wave Two (see Figure 4). Women were sometimes teamed with men. The increase in bombers per attack was effective in increasing fatalities per attack during this period, although by a relative small increment (7.6 per attack from 6.25). Although under sustained pressure, Boko Haram maintained the FST offensive. This wave saw attacks in Borno, Kaduna, Kano, and Yobe states.

### TYPE OF ATTACK BY NUMBER OF BOMBERS

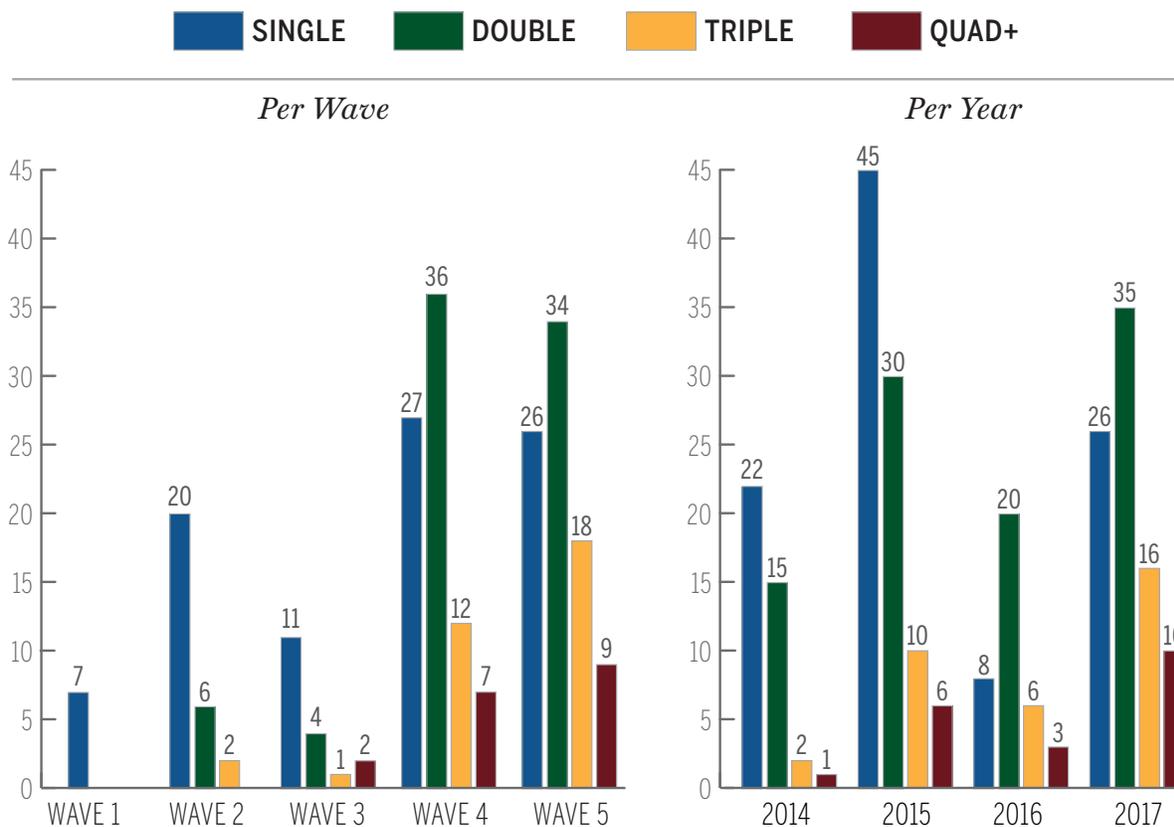


Figure 4: Number of bombers per attack, by waves and by year

**Wave Four: Retrenchment [167 attackers in 56 successful and 26 failed attacks]** The fourth wave commenced in July 2015 and did not ease until the end of May 2016. This wave is differentiated from Wave Three through, first, the predominance of multiple female suicide attackers, with for the first time more tandem attacks than single attacks (see Figure 4); and second, with a new geographic focus in the Far North of Cameroon, which saw 28 attacks (34%), Chad, which saw six attacks (7%), and Niger, which saw two attacks (2%). This was likely a result of Boko Haram relocating its bases as the Nigerian Army cleared territory formerly held by the insurgents in northeastern Nigeria. Attacks, however, demonstrated not expansion, but retrenchment around a reduced geographical space focused on Borno State and the border areas with its neighbors. While fatalities per attack were slightly reduced in this wave, the reliance on multiple attackers succeeded in almost doubling injuries per attack (from 9.6 to 18). Female suicide attackers continued to predominantly target civilian areas (60% of attacks), such as markets (24%), bars, or restaurants, and from September 2015 began to assault

camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (8%). These are easily accessible locations to female suicide bombers, given the high proportion of women and children in camps.<sup>221</sup> Some 14% of attacks impacted government, political, and security targets. Military action to combat FST, however, meant a high number of failed attacks, with 26 (16%) of Wave Four bombers shot. This means that in 15% of attacks, the target was unclear.

Boko Haram's use of FST almost disappeared between May and October 2016. There were only two attacks through June to September, and all four bombers in this 'gap' period were shot. Boko Haram faced numerous challenges at this time. For example, a key bomb-maker was arrested in late May 2016, and there were also factional struggles within the movement.<sup>222</sup> Boko Haram splinter group Ansaru saw Khalid al-Barnawi arrested in April 2016, and the Islamic State replaced Shekau as West Africa Province leader in August 2016 and installed as the new leader Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the reported son of former Boko Haram leader Muhammed Yusuf. Al-Barnawi disapproved of Shekau's targeting of innocent Muslims in attacks. An arrested insurgent commander has also suggested disagreement on Shekau's use of girl children as bombers was a source of tension between Boko Haram leaders that eventually led to splits.<sup>223</sup>

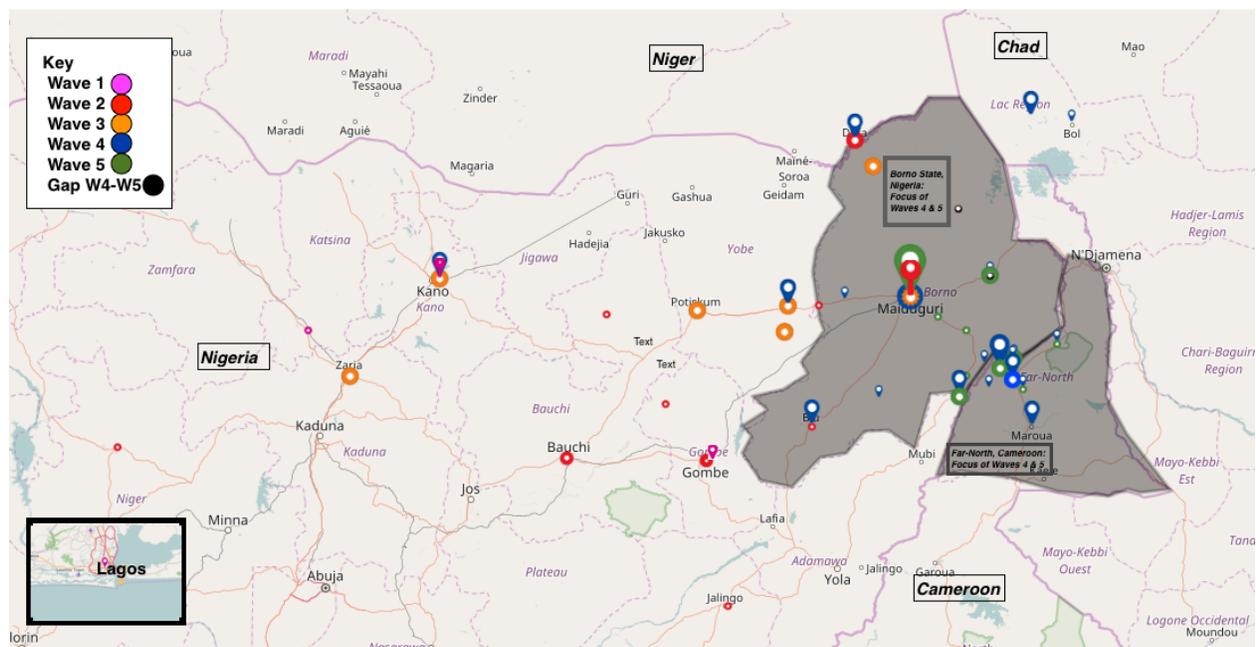


Figure 5: Map of waves

**Wave Five: Factionalization [174 attackers in 41 successful and 39 failed attacks]** The Fifth Wave of female suicide attacks is evident since October 2016 and is ongoing and centered on Borno State (76 attacks, 74%) and its capital, Maiduguri (55 attacks, 54%), with a maintained presence in Cameroon, including 20 attacks there in this period (19%). It coincides with Shekau's attempt to reassert his status after being deposed as the Boko Haram wali ("governor") in August 2016, an announcement he publicly contested.<sup>224</sup> IDPs remain a focus (17%) of attacks, as do general attacks against civilians (21%),

221 The majority of these attacks took place in 2016, amid the Nigerian government's attempts to return 2.2 million internally displaced people.

222 "B'Haram Chief Bomb Maker Killed by Shekau's Body Guard, Another Blinded," THISDAYLIVE, May 23, 2016.

223 "Boko Haram Fracturing over Islamic State Ties, U.S. General Warns," Reuters, June 21, 2016; "Ex-Boko Haram Intelligence Chief Speaks on Shekau, Albarnawi, Others," *Premium Times*, December 24, 2017.

224 Abdulkareem Haruna, "In new video, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, threatens to attack Buhari in presidential villa," *Premium Times*, August 8, 2016.

with continuing pressure on security targets (14%). While ongoing, this wave is the least effective, mirroring Wave One. This likely reflects movement fragmentation; Shekau's reduced status; increased military activity, including the 'interception' of bombers; reduced fighter numbers; and possibly less materials and expertise. Some 18% of Wave Five bombers (39) have been shot and a number of others have aborted attacks prior to detonation. For a variety of reasons, therefore, half of the attacks have been failures, and 25% of intended targets impossible to identify.

As a result, the Fifth Wave has seen average fatalities per attack halved, from 7.3 to 3.3—and per attacker from 3.6 to 1.5. Despite a continued reliance on multiple bombers, this wave has been unable, as was possible in prior waves, to utilize multiple bomber “teams” to maintain casualties per attack, at the expense of casualties per attacker.

Matfess and Warner suggest Boko Haram suicide bombing (male and female) per bomber is less effective than for other groups, pointing to the decreased lethality year on year.<sup>225</sup> (See also Figure 2.) However, a consideration of “waves” over “years” offers a different interpretation of the effectiveness of Boko Haram's female suicide bombings. Firstly, when considering “waves” of attacks, the decline becomes dramatic only in Wave Five, in which Shekau is no longer ISWAP wali. Here, the impact is similar to Wave One. The military offensive clearly impacted FST efficacy, particularly in terms of geographical scope, but apparently not so dramatically as factionalization. Second, while it is true that average fatalities per Boko Haram female bomb attack across all incidents (excluding bombers) are at 5.5, which is lower than figures offered for other groups (11 mean average per mission in Moghadam's data of all groups using suicide terrorism, but rising to 23 when only salafi-jihadi groups are considered),<sup>226</sup> the salient point about Boko Haram's female bombing is its unprecedented prevalence. Lethality is only one measure of efficiency. Female suicide bombing data from West Africa reveals an onslaught of sustained attacks, the sheer frequency and unpredictability of which have impacted perceptions of security, particularly human security, in ways that are unmeasurable. A recent report suggests 86% of IDPs are “not ready to return” home as they are afraid.<sup>227</sup> The Borno State government is considering plans for the concentration of security on urban settlements, practically ceding rural areas to the insurgents.<sup>228</sup> FST has been an important tactic in achieving fear and communicating Boko Haram's unrelenting endurance, even when under duress. Importantly, this undermines President Muhammadu Buhari's December 2015 claims of the “technical defeat” of the insurgency. FST has effectively targeted the most vulnerable, such as IDPs, often using the most vulnerable. Low average lethality notwithstanding, female suicide bombing has been effective in hugely amplifying the key effects of terrorism as a tactic: creating fear, sending a symbolic message to diverse audiences, killing civilians, and asserting power over governments and communities.

### Coercion and Symbolism in Boko Haram FST

Among other terrorist groups using FST, the symbolic power of the female bomber as a willing “martyr” has been key.<sup>229</sup> In Chechnya, for example, the so-called “Black Widows” shared experiences of brutality and rape by Russian security forces to elicit public sympathy prior to their bombings.<sup>230</sup> By contrast, Boko Haram has not “capitalized” on female suicide deaths with martyrdom videos, or “wasiyeh,” which have in other terrorist groups elevated women as “poster-girls.” There is no evidence

225 Warner and Matfess, pp. 10-11.

226 Assaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks,” *International Security* 33:3 (2008): p. 49; Assaf Moghadam, “Shifting Trends in Suicide Attacks,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:1 (2009).

227 “Boko Haram: 86 Percent of Borno IDPs Not Willing to Return Home - Report,” *Premium Times*, October 12, 2017.

228 Paul Carsten and Ola Lanre, “Nigeria Puts Fortress Towns at Heart of New Boko Haram Strategy,” Reuters, December 3, 2017.

229 Lewis, pp. 38, 253.

230 Lindsey A. O'Rourke, “What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?” *Security Studies* 18:4 (2009): p. 710.

of Boko Haram using attacks to publicly promote female commitment to the cause, or garner support in local Muslim populations. A 2014 Pew Report found only 20% of Nigerians surveyed found the idea of suicide bombing justifiable, although this marked a rise on views in 2013, and a separate study showed Nigerian women in particular tend not to support terrorism.<sup>231</sup> Studies of populations elsewhere additionally indicate increased moral outrage at the use of female violence in terrorism campaigns.<sup>232</sup> Yet gaining support in local populations is historically among the main purposes of FST by other groups. Notably, however, al-Zarqawi, who initiated a wave of female suicide attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq in 2003-2008, also avoided martyrdom videos for women and girls, and did not even record their names.<sup>233</sup> AQI also coerced female bombers into attacks, a factor familiar in reports of Boko Haram FST. Coercion renders meaningless theological justifications for jihad, and disturbs the narrative of martyrdom, which is by contrast central to Islamic State suicide operations.

Primary knowledge of the identities of Boko Haram female suicide bombers is scant, as mentioned, and a literature on broader female involvement in the group is only gradually emerging. Research shows Boko Haram has routinely engaged in GBV, abusing and harassing both Muslim and Christian women in northeastern Nigeria. They have also instrumentally used women and girls well before the use of FST, for example, to recruit or to smuggle arms.<sup>234</sup> There is growing evidence of the coercion of females into roles as suicide bombers, from NGO reports from women liberated from Boko Haram camps, the accounts of officials, and media interviews with young women who refused to self-detonate.<sup>235</sup> The methods and extent of this coercion vary. For instance, UNICEF suggests child attackers are 20% of the total bombers, and 75% of these are female.<sup>236</sup> This chapter's data suggests 29 female suicide bombers were pre-pubescent children (6%) and 136 (29%) teenagers. Minors cannot be understood to legally consent, even if "willing." Some stories reveal parents "donating" girls to Boko Haram. Zaharau Babangida, a 13-year-old girl who aborted an attack in Kano, described how her parents ordered her to join Boko Haram, which they supported. Another account of coercion comes from an adult, "Hauwa." She willingly married an insurgent but after his death rejected the advances of another militant and was ordered to blow herself up. She refused.<sup>237</sup> There are other complex accounts like theirs that "defy neat categories" and demonstrate a spectrum of agency.<sup>238</sup>

Members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) and Operation Lafiya Dole command believe both hypnotism and enforced drug-use also coerce females to bomb. In 2016, a woman abducted in Maiduguri described how she and two other women were injected with a tranquilizer before being strapped with bombs.<sup>239</sup> Eyewitnesses have also reported seeing men accompanying female suicide attackers to ensure they see through their task. Coerced remote detonation is possible, although U.N. reports

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231 "Concerns About Islamic Extremism on the Rise in Middle East," Pew Research Center, 2014, pp. 10-11; C. Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd, "Who Supports Terrorism? Evidence from Fourteen Muslim Countries," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29:1 (2006): p. 58.

232 O'Rourke, p. 692.

233 Bloom, *Bombshell*, 216.

234 Atta Barkindo, Benjamin Gudaku, and Caroline Wesley, "Our Bodies, Their Battleground: Boko Haram and Gender-Based Violence against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria since 1999," Open Doors International, November 2013; Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5:1 (2014); Chitra Nagarajan, "Gender Assessment of Northeast Nigeria," February 2018, for Managing Conflict North East Nigeria (MCN), via [chitrasudhanagarajan.wordpress.com](http://chitrasudhanagarajan.wordpress.com).

235 Author interview, Civilian Joint Task Force Member, Borno, February 2016; author interview, Air Commodore Dele Alonge, Spokesman Operation Lafiya Dole, February 2016; Freedom C. Onuoha and Temilola A. George, "Boko Haram's Use of Female Suicide Bombing in Nigeria," Al Jazeera Center For Studies, 2015.

236 "Bad Blood," UNICEF and International Alert, February 2016, p. 2.

237 "13-Year-Old Girl, Teenage Suicide Bomber Confesses 'Boko Haram Told Me I'll Enter Paradise If I Blow Up Myself,'" *Naijagists.com*, December 25, 2014; Haruna Umar, "Nigerian Suicide Bomber Gets Cold Feet, Refuses to Kill," Associated Press, February 12, 2016.

238 Christina Luchetta, "Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth," Mercy Corps, April 8, 2016, p. 11.

239 "Boko Haram: Suicide Attack on Kano Market Aborted," *Today (Nigeria)*, May 22, 2016.

suggest this is less prevalent, as photographs of dead attackers reveal self-detonation via wristband.<sup>240</sup> Perhaps most compelling are the reported cases of GBV in aborted or prevented FST, in which females subsequently describe both threat and deception.<sup>241</sup> A number of women and girls say insurgents told them they would be safe when they detonated, as in this account: “[He said] there are soldiers at a checkpoint over there. When you get there, see what you’ll press, when you press it – nothing will happen to you. The belt will disengage from your body – [so] go and harm the soldiers, don’t have any fear, just press it when you get there.”<sup>242</sup> Other “failed” female suicide attackers report being paid for their attack, in one case as little as 200 Naira (60 cents); some are among the up to 2,000 women and children UNICEF estimates were abducted by Boko Haram between 2012 and February 2016.<sup>243</sup> Reports of the involvement of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls being used in FST are not thus far supported by evidence.<sup>244</sup>

Analyzing FST through a multi-layered prism—societal, cultural, organizational, and personal—situates Boko Haram’s female operations more closely to other African conflicts, than to Islamic State practice.<sup>245</sup> Conflicts in Mozambique, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone have seen women abducted, raped, and forced into marriage and combat.<sup>246</sup> The mass abduction of schoolgirls witnessed in Chibok was first seen in Uganda by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony.<sup>247</sup> Such abductees, however, after time supported the LRA, finding agency and status, as has been reported in the case of some females taken by Boko Haram.<sup>248</sup> Boko Haram’s abuses of women emerge partly from salafi-jihadi interpretations of sharia and partly from entrenched patriarchal legal and social structures in the northeast, which can politically marginalize women and enable abuses of male power, even when women also feel they benefit from other aspects of Islam, and indeed sharia.<sup>249</sup> They are likely also the result of simple criminality. However, they also follow local patterns of regional conflict, which as Turshen suggests, primarily seek to exploit and objectify women “for their assets, and as ‘assets’ in themselves.”<sup>250</sup> Clearly such GBV in conflict has global resonances; but in the case of Boko Haram, there are shared regional particularities.

Additionally, Shekau, like al-Zarqawi before him, has instrumentalized religious and cultural narratives to justify GBV, including FST, with little regard for the advice of others with greater theological knowledge. Justifying criticisms of Boko Haram sex slavery, for example, Shekau refutes rival leader

240 Dionne Searcey, “Nigeria Vexed by Boko Haram’s Use of Women as Suicide Bombers,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2016.

241 Ibid.; author interview, Air Commodore Dele Alonge, 8 October, 2016.

242 Transcript from an interview of a young female Boko Haram ‘bomber,’ with thanks to *Libération* journalist Patricia Huon. Similar stories have emerged in author’s interviews with journalists who have talked to women who did not detonate. See also Patricia Huon, “Boko Haram : ‘Je Suis Étudiante, j’ai Une Bombe, n’approchez Pas,’” *Libération*, August 23, 2017.

243 It should be noted that men and boys are also forcibly recruited as fighters, or paid for their services. “Bad Blood;” Samuel Osborne, “Nigerian Woman Says Boko Haram Gave Her 50p to Carry out Suicide Bombing Attack,” *Independent*, February 8, 2017.

244 See Elizabeth Pearson and Jacob Zenn, “#BringBackOurGirls? Two Years After the Chibok Girls Were Taken, What Do We Know?” *War on the Rocks*, April 14, 2016, for discussion of the focus on FST and Chibok.

245 Lewis, p. 138.

246 Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay, “Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After war,” International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004, pp. 11–17; Meredith Turshen, “The Political Economy of Rape: An Analysis of Systematic Rape and Sexual Abuse of Women During Armed Conflict in Africa,” in C. Moser and F. Clarke eds., *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (London: Zen Books, 2001), p. 5.

247 Meredith Turshen, “The Political Economy of Violence against Women During Armed Conflict in Uganda,” *Social Research* 67:3 (2000): pp. 811–12.

248 See Susan McKay, “Girls as ‘Weapons of Terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28:5 (2005): pp. 385–397 and also Hilary Matfess, “Rescued and Deradicalised Women Are Returning to Boko Haram. Why?” *African Arguments*, November 1, 2017.

249 “Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency,” International Crisis Group, December 5, 2016, p. 2.

250 Turshen, “The Political Economy of Rape,” pp. 55–68; Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, “Young Female Fighters in African Wars Conflict and Its Consequences,” *Nordic Africa Institute*, 2008.

Mamman Nur on whether an apostate can be enslaved, where he says “they said, it is not permissible for me to capture women participating in democracy, to fight them or to handle them as slaves. I replied to them that I will continue to capture and sell them just as our predecessors did. This is my creed.”<sup>251</sup> Shekau again presented a selective ideological justification for preferred tactics with a significant development on January 17, 2017, when he claimed a suicide attack on the University of Maiduguri, Borno State, reportedly involving a seven-year-old girl. Just two weeks before, he had warned the “battle was just beginning.”<sup>252</sup> On January 17, he stated:

This is my message to you, we carried out the bombings and you saw a female detonate the bombs and this is done for a reason; but it is not in our creed for women to go to war but we know the reason God gave to us in his Book, when it warrants for a woman to do so; we know because you are not our tutors, the Quran is our teacher ... a woman can do it when the need arises and it is there in the book of God.<sup>253</sup>

Although there was a prior claim of a June 2014 suspected female vehicle suicide bombing in Apapa Wharf, Lagos, the University of Maiduguri explosion was the first female suicide bombing incident to be both explicitly claimed as such and “theologically justified” in public.<sup>254</sup> This effectively stamped the tactic, and the ongoing Fifth Wave of attacks, with Shekau’s signature. Shekau and Boko Haram have not claimed 99% of overall attacks. No female suicide attacker has been eulogized as a fighter for God, unlike a handful of cases of Arabic-language claims of high-profile attacks by men/boys in Boko Haram. The “justification” of attacks by women, however, provides no back-story to the bomber, and no reference to her courage in fighting for Boko Haram, as has accompanied claims of male suicide attacks.<sup>255</sup> Female suicide bombers have been accorded no symbolic value by the group.

### Islamic State: Masculine Heroes, Territorial Aims, and the Challenge to Boko Haram

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was defeated in 2017. One by one, the Islamic State lost key cities, including Mosul and the self-declared capital of the caliphate, Raqqa. It was in Mosul in July 2017 that Iraqi television crews filmed a woman carrying a baby, catching the moment both explode.<sup>256</sup> Dozens of other female suicide bombers were soon reported, with profound implications. There had been previous rumors of Islamic State bombers in Turkey, of female “training groups” in Syria and Iraq, and news of female suicide bomber training among Libya-based Islamic State forces and Indonesian pro-Islamic State cells.<sup>257</sup> However, reports from Mosul appeared to demonstrate a reversal of the previous strict policy barring women from violence within Iraq and Syria, which is the ideological center of the Islamic State eschatology.<sup>258</sup> After this, in October 2017, an article suggesting women had

251 “Shekau responds to his Critics,” audio, December 2016, translated by Abdulbasit Kassim, with thanks to Kassim for allowing its inclusion.

252 Katie Mansfield, “Boko Haram - ‘The Battle is just beginning’ threatens leader in chilling new video,” *Daily Express*, January 3, 2017.

253 Shekau, January 17, 2017, transcript of YouTube audio claiming University of Maiduguri bombing, with thanks to Jacob Zenn.

254 In a number of reports, women and girls appear to be told missions are Islamically justified by Boko Haram members in camps.

255 For an alternative perspective, see also Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror - ProQuest,” *Prism* 6:1 (2016): pp. 104-121. Abba Ibrahim, “Sako Zuwa Ga Duniya (A Message to The World)!” YouTube, September 30, 2012; “Adetutu Alao, Sako Zuwa Ga Jonathan 1\_ Imam Abubakar Shekau.flv,” YouTube, January 11, 2012; Zenn and Pearson, “Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram.”

256 “Suicide Attacks amid ‘final’ Mosul Battle,” BBC, July 4, 2017; “Female Suicide Bomber Cradles Baby Moments before Blowing Them Both Up,” *Independent*, July 9, 2017.

257 Constanze Letsch, “Pregnant Istanbul Suicide Bomber Was Russian Citizen,” *Guardian*, January 16, 2015; “Inside the female jihadist training group: Female fanatics chant as they are trained to use assault rifles (though they’re making at least one firearms blunder),” *Daily Mail*, April 10, 2015.

258 Bel Trew, “Isis Sends Women into Battle in Libya,” *Times*, February 29, 2016; Haeril Halim, Arya Dipa, Ganug Nugroho Adi, and Suherdjoko, “Women Playing Greater Role in Terrorism,” *Jakarta Post*, December 16, 2016; Simon Cottee and Mia Bloom, “The Myth of the ISIS Female Suicide Bomber,” *Atlantic*, September 8, 2017; Elizabeth Pearson, “Why Female Suicide Bombers Mean the End of ISIS’s Caliphate Dream,” *Newsweek*, July 18, 2017.

a duty to participate in “all forms of jihad” appeared in the official Islamic State newspaper al-Naba,<sup>259</sup> suggesting another shift toward tactics of female violence already instituted in the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Then in February 2018, a propaganda video citing al-Zarqawi appeared in which women with guns were shown shooting in a battle to “avenge the chaste women,” in a “new era” of war.<sup>260</sup> The collapse of the caliphate in Syria and Iraq seemed to signal the collapse of the Islamic State prohibition on female violence.<sup>261</sup>

Initial academic skepticism rightly followed.<sup>262</sup> Media obsession with myths of violent female “jihadis” had led to prior false alarms.<sup>263</sup> Although Islamic State predecessor AQI, as mentioned, used female suicide bombers under al-Zarqawi, al-Baghdadi effectively closed this chapter of the Islamic State’s history when in February 2015 he catalyzed Jordan’s execution of the last imprisoned attempted female suicide bomber from that era, Sajida al-Rishawi.<sup>264</sup> Instead, al-Baghdadi emulated al-Qa`ida Central’s exclusive use of male suicide terrorism as symbolic elevation. Under bin Ladin, the narrative of altruistic “hero-martyr” was instrumentalized to mobilize communities, who revered bombers as public heroes. By fostering group approval and admiration for male suicide bombing, al-Qa`ida was better able to recruit bombers and realize the group’s operational goals.<sup>265</sup>

The Islamic State under al-Baghdadi expanded al-Qa`ida’s doctrine of a strictly gendered ideology with a “culture of male militancy.”<sup>266</sup> At the backbone of Islamic State governance was a gendered “double binary” that first distinguished the roles of Islamic State men (constructed as warriors/combatants/state-builders) from Islamic State women (constructed as mothers/wives) and, second, distinguished the Islamic State’s “own women” from “enemy, or ‘infidel,’ women” (constructed as the spoils of war/slaves). The gender binary of the Islamic State men/women is hierarchical: warrior culture, and in particular male suicide bombing, or *istishhadi*, represented the highest status, or ‘hegemonic’ masculine role within the group.<sup>267</sup> This followed bin Ladin, who put male martyrdom at the heart of al-Qa`ida’s ideology when he declared to the West “these young men love death as you love life.”

The power of this gender binary and the high status of male martyrdom in the worldwide recruitment of male suicide attackers cannot be underestimated. A reported 27,000-31,000 foreign fighters traveled from 86 countries to join the Islamic State.<sup>268</sup> Many of the new Islamic State male warrior-citizens did so as aspiring martyrs. Martyrdom reportedly commanded a waiting list of eager young men, willing to use bribes to reach its top. Photographs posted online depicted dead martyrs in a Photoshopped state of ecstasy, with male suicide attacks publicly claimed in Islamic State “round-ups” of

259 “Islamic State Calls on Female Supporters to Take Part in ‘Jihad,’” *Middle East Eye*, October 6, 2017.

260 Dearden.

261 Charlie Winter and Devorah Margolin, “The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel* 10:7 (2017).

262 Cottee and Bloom.

263 Just one example was evident in reports of a female suicide bomber in Paris in 2015. “Paris Attacks: Woman ‘was Not Suicide Bomber’ in Raid,” *BBC*, November 20, 2015.

264 “Jordan Executes Sajida Al-Rishawi after Pilot Murder,” *Al Arabiya*, February 4, 2015. This was in response to the Islamic State immolation of a captured Jordanian pilot and appears to be a calculated action by al-Baghdadi, knowing al-Rishawi’s execution was likely.

265 Lewis, p. 11; Shaun Best, “Liquid Terrorism: Altruistic Fundamentalism in the Context of Liquid Modernity,” *Sociology* 44:4 (2010): pp. 678-694; Liz Sly, “Al-Qaeda Backs Away from Radical Fighters in Syria, Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 3, 2014; Bloom, *Bombshell*, 210-212; Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and Ash-Sham,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 16 (2014); O’Rourke, p. 697.

266 Nelly Lahoud, “Can Women Be Soldiers of the Islamic State?” *Survival* 59:1 (2017): pp. 61–78.

267 R. W. Connell and J. W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19:6 (2005): pp. 829–859.

268 “An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq,” Soufan Group, December 2015, p. 4.

the activities across its provinces.<sup>269</sup>

Men's high-status role as warriors and bombers was propagandized alongside an opposing narrative of the empowerment of women through the domestic setting. This provided strong regulation around the gender binary (male violence/female non-violence) for citizens' behavior in the fledgling State. One of the most important English-language vehicles for the articulation of the roles of men and women was the (now discontinued) Islamic State propaganda magazine *Dabiq*. Editions included articles explicitly for women. *Dabiq* Issue 11 "A Jihad Without Fighting" is typical. It both acknowledges and admonishes the women who wish to fight and bomb: "My Muslim sister, indeed you are a mujahidah, and if the weapon of the men is the assault rifle and the explosive belt, then know that the weapon of the women is good behavior and knowledge." Even where female violence appears to be condoned in Islamic State ideology, as for example in *Dabiq* Issue 13, which praises husband and wife Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik for their San Bernardino, California, shooting that killed 13 people, the intention is not to encourage other women to action, but to shame men to fight instead.

Analysis of the now-defunct *Dabiq* shows how it regularly and explicitly reinforced the gender binary in theological terms, through representations of both men and women. *Dabiq* provides four key representations of women, all of which validate male violence and delegitimize female. First, women are victims, whose abuse by the enemy justifies men's jihad to both avenge and protect them.<sup>270</sup> Second, women are depicted as symbolically sanctified mothers and sisters and incubators of the next generation. While men's existence as fighters was precarious, it was the women who represented *baqiya*, or permanence.<sup>271</sup> This message was intended for both women and men.<sup>272</sup> For example, the al-Khansaa Brigade's Arabic-language manifesto aimed at Saudi Arabian women emphasized the "hallowed" domestic role of Islamic State women and "divine duty of motherhood" as opposed to the "beauty salon culture," hypocritical feminism and consumerism of the West, where women have forgotten their "fundamental" role and men are "emasculated" through women's self-reliance. The manifesto states of the Islamic State woman, "The greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood." This feminine sanctity, contrasted with Western women's immorality, aimed both to attract disenchanting foreign women to the Islamic State, and then regulate their behavior when there.<sup>273</sup>

Third, the status of Islamic State women is defined not only against men, but against "enemy women," who may be enslaved according to their interpretation of the Qur'an, creating a double gender binary. Enslavement, which plays a central ideological role in the Islamic State's state project, represents a complete erasure of the agency of female slaves and therefore any perceived violation of their rights, legitimizing GBV. *Dabiq* Issue 4 "The Failed Crusade" outlines the fate awaiting captured Yazidi women, according to the *dhimmi* laws of the second Caliph governing the rights of Christians and Jews. While the payment of *jizya*, a religious tax, protects adherents of Christianity and Judaism ("People of the

269 Katherine E. Brown, "Gender in the Apocalyptic and Utopian Thinking of Daesh," King's College, February 8, 2016; Rob Virtue, "Islamic State Nutters Moan about Fellow Jihadists Jumping the Queue to BLOW THEMSELVES UP," *Daily Express*, May 22, 2015; Jürgen Todenhöfer, *Inside IS - 10 Tage im "Islamischen Staat"* (München: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2015); Mark Thompson, "Why Suicide Bombings Are So Terrifying," *Time*, October 18, 2016; Sudarsan Raghavan, "Inside the Brutal but Bizarrely Bureaucratic World of the Islamic State in Libya," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2016; "Exclusive: Seized Documents Reveal Islamic State's Department of 'War Spoils,'" Reuters, December 28, 2015; "An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq," Soufan Group, December 2015.

270 *Dabiq* frequently cited the rape of Muslim women as reason for vengeance. Female civilian deaths as "collateral damage" in coalition attacks were used as examples to justify the beheading of American journalist James Foley. *Dabiq* Issue 3, "The Call to Hijrah," pp. 3 and 12.

271 With thanks to conversation with Dr. Katherine Brown, 2016.

272 Sarah Ladbury, Hamsatu Allamin, Chitra Nagarajan, Paul Francis, and Ukoha Okorafor Ukiwo, "Jihadi Groups and State-Building: The Case of Boko Haram in Nigeria," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 5:1 (2016): p. 9.

273 Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith, "'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, May 2015; Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett, "Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015; Charlie Winter, "Women of the Islamic State," The Quilliam Foundation, 2015, p. 18; *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Book”), Yazidi women are treated as mushrikat, believers in a deity that is not God. The Islamic State therefore justifies their enslavement in ideological terms; however, videos of ‘slave markets,’ online discussion between men, and testimonies by Yazidi women of their abuse indicate that the realities of enslavement are less often representations of piety, and more often simple criminal rape and abuse.<sup>274</sup> The Islamic State persists, however, and gives slavery ideological meaning as a symbolic God-given institution, because “one of the signs of the Hour [was] that ‘the slave girl gives birth to her master.’” Slavery is therefore eulogized as part of the apocalyptic project, with the sexual lives of citizens as much the domain of the Islamic State as their public lives. These narratives are again instrumentalized to attract men to the Islamic State, and also appeal to women, even while they may resist their husbands raping slave women, or indeed taking a second wife.

Fourth, propaganda ensured women served as their own police. The state made public the roles required of men and women and regulated and enforced women’s behavior according to these narratives, with the gender binary serving as a litmus test of the smooth functioning of Islamic State governance. Every citizen of the state, whatever their country of origin, was made aware of these rules, codified by the Islamic State’s sharia laws, which served as a unifying feature of the political and physical space. Vast billboards forbade the display of skin, of see-through clothing, of tight or masculine clothes, perfume, of patterned or branded clothes, of clothes that might distract male observers.<sup>275</sup> Women meted out brutal punishment for female transgressions of these rules as readily as men, as for example in the all-women al-Khansaa Brigade.<sup>276</sup> Women were also encouraged to police one another online.<sup>277</sup>

Strict maintenance of this gendered bifurcation of roles, or what Guidère calls the “theology of sexuality,” was ostensibly ideological, but also strategic. It served a fundamentally organizational role for the Islamic State, which is committed to eternal military conflict until the Apocalypse. As noted, Islamist theology need not deny women violent roles. Nor can the Islamic State be analyzed solely in terms of ideology.<sup>278</sup> The strict gender binary of Islamic State propaganda allowed action to be justified through reference to ideology, but also strategically supported Islamic State material aims in three ways: first, the international recruitment of much needed male fighters and women citizens through the symbolic meaning of each gender’s role; second, the regulation of citizens and institutions in the caliphate through the repeated articulation of its fundamental rules in gendered terms, enabling the production of Islamic State male fighter-citizens far into the future; and third, unification of the 30,000 fighters and female migrants of many nationalities through shared ideological boundaries and the repeated public display of the rules of Islamic State sharia laws. This was crucial for social cohesion, as a significant proportion of Islamic State fighters were from non-Muslim and secular lands (Dar al-kuffar), and in fulfilling the promise that all Muslims were equal in this new land. The binary was also fundamental to the highly bureaucratized systems of the new “warrior State” and, as Lahoud has emphasized, there was therefore an “ideological cost” in any Islamic State move to permit female fighters.<sup>279</sup> The frequent articulation of the deeply entrenched binary to a global audience created its own constraint, limiting the Islamic State from engaging FST without challenging its state project.

274 Laura Huey, “Exploring Women’s Participation in Online Radical Milieus,” presentation at Kanishka Symposium (Building on International Research Partnerships to Understand and Address Violent Extremism and Terrorism, London: Public Safety Canada, 2015); Mathieu Guidère, “Isis’ Politics of Sex,” in Martin Schmetz and Janusz Biene eds., *Kalifat Des Terrors Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven Auf Den Islamischen Staat*, Sicherheitspolitik-Blog, 2015, p. 22; *Ibid.*, p. 21; Dabiq Issue 4, “The Failed Crusade,” p.15.

275 Nick Gutteridge, “Islamic State Fanatics Put up Billboards Ordering Women to Wear the Burka...or Else,” *Daily Express*, July 17, 2015; Kathy Gilsinan, “The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women,” *Atlantic*, July 25, 2014.

276 Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou-Smith, “Escaped Isis Wives Describe Life in the Punishing All-Female Al-Khansaa Brigade,” *Independent*, April 20, 2015; Elizabeth Pearson, “Wilayat Twitter and the Battle against Islamic State’s Twitter jihad,” *VOX-Pol*, November 11, 2015.

277 See Elizabeth Pearson, “Online as the New Frontline: Affect, Gender, and ISIS-Take-Down on Social Media,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, September 5, 2017, pp. 1-25.

278 Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou, *A Theory of ISIS: Political Violence and the Transformation of the Global Order* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 11.

279 Lahoud, “Can Women Be Soldiers of the Islamic State?”

However, without a functioning state project, the strategic need to adhere to the binary as a unifying, recruiting, and regulating system was removed. Winter and Margolin have drawn attention to the ways in which the Islamic State has been dismantling the binary and preparing for a phase in which they can instrumentalize female violence.<sup>280</sup> It was through strict gender division of violence that the emerging caliphate was united; as it collapses, so do its ideological structures. Calls for female non-violence or as appears the case now, female violence, show the boundaries between the two are strategic after all. So, too, for Boko Haram.

### **Boko Haram and the Islamic State: Comparisons**

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has been adapting its doctrine on female suicide bombing and violence to its new situation. Such adaptation had been evident however for months in other Provinces, suggesting that “outposts” of Islamic State are on a looser ideological leash. Female suicide bombers allied to groups sympathetic to the Islamic State have been arrested in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan, and deployed in Libya.<sup>281</sup> However, the only wilaya with prolific use of FST is West Africa Province, where Boko Haram’s campaign as outlined in Sections I and II represented an exception to the carefully managed gendered binaries of jihad previously fostered by the Islamic State. Boko Haram’s FST contradicted the aims, meanings, and symbolism of martyrdom in the caliphate, as well as the majority view of salafi-jihadi scholars that women should neither fight nor engage in suicide bombings. It transgressed the “double binary” of the Islamic State gender doctrine and instead, effectively merged male and female roles. Until the demotion of Shekau in August 2016, however, Islamic State leadership appears to have tacitly endorsed his FST campaign. Rather than criticize Boko Haram for challenging its gendered ideology, the Islamic State instead emphasized high-profile actions that apparently cohered with it, such as the abduction and “sale” of the Chibok schoolgirls, which was praised in Dabiq Issue 8 “Shari’ah Alone Will Rule Africa.”<sup>282</sup> Additionally, ISWAP suicide attack numbers published by the Islamic State appear to have included female suicide attacks, or they would be even more inaccurate. Boko Haram FST, meanwhile, revealed the Islamic State’s ideological inconsistencies and raised the possibility of female violence in Iraq and Syria, which became a reality.

The differences in approaches from 2014–2017 lie in the differing aims, objectives, and local contexts of each group. The three organizational goals of the Islamic State’s state project (international recruitment, regulation, and unification), which were achieved through the Islamic State’s well-propagandized gender binary in which only male violence was legitimized, are absent in Boko Haram, which had no “state.” Importantly, Boko Haram has never maintained long-term systems of governance beyond rudimentary sharia court punishments and mediation between Boko Haram fighters and villagers under their control. The Islamic State inherited sophisticated governance systems, complex infrastructure, and urban centers, and it successfully held and governed some territories for sustained periods. Parts of northeastern Nigeria conversely have a history of poor governance.<sup>283</sup> Boko Haram formally held territories there only briefly, although much land is still inaccessible, had no urban centers and its own insurgency had, in fact, destroyed much infrastructure.

First, therefore, Boko Haram has not needed to “sell” its message to a global audience of foreign fighters or female “citizens;” rather, its recruitment pool has always been comprised of traffickers, paid male

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280 See Winter and Margolin.

281 See, for example, Charlie Campbell, “ISIS Unveiled: The Story Behind Indonesia’s First Female Suicide Bomber,” *Time*, March 3, 2017; Ayaz Gul, “Pakistan Probes Detained IS Female Suicide Bomber Who Planned to Assault Christians,” VOA, April 17, 2017; “IS uses female suicide bombers in Sirte,” *Libya Herald*, December 2, 2016; “Bangladesh Police Arrests 4 Women Militants of JMB,” *Indian Express*, September 5, 2016.

282 Dabiq Issue 8. The fact the women taken here are Christian and not *mushrikat* is not addressed.

283 Brandon Kendhammer, *Muslims Talking Politics: Framing Islam, Democracy, and Law in Northern Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016; Kindle edition), position 103.

fighters, forced male conscripts, spouses and kin of pre-existing members, alongside the ideologically motivated fighters, most of whom are from the Lake Chad sub-region.<sup>284</sup> Nor does Boko Haram need to recruit foreign women to populate its territories in northeastern Nigeria. Again demonstrating the importance of assuming nothing regarding female agency and Boko Haram, local women were reportedly early supporters of the group, particularly as a means to gain religious knowledge, or marriage.<sup>285</sup> Journalist Ahmed Salkida, who has written extensively on the movement, suggested in February 2016 “there are [now] more women than men [in Boko Haram], since it is the men that are in the battle front.”<sup>286</sup> Boko Haram is known to consolidate networks through marriages of widows to other members, suggesting women and men may share convictions.<sup>287</sup> Wives have anecdotally taken part in violence alongside their husbands, although it is not believed they are routinely fighting.<sup>288</sup> Additionally, there has been one media report of the discovery of the body of a female fighter, and Nagarajan reports in Adamawa women sometimes take up arms, but this is not the norm.<sup>289</sup> A Mercy Corps report suggests women may burn buildings during raids, but female members mostly occupy domestic roles, rarely also teaching or preaching.<sup>290</sup> Nor are women apparent in videos of Boko Haram members fighting. Women have, though, reportedly been active in organizational roles, such as the “female wing” arrested in June 2014, suspected of recruiting new members and spies.<sup>291</sup> Boko Haram’s international messaging, however, has mainly focused on women as victims of its power, as with videos boasting of the Chibok abductions.

Second, Boko Haram has not formalized its gendered ideology. Ladbury et al. stress that Shekau’s sharia, as opposed to that of the Islamic State, was nowhere clearly articulated, and there was, therefore, no coherent manifesto for governing a Nigerian ‘caliphate.’<sup>292</sup> Boko Haram’s vision of “state” was a shadow of that of the Islamic State. Lacking a repeated formal articulation of a gendered manifesto, the constraints of the strict gender ideology seen in the Islamic State are absent, leaving Boko Haram less constrained and more able to shape its gender ideology according to its tactical needs, without the risk of self-contradiction. This is partly due to differences in organizational cultures, based around the intended audience and how they digest material. While the Islamic State has produced thousands of publications and videos asserting violence for men only, Boko Haram has primarily spread its message through videos and tapes, and only around 100—not thousands—of them. This is due to Boko Haram’s fewer resources, but also cultural differences regarding proselytization: northeast Nigeria has a tradition of traveling Islamic preachers who evangelize in person. Boko Haram’s founder Muhammad Yusuf mainly relied on oral Dawa’ around Maiduguri, Borno State, to gain followers, although he also

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284 Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram: Recruitment, Financing, and Arms Trafficking in the Lake Chad Region,” *CTC Sentinel* 7:10 (2014); Freedom C. Onuoha, “The Islamist Challenge: Nigeria’s Boko Haram Crisis Explained,” *African Security Review* 19:2 (2010): pp. 54-67.

285 Luchetta, p. 15.

286 Author conversation, Ahmad Salkida, February 2016.

287 Andrew Walker, “Join Us or Die: The Birth of Boko Haram,” *Guardian*, February 4, 2016; “Nigeria women and the Boko Haram Insurgency,” Ahmad Salkida, “Reporting Terrorism In Africa: A Personal Experience With Boko Haram By Ahmad Salkida,” Sahara Reporters, April 19, 2012; author interview, anonymous Nigerian Army officer, October 2014; Dr. Freedom Onuoha, presentation at EUTANS conference in Abuja, Nigeria, October 2015; Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “A Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27:5 (2016): p. 879.

288 Author interview, Air Commodore Dele Alonge, Operation Lafiya Dole, February 2016; author interview, anonymous military officer, October 2014; “Insight: Boko Haram, Taking to Hills, Seize Slave ‘Brides,’” Reuters, November 17, 2013

289 Author interviews, anonymous military sources, (March 2016, December 2016, February 2017). See also Eromosele Ebhomele, “Breaking: Top Female Boko Haram Fighter Killed (Photos),” Naija.ng, February 27, 2017. A recent article by Botha and Abdile suggests women also routinely act as foot-soldiers. However, the definition of foot-soldiers is not clarified, and this contradicts other evidence from the region. Nagarajan, p. 8; Josephine Para-Mallam, “Promoting women’s engagement in peace and security in northern Nigeria report of baseline survey (Adamawa, Plateau & Gombe States of Nigeria),” UN Women, 2016.

290 Luchetta, p. 15; Hadassah Egbedi, “The Wives of Boko Haram Jihadists Share Their Stories from a Safe House,” *Ventures Africa*, September 26, 2016; Dionne Searcey, “Women, Children and Razor Wire: Inside a Compound for Boko Haram Families,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2016; “I Miss My Boko Haram Husband - Rescued 16-Yr-Old Nigerian Girl,” *African Spotlight*, February 5, 2016.

291 “Authorities Arrest Three Women ‘Secretly Working for Boko Haram,’” *Daily Mail*, July 5, 2014.

292 Ladbury, Allamin, Nagarajan, Francis, and Ukiwo, pp. 11-12.

produced written tracts and widely circulated audio and video recordings.<sup>293</sup>

A third reason for Boko Haram's FST is Shekau himself. He innovated female suicide bombing at a time when it maximized not just Boko Haram's global status, but his own. Shekau's own personality likely has some bearing on this innovation, as with al-Zarqawi in AQI before him. On the rare occasions when Shekau has explicitly articulated Boko Haram's position on gender, it has served his tactical goals and legitimized GBV. Shekau, for example, emphasized the inadmissibility of violence against women, consistent with salafi-jihadi doctrine, when Boko Haram's wives were being arrested.<sup>294</sup> Other notable Shekau pronouncements on gender have (mis)used "ideology" to justify GBV, as in the May 2014 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping claim and in January 2017, the claim of FST. As previously noted, this led to criticism by Mamman Nur and likely influenced the August 2016 split in the movement and Shekau's dismissal from ISWAP.

Like their approach to gender, the partnership between the Islamic State and Boko Haram from 2014-2017 appears first and foremost strategic, with insistence on an ideologically coherent partnership secondary. The Islamic State strove to further its "brand" through expansion, and the addition of new provinces, including in West Africa.<sup>295</sup> It tolerated Boko Haram FST, at least until the removal of Shekau as ISWAP wali, while surely recognizing that the coercion of any women or girls into suicide bombing completely transgressed Islamic State ideology, effectively inverting the high-status role of bomber and symbolic power of the willing male "martyr."<sup>296</sup> The use of abducted women as female suicide bombers in particular would transform those with lowest status under the Islamic State (enemy slave women) to the highest status role (martyrs). This transgresses not only the primary ideological boundary between men and women, but also the second binary, distinguishing enemy women from women of the state. Again, this suggests FST is a campaign with primarily—albeit not exclusively—tactical and organizational objectives for Boko Haram. The Islamic State was not only willing to turn a blind eye, but to adopt FST itself when the need arose.

## Discussion

Whatever their differences on female suicide terrorism, this chapter has sought to show that the gendered stances of both Boko Haram and the Islamic State fulfill the same goal: advancing each movement militarily and enabling GBV. One was focused on the creation of a "religious" state (the Islamic State) and the other on the defeat of an "irreligious" one (Nigeria). Until 2017, the Islamic State demonstrated strict division of gender roles and was careful to justify GBV as part of a highly codified and well publicized "Islamic" system. This helped it recruit and build its governance project. Lacking a similar goal, Boko Haram's justifications were more sporadic, less systemized. However, both movements clearly abuse women and adapt theology to justify this. The ostensibly theologically systematized violence endorsed by the Islamic State is, in practice, irregularly applied and permits rape and other criminality. Boko Haram's violence may often appear chaotic and lacking rigid ideological explication; yet it fulfils a strategic aim. Boko Haram's GBV and the Islamic State's treatment of women suggest shared practices rooted in the adaptation of salafi-jihadi practices, exploitation of cultural patriarchal norms, and crucially, prioritization of strategy over ideology.<sup>297</sup>

293 Atta Barkindo, "How Boko Haram Exploits History and Memory," Africa Research Institute, 2016; "Nigeria's 'Taliban' Enigma," BBC, July 31, 2009; Onuoha, "The Islamist Challenge," pp. 57-58; Andrew Walker, *"Eat the Heart of the Infidel": The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram* (London: C Hurst & Co, 2016).

294 See Zenn and Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram."

295 Peter R. Neumann, *Die neuen Dschihadisten: ISIS, Europa und die nächste Welle des Terrorismus* (Berlin: Econ, 2015), pp. 98-99; Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: William Collins, 2015), pp. 2,822-2,859.

296 Lewis, p. 38.

297 This violence affects men as well as women. Examples of gender-based violence against men include the execution of gay men in Islamic State; the targeting of boy children to carry out attacks by both groups; men in both areas subject to forcible recruitment or execution during raids, while women are spared or 'enslaved.'

This chapter has also linked Boko Haram's use of FST to Shekau. Boko Haram is, as of the end of 2017, a fractured movement, with at least two competing leaders and a lack of coherent ideology. Shekau has little to attract recruits but fear and violence. The Islamic State is also no longer a winning side. Any status afforded to Boko Haram fighters through the link to the Islamic State's global jihad is diminished. This dent to the Islamic State's reputation offers those West Africans seeking violent jihad the prospect of collaboration with al-Qa`ida-aligned militants in North Africa; it also further threatens the coherence of Boko Haram, which has often consisted of factions. While fluidity has previously been a strength of the movement, this threatens to become a weakness in the absence of clear goals, splitting efforts to recruit and even leading to open confrontation.<sup>298</sup>

The dynamic events on the ground, alongside the complexities of female suicide bombing in West Africa, suggest an increasingly open future for female Boko Haram supporters. After a period of inactivity from June to September 2016, female suicide bombers returned as Shekau apparently reasserted his authority. How further internal shifts may impact on this situation is not clear. Women in IDP camps are under increasing pressure, with reports of sexual exploitation enabling food shortages in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>299</sup> They present possible targets for Boko Haram recruiters who are regrouping after internal conflict. Another factor is the return to reclaimed areas of women sympathetic to Boko Haram's cause, and men released from detention. Such factors provide a possible enabling environment for female violence. Additionally, state actions such as the shooting of suspected bombers, the accidental Nigerian Air Force bombing of an IDP camp, or failure to provide humanitarian assistance against famine may increase local support for an "alternative" approach. There is no room for complacency even while Boko Haram is "technically defeated."<sup>300</sup>

Additionally, as al-Zarqawi perhaps inspired Shekau in female bombing, Shekau may inspire others. Active female involvement in Boko Haram, even if frequently coerced, may have—through "contagion"—encouraged female supporters of the Islamic State who desired a greater role in the violence. The October 2017 Islamic State edict in al-Naba magazine and the February 2018 video now apparently legitimize this, and may further incite women in Europe, Bangladesh, or Indonesia who are seeking permission to become female suicide bombers.<sup>301</sup> Since factionalization and Shekau's decline in power, West African female suicide bombing may be less effective; yet after a period in 2014–2015 in which FST was only evident in West Africa, it is now appearing in other parts of the world in which violent jihadi groups are active.<sup>302</sup> The fall of the caliphate and the "fall" of Shekau may ironically open violent opportunities for female Islamic State supporters, if not real power.

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298 "Boko Haram Supremacy Battle: Shekau Loses Grounds to Albarnawi Faction," *Ripples Nigeria*, December 14, 2017.

299 Ndahi Marama, "BORNO Food Crisis, Malnutrition, Prostitution Rock IDPs Camp," *Vanguard News*, August 28, 2016.

300 "Buhari: Nigeria Has 'Technically' Defeated Boko Haram," VOA, December 24, 2015.

301 Sam Adams, "Female 'ISIS Suicide Bomber' Plotted 'to Blow up Austrian Defence Ministry,'" *Mirror*, October 27, 2016; "IS Shifts Focus to Female Suicide Bombers," *Jakarta Post*, December 13, 2016; Avi Issacharoff, "The Palestinian and Israeli Media on Female Suicide Terrorists" (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies: Institute for National Security Studies, 2006), p. 48.

302 Avi Issacharoff, "2016 Was Deadliest Year Ever for Suicide Bombings Worldwide," *Times of Israel*, January 6, 2017; Yoram Schweitzer, Aviad Mendelboim, and Yotam Rosner, "Suicide Attacks in 2016: The Highest Number of Fatalities," Institute for National Security Studies, January 5, 2017.

## CHAPTER 3: Abubakr Shekau: Boko Haram's Underestimated Corporatist-Strategic Leader

*By Atta Barkindo*

### Introduction

A common characteristic across terrorist organizations is that they have leaders who are charismatic and bend people to their will.<sup>303</sup> Abubakr Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram<sup>304</sup> after 2009, Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) from March 2015 to August 2016, and Boko Haram again since August 2016, is one such leader.

Shekau captivates his followers by combining his salafi religious interpretation with the victimhood that some Muslims perceive around the world and especially in northern Nigeria, where there is a distinct narrative about the relationship between Islam and Western cultural and political influences.<sup>305</sup> Locally, Shekau exploits the cultural environment of the fallen Kanem-Borno Empire in present-day Nigeria's Borno State and that region's Kanuri language. In the international arena, jihadis have seen Shekau as a leader who vexes his enemies with charisma and bravado, while depicting the West and its allies, including Nigeria, as lands of infidels.<sup>306</sup> Shekau's persona and narrative have proven to have an alluring and radicalizing influence on the weakest nodes of northern Nigerian society, especially in rural areas and among marginalized young people of the Lake Chad region.

Despite Shekau's influence and long reign as leader of Boko Haram, he has, however, been dismissed as crazy and a rabble-rouser both in Nigeria and abroad.<sup>307</sup> In Nigeria, policymakers, political analysts, security officials, and scholars have considered Boko Haram a rag-tag group of deranged criminals, led by a mad-man, Shekau, whose ambitions would simply fizzle away.<sup>308</sup> In 2014, Nigeria's former Chief of Defence Staff called Boko Haram members "idiots" who would soon be eliminated and described them as "ignorants who are the antithesis of contemporary values."<sup>309</sup> Former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan confirmed that "we underrated Boko Haram and thought that we were dealing with some local elements who are disorganized and led by a brutal psychopath." In fact, despite well-publicized efforts to negotiate with Boko Haram, President Jonathan refuted all claims of negotiations in a televised interview on November 18, 2012. He then described Boko Haram's members as "ghosts and

303 Deborah Schurman-Kauflin, *Disturbed: Terrorist Behavioral Profiles* (Sun City, AZ: Violent Crimes Institute, 2008), p. 364.

304 Shekau is the leader of *Jamaa'atu Ahlis-Sunnah lid Da'awati wal Jihaad* (JAS), ('people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad'), nicknamed "Boko Haram" by a journalist in Bauchi because of the group's constant emphasis on the non-compatibility of Western civilization with Islamic values. In 2015, the group changed its name to Islamic State West Africa Province after Shekau pledged allegiance to Islamic State 'caliph' Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, although in August 2016, Shekau left West Africa Province and returned to leading Boko Haram in its second iteration.

305 For background reading on the concept and nature of jihadi-salafi ideology and the original sources of philosophy of Boko Haram's ideology, see Kassim Abdulbasit, "Defining and Understanding the Religious Philosophy of Jihadi-Salafism and the Ideology of Boko Haram," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 16:2-3 (2015): pp. 173-200.

306 Author translation, Abubakr Shekau's Tafsir "Western civilization is atheism," dated February 17, 2004.

307 "Insane, Boko Haram leader, Abubakr Shekau uses brutality," *News*, May 15, 2014; Atta Barkindo, "The Vanishing Nigerian Amnesty," unpublished article, August 2012; "No negotiations with Boko Haram – Jonathan," *Vanguard*, November 19, 2012; "I and My Team Underestimated Boko Haram – President Jonathan," *African Leadership*, February 23, 2015; "Shekau is mentally ill, says Nigerian Army," *Guardian*, September 26, 2016; "Boko Haram'll soon run out of bombers – CDS," *Punch*, January 24, 2012, p. 12; Simon Kolawole, "Boko Haram and Those Conspiracy Theories," *ThisDay*, November 9, 2014; Colin Freeman, "Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau: The 'craziest commander of all,'" *Telegraph*, May 12, 2014.

308 Kolawole.

309 "Boko Haram'll soon run out of bombers – CDS," Kolawole.

faceless masquerades,” including Shekau.<sup>310</sup>

As a result of these perceptions, the Nigerian government underrated Boko Haram’s capacity under Shekau’s leadership, including his ability to establish cross-border networks.<sup>311</sup> The Galtimari Presidential Committee that was set up to investigate the Boko Haram conflict in 2011 suggests that “Security officials grew careless in dealing with an ignorant and deranged leader, heading a local group. Internal wrangling, conspiracies and deceptions erupted as senior officers became victims of constant sack and replacement.<sup>312</sup> Intelligence gathering also became weak and lacked diligence and details. For instance, during a top-secret meeting with the exiled Emir of Gwoza, former President Jonathan was alleged to have asked, “Where is Gwoza sef?” (Where is Gwoza located?).<sup>313</sup> He failed to recognize where Gwoza, the headquarters of Shekau’s declared caliphate in 2014, was located.

Existing literature presents Shekau as a bloodthirsty lunatic. Others, such as Emilie Oftedal, in her overview of Boko Haram, describes Shekau as “dreaded and feared.”<sup>314</sup> Muhammad Mann Shaaba describes Shekau as mad, ruthless, and vicious.<sup>315</sup> Sabina Brakoniecka assesses Shekau as “temperamental” and “insane.”<sup>316</sup> Most of these claims are based on secondary sources that rely on media reports. Furthermore, such claims do not take into consideration the cultural and linguistic context in which Shekau operates. Importantly, they ignore how much the mannerisms and symbols deployed by Shekau are well understood by his followers.

The thesis of this article contends that Boko Haram is not simply a poverty-stricken, rag-tag group of delinquents. Shekau is not ignorant and mentally deranged as some analysts would believe. Additionally, if the above perceptions of Shekau and Boko Haram are to be taken at face value, it is important to ask: how is it possible for an allegedly crazy man to organize and oversee the transformation of Boko Haram from a relatively non-violent socio-religious movement before 2009 into a terrorist organization that in 2014-2015 conquered parts of three Nigerian states? How did Shekau, the “mad-man,” achieve Boko Haram’s transition to a sophisticated jihadi group able to mount anti-aircraft attacks? How can Boko Haram’s sudden capacity under Shekau’s leadership to create film videos and establish a Twitter presence to advertise its overrunning of military barracks and ammunitions depots, its control of territories, and its eventual pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State be understood? How has Shekau stayed updated with the political commentaries of the Nigerian government, been able to reply to any official claims when he so desires—no matter how much pressure is placed on Boko Haram or how many times the Nigerian government claims he is dead—and been able to negotiate the release of more than 100 of the Chibok schoolgirls after having kept them captive—and relatively well-fed—for more than three years from April 2014 to May 2017?

This article seeks to better understand the phenomenon of Shekau’s leadership of Boko Haram. It contends that Shekau, although ruthless and fearless, is a smart and strategic leader with vision and objectives. The article demonstrates this at two levels, offering some analysis on why Shekau is often dismissed as mentally deranged, and the security implications for such mindset.

It first discusses the corporate model of terrorist group leadership and explains three reasons why

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310 Chioma Gabriel, “Boko Haram: Finally, Amnesty comes to Ghosts,” *Vanguard*, April 13, 2013; “I and My Team Underestimated Boko Haram – President Jonathan.”

311 Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Nigeria’s Interminable Insurgency? Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis,” Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, September 2014.

312 Galtimari Presidential Committee Report, 2011, p. 58.

313 “Where is Gwoza Sef?” Jonathan Asks at Meeting with Emir,” Sahara Reporters, September 1, 2014.

314 Emilie Oftedal, “Boko Haram: An Overview,” Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, May 31, 2013, p. 33.

315 Muhammad Mann Shaaba, “Absolutism in Religion and Global Peace: Boko-Haram Factor in Nigeria and Its Educational Imperatives,” *World Journal of Education* 7:2 (2017): pp. 11-18.

316 Sabina Brakoniecka, “The Beginnings of the Boko Haram Rebellion from a Micro-level Perspective,” *Hemispheres: Studies on Cultures and Societies* 30:3 (2015): pp. 77-92, 89.

Shekau is a corporatist leader: first, he articulates a central philosophy as a guiding principle for Boko Haram that most organizations require; second, he establishes alliances with rival factions within the broader Boko Haram movement and external jihadi groups as a strategy for sustainability, just like organizations build partnerships and networks; and, third, he delegates core responsibilities to other commanders who operate on Shekau's behalf but remain anonymous so as to preserve Shekau as the lone face of Boko Haram, a reflection of the division of roles evident in every organization.

Second, the article underscores Shekau's strategic ability in leveraging the context of the conflict. It explains non-managerial skills that Shekau exploits to his advantage to assert his leadership, including language, symbols, understanding of the Nigerian political context, and Kanuri socio-cultural narratives.

The article offers several reasons why Shekau is often dismissed as only a symbolic or mentally deficient leader instead of an organized corporatist leader who uses varied skillsets to survive in his specific socio-cultural environment and confront the Nigerian State and its allies. At a time when Nigeria is again claiming that the war against Boko Haram will soon be over, it is more important than ever to understand Shekau's leadership qualities and not write him - or Boko Haram - off until he and his group are eliminated.<sup>317</sup>

### Shekau as a Corporatist Leader

One of the predominant theoretical perspectives on terrorism in contemporary literature compares terrorist groups to business organizations, which are fraught with risk and market uncertainty.<sup>318</sup> Heckscher and others argue that terrorist organizations now follow the example of contemporary business organizations and are becoming network based. According to Drucker and Arquilla, terrorist organizations use the internet among dispersed units and adopt organizational strategies that are less hierarchical. Using the models of some corporate organizations with branches across the globe, Hanlon contends that terrorist organisations decentralize decision-making organs, permitting local autonomy and initiative where units and members rely on networking via mobile phones or the internet. This means that they require strong central leadership with vision, innovation, and initiative. For example, in the 1900s, Henry Ford was an exceptional leader because he had the vision to mass produce automobiles and to make them widely available for communities, unlike other hundreds of founded automobile companies who simply made automobiles a toy for the rich.

These same leadership characteristics of vision, daring, innovation, and initiative are evident in the individuals who have excelled in the development and application of terrorism as an art and trade-craft.<sup>319</sup> Applying these corporate principles to terrorist organizations, the terrorist leader will initiate the motivation, create the opportunity, and establish capability for the group to carry out its activities. Motivation demonstrates how the terrorist leader constructs and combines central ideology with expected goals to inspire members to embrace group activities. Opportunity, on the other hand, reflects the strategic creativity of the terrorist leader, regarding when, where, and how to initiate changes for effective group transformation and conduct the terrorist activities. Capability is based on the leader's ability to initiate the process of acquiring the necessary skills and resources, and to develop the routines

317 Abdulkareem Haruna, "Boko Haram has been defeated, Nigeria's Army Chief insists," *Premium Times*, November 21, 2016.

318 Heckscher Charles and Donnelon Anne eds., *The Post-Bureaucratic Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Drucker Peter, *The Coming of the New Organization: Harvard Business Review on Knowledge Management* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1998), p. 3; John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, "Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism" in Russell Howard and Reid Sawyer eds., *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment: Readings and Interpretations* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), pp. 39-41; Hanlon Querine, "Globalization and the Transformation of Armed Groups," in Norwitz Jeffrey ed., *Armed Groups: Studies in National Security, Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency* (Newport, RI: US Naval War College Press, 2008), p. 119.

319 Stewart Scott, "Terrorism and the Exception Individual," *Security Weekly*, May 17, 2012.

for ensuring transformation. Another element is that the vision and innovation of the leader indicate the ability to develop a central philosophy for strategic progress. A leader's initiative demonstrates the ability to enter into partnerships and to establish regional-international alliances with other corporate groups that will ensure success.<sup>320</sup>

Central leadership does not, however, suggest lack of power delegation; rather it encompasses the allocation of authority to deputies and provincial managers who exercise power on behalf of the central corporate leader.<sup>321</sup> The leaders of terrorist organizations do not simply serve as managers, but retain the capacity to motivate and inspire their subordinates to overcome psychological obstacles associated with confronting and waging war.<sup>322</sup> Emerging evidence suggests that through creative leadership, terrorist organizations now also adopt the strategies of business groups to become flexible, more networked, and less hierarchical.<sup>323</sup>

For example, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian who formed the terror group Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ), exemplifies the modern "terrorist CEO." After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, various insurgent groups emerged in opposition. These insurgent groups comprised largely of Iraqis from the former Baathist regime, nationalists, tribal elements, and Islamist fighters, some of whom, like al-Zarqawi, had fought in Afghanistan under Usama bin Ladin. Al-Zarqawi demonstrated wit, vision, and initiative in welding together the various types of insurgents into JTJ. After ultimately forging an alliance with al-Qa`ida, JTJ became al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) until al-Zarqawi's tactics led to a break-up with al-Qa`ida around 2007 (after which AQI evolved through several phases until it became the Islamic State). Al-Zarqawi introduced the use of the internet to promote his message, recruit personnel, and terrorize his enemies, orchestrating the first beheading of an American wearing an orange Guantanamo-style jumpsuit in 2003—a visual that the Islamic State would further popularize more than a decade later in its own videos.

Al-Zarqawi also instructed his fighters to post messages from him and other videos on multiple servers to avoid delays in downloading and to ensure they reached as many audiences as possible, (and would still be available after some were blocked on the internet). In terms of semiotics, he initiated a specific way of dressing and style and of shooting guns that embellished his jihadi identity and motivated participation. In this regard, he served as a 'role model' not only for Iraqi jihadis in the mid-2000s, but also for Shekau, who imitated al-Zarqawi in his own videos in the 2010s. It is perhaps, therefore, no surprise that Shekau would pledge allegiance to al-Zarqawi's successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in 2015.

Applying these corporate principles to Shekau's leadership, it is important to ask how Shekau might behave if he was indeed ignorant and deranged. In other words, Shekau would be expected to make significant mistakes and missteps. He would likely succumb to paranoia about internal group dynamics, leadership challenges, and member loyalty and betrayals and ultimately be killed or permanently deposed. What is notable is that Shekau does not appear to have fallen into such traps. Rather, Shekau's

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320 These corporate principles demonstrate that the terrorist leader has the competence to organize and sustain members' inspiration in unstable conflict circumstances. For instance, Usama bin Ladin, realizing the changing nature of the Afghan conflict, used satellite phones from the remote mountains of Afghanistan to coordinate the activities of his dispersed operatives. Henrich Greve, "Performance, Aspiration, and Risky Organizational Change," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 43:1 (1998): pp. 58-59; Michele Zanini and Sean Edward, "The Networking of Terror in the Information Age," in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), p. 36.

321 Ahmed S. Hashim, "From the Al-Qaida Affiliate to the Rise of the Islamic Caliphate: The Evolution of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," *Policy Report*, Military Studies Programme, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 2014, p. 4; Robert Rabil, "The ISIS Chronicles: A History," *National Interest*, July 17, 2014.

322 Bryan Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *Quarterly Journal of International Security* 36:4 (2012): pp. 9-46.

323 Heckscher Harles and Donnelon Anne eds., *The Post-Bureaucratic Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); Peter, p. 3; Arquilla, Ronfeldt, and Zanini, p. 39.

corporatist skills can thus be seen in three different ways throughout the course of his leadership of Boko Haram since 2010: his central philosophy, his establishment of alliances, and his delegation of authority—an ability that would be difficult for any ‘ignorant’ and ‘deranged’ man to achieve.

### *Central Philosophy*

Shekau portrays Boko Haram’s struggle as a jihad against Nigeria, Christianity, and the West, which provides a central philosophy, or *raison d’être*, for the struggle for his followers. Shekau has consistently framed this struggle on the basis of salafi-jihadi ideology in his sermons in mosques before he declared a jihad in 2010, and in over 50 videos that he has released since he went into hiding. Shekau bases his understanding of Islamic history and theology on the tenets initially constructed by Boko Haram founder Muhammed Yusuf and defined in Yusuf’s book *Hadhihi Aqidatuna wa Minhaju Da’awatuna* (This is our Creed and the Methodology of our Preaching).<sup>324</sup> Yusuf’s book clearly states that “our religion is Islam, Our Creed is the Creed of the Prophet and his Companions and our *manhaj* (methodology) is jihad.” In accordance with Saudi-inspired trends of salafism, Yusuf reinforces the significance of *tawhid* (monotheism) as well as the Qur’an, Sunna, and ahadiths as the foundation for all religious and political authority in Islam. In his book, Yusuf reaffirms the fact that Islam is the religion of Boko Haram. The creed of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions is the group’s creed, and the group’s methodology is jihad. Sharia remains the only truth, while the secular constitution and democracy are all *kufir* (unbelief).

Yusuf advocated Islamic law and the gradual establishment of an Islamic state. He strongly opposed the corruption and abuses carried out by security forces, condemning democracy, constitutional governance, and the Muslims working under secular government. In following Yusuf’s ideology, Shekau went even further to strongly oppose Western civilization, which he equates with atheism. He suggests that the edifice of Western civilization is constructed on three fundamental pillars: Western education, Judeo-Christian tradition, and democracy. The collaboration between the three has led to what he calls “globalization and modern world order.”<sup>325</sup> He believes these three elements of Western civilization are intended to destroy Islam; thus, he contends, Muslims must stand up to fight Westerners or Christians anywhere, anytime, and by whatever means.<sup>326</sup>

For example, Shekau accuses Judeo-Christian tradition of attributing to God (a son, Jesus Christ) when God himself has not declared that he has a son. According to Shekau, such Christian theology has encouraged liberal interpretation of sacred texts, divine mandates and religious issues. It has allowed institutions and secular systems such as governments to relax Allah’s law and allow human liberty and freedom to become the norm. As a result, Shekau completely rejects the use of the Judeo-Christian calendar and holidays that have been recognized and adopted by governments all over the world. He calls Christians *mushrikoon* (associationists) and infidels and says true Muslims should

324 Salafism emphasizes that temporal proximity to the Prophet and his companions reflects the truest form of Islam. However, the process of ensuring this temporal proximity in contemporary times has given rise to all forms of salafism, including the salafi-jihadi who believe in the use of violence to achieve their aims; this is the school to which JAS belongs. Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in Meijer Roel ed., *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 34; Gilles Kepel, “Coming to Terms: Fundamentalists or Islamists? Martin Kramer,” *Middle East Quarterly* 10:2 (2003): pp. 65-77. The uploaded audiotapes can be accessed at “Littafin Haazihii Aqeedatuna\_010a.wmv,” YouTube, December 7, 2011 and “Littafin Haazihii Aqeedatuna\_010b.wmv,” YouTube, December 7, 2011.

325 Author translation, Abubakr Shekau, “Western civilization is Atheism and anti-Islam,” YouTube, October 28, 2011.

326 Ibid. Specifically, Shekau argues that the West uses Western education to infiltrate Muslim minds and destroy Islam. Western Education for him is the foundation of immorality and all that is evil in the world. Such a system of education must not only be rejected but must be replaced by religious education where Allah is the means and the goal.

have nothing to with them.<sup>327</sup> Shekau also endorses the concept of *al-wala' wa al-bara* (loyalty and disavowal), legalizing the killing of infidels and group members that betray his code. He also capitalizes on eschatological narratives to attract the support of followers.<sup>328</sup> Such narratives outline the nature of life after death, explaining that all living things will be raised to life again and called in front of God for final judgment. On that day, people will be divided; some will enter *Jannah* (paradise, the garden, or a place of physical and spiritual pleasure with delicious food and drink, virgin companions, and lofty mansions). Others will enter *Jahannam* (hellfire), which is reserved for the vilest of all creatures and where the pagans shall burn forever in the fire of hell.

Shekau also describes democracy as the rejection of Allah's supreme leadership over his creation (humanity), which in Nigeria is reflected in its multi-party democracy and the constitutional affirmation of its secular identity. Shekau's contention that Nigeria rejects Allah's law is further cemented by his belief that national symbols like the national anthem, the national pledge, and the national flag receive praise that should be reserved only for Allah. The concept of the nation-state is a human construct that denigrates the place of Allah and completely excludes Allah from the public domain. Shekau also rejects the doctrinal principle of inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims and considers Islamic religious leaders, such as the Sultan of Sokoto, who engage in dialogue with Christians as conspirators against Islam and deserving of nothing but death.<sup>329</sup> Shekau, like Yusuf, also calls for the full implementation of sharia law, meaning that the entire government structure should be based on Islamic law in moral, civil, and criminal issues.<sup>330</sup>

However, Shekau's main contribution to Boko Haram's ideology beyond Yusuf's teachings is his introduction of the ideological concept of takfirism.<sup>331</sup> There is a general agreement in the salafi creed (*aqidah*) on a principle 'man lam yukaffir al-kafir fahuwa kafir' meaning that 'whosoever does not make takfir of an infidel (*kafir*), he is also an infidel.' Shekau, and ultimately Boko Haram, assumed the authority to declare Muslim non-members as apostates and infidels. Shekau said, "Any Muslim who does not convert an atheist to Islam and does not try to convert *mushrikun* to Islam but approves their way of life betrays Islam and is automatically expelled from Islam."<sup>332</sup> Shekau also used this concept to declare Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the leader of ISWAP who deposed Shekau from that position in August 2016, of being a kafir on grounds that al-Barnawi did not believe it was acceptable to kill ordinary Muslims who did not join the jihad. Shekau responded to al-Barnawi's accusation that he engaged in excessive *takfir* with the following:

"We do not engage in takfir against anybody except those branded as kuffar by Allah and His Messenger. Some people accuse [Boko Haram] of killing common Muslims and of engaging in *takfir* against all the people. But can any sane Muslim say that the *kuffar* who advocate democracy and the *taghuts* fighting the *mujahidin* are common Muslims?"<sup>333</sup>

327 This is in accordance with the *diktats* of jihadi-salafi ideology that calls for return to the pristine age of Islam, even if it means using violence. It emphasizes *tawhid*, rejects innovation, permits the expulsion of infidels including Muslims who betray Islamic injunctions, promotes the literal and strict adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunna, and accepts the use of violence as means to establishing an Islamic state. Kassim Abdulbasit, "Defining and Understanding the Religious Philosophy of Jihadi-Salafism and the Ideology of Boko Haram," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 16:2-3 (2015), pp. 176-187.

328 Arosoaie Aida, "Doctrinal Differences between ISIS and Al Qaeda: An Account of Ideologies," *A Journal of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research* 7:7 (2015): p. 31.

329 "Islam, Christianity Not at War – Sultan," *Vanguard*, December 27, 2011; author translation of Shekau's video message, "Sako Zuwa Ga Duniya (A Message to the World)," YouTube, September 30, 2012.

330 Author translation of Shekau's lecture, "Islam and Secularism in Nigeria," YouTube, October 28, 2011.

331 *Takfir* is the process of declaring those who do not live according to the rudiments of Islamic values as infidels and unbelievers. This is a jihadi-salafi theological principle, which is regarded as an outright obligation to provide a strict and clear distinction between true believers and infidels, and to declare the infidels as such.

332 Author translation of Shekau's lecture, "Islam and Secularism in Nigeria," YouTube, October 28, 2011.

333 Abubakr Shekau, "New Video Message from Jama'at Ahl Al-Sunnah Li-I-Da'wah Wa-I-Jihad: A Message to the World," *Jihadology*, September 25, 2016.

Similarly, Shekau justified suicide bomb attacks at the University of Maiduguri in January 2017 under the same concept where he said:

“They regard their Constitutions and their books as more sacred than the Qur’an. The proof is that their rules are given precedence over Allah’s rules. So the masses in the religion of democracy do not accept Allah’s ruling. This is an explicit renunciation of faith.”<sup>334</sup>

Shekau is also influenced by some of the most influential salafi theological thinkers in the history of Islam, and his theological polemics have similar lines to earlier books written by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Basir al-Tartusi. Shekau has on several occasions spoken about the need to reject secular rulers. Shekau, rightly or wrongly, made reference to Ibn Taymiyya as the source for his justification of takfirism.<sup>335</sup> In a January 2015 video called “Doctrinal Principles,” Shekau denounces those who subscribe to democracy and accept man-made laws and says Ibn Taymiyah al-Harrani said that one does not engage in *takfir* against any Muslim unless he has committed major sins. Shekau added that “Imam Muahmmad bin Abd al-Wahhab [founder of the Wahhabi salafi sect] said that worshipping deities other than God is worse than the cardinal sins and that claiming ignorance is not accepted as an excuse.” As a result, Shekau concluded, “all those who subscribe to democracy are infidels and those who accept judgment according to man-made laws are infidels. All those who get education in foreign schools are infidels. This is my faith, my brethren. If you did not know me, here I am.” Notably, Shekau has also condemned one of the most renowned Islamic philosophers, Ibn Arabi, for exhibiting and teaching secular philosophy and for contradicting the teachings of Ibn Taymiyah and al-Wahhab.<sup>336</sup>

### Alliances

Shekau’s stance on alliances is also based on his salafi-jihadi ideology. Under Shekau, Boko Haram began as an independent jihadi group with “start-up” funding from al-Qa`ida, then evolved into an “unofficial affiliate” of al-Qa`ida, and then pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi and became ISWAP in March 2015; Shekau then left the Islamic State in August 2016 to lead Boko Haram once again.<sup>337</sup> Shekau’s operating principle, as stated in a November 2016 audio, is “*tawalli* through alliance (*tahalluf*),” which means he shows allegiance to other jihadi leaders and groups without regard for factionalism or rivalry.<sup>338</sup> This is in contrast to Nigeria, which allies with other “un-Islamic” states and leaders.

Recent anti-Shekau narratives in the international jihadi community might be linked to his personality, which is arrogant, unbending, dominating, and controlling, and his lack of consultation. Shekau appears to be rejected for these qualities rather than most of the extremist ideologies he supports. The arrogance of Shekau is further accompanied by his strategic manipulation of Islamist groups, taking advantage of them when necessary and dumping them when possible.

For example, Shekau’s relationship with al-Qa`ida faltered when al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb

334 “UNIMAID Attack: Shekau claims responsibility in new audio” *Vanguard*, January 17, 2017.

335 In particular, Ibn Taymiyya fought to ensure that legitimate political authority in Islam is based on the Qur’an and sharia law. Shekau also made references to Imam Ibn al-Qayyim, a well-known salafi Imam born in Damascus in 1292AD. Among Ibn al-Qayyim’s goals was the purging of the religion from the innovations and returning it to its pure and original fountains. Ibn Taymiyya is also one of the profound Islamic religious reformers (*muslahun*). He lived in 1258AD, when the Abbasid Empire was defeated by the Mongol armies and Bagdad was captured, and insisted on the practice of Islam in its original form as practiced by the Prophet and his companions. Omar A. Farrukh (trans.), *Ibn Taymiyya on Public and Private Law in Islam or Public Policy in Islamic Jurisprudence* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), p. 1.

336 Author translation, Shekau, “Western civilization is Atheism and anti-Islam.”

337 Dabiq Issue 5, “Remaining and Expanding,” 2015, p. 12-33; Jacob Zenn, “Spot Report #3, Al-Urhwa Al-Wutqha Phase II: Insights, European Union Technical Assistance to Nigeria’s Evolving Security Challenges, Abuja,” 2015, p.1; “Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali’s Rebels Seize Gao,” *Vanguard*, April 9, 2012; Dabiq Issue 8, “Sharia alone will Rule Africa,” 2015a, p. 14-16.

338 For more on Tawalli, see Millat Ibrahim, “The Difference Between Muwaalaat and Tawalli,” October 9, 2008.

(AQIM) sided with the Ansaru faction comprised of Boko Haram defectors who opposed Shekau's excessive takfirism and acceptance of Muslim casualties. In early 2015, Shekau nonetheless reintegrated some of those same defectors into Boko Haram after Ansaru went into dormancy (in part because of Boko Haram killing off Ansaru members), and they helped connect Shekau to al-Baghdadi and secure al-Baghdadi's acceptance of Shekau's pledge, with Boko Haram thus becoming ISWAP. In terms of external alliances, Shekau also received support from AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel, who in 2010 offered his "salafist brothers in Nigeria, men, weapons, and ammunition to gain revenge on Nigeria's ruling Christian minority, and for killing the martyr Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf, and the deaths of Muslims in clashes with Christians in the Middle Belt."<sup>339</sup>

Shekau also managed alliances internally within Boko Haram.<sup>340</sup> When Shekau came out from hiding in 2010 after the Nigerian military killed Muhammed Yusuf and mistakenly also declared Shekau dead, Shekau coordinated attacks with rival factions opposed to his leadership. The bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Abuja in August 2011, for example, which Shekau claimed in the name of Boko Haram, was masterminded by Mamman Nur. Nur had initially attempted to become the leader of Boko Haram until Shekau wrested control of the movement from him by 2010. Even when Nur and Khalid al-Barnawi, the latter whom Shekau had delegated to manage relations with AQIM in 2009, formed Ansaru in 2012 and spoke out against Shekau for killing Muslim civilians, including Ansaru members themselves, Shekau was still willing to renegotiate with them. In 2013, a number of key former Ansaru militants—including Nur and the former Ansaru commander of suicide operations, Abu Fatima, who was originally a Boko Haram member—joined with Boko Haram before Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi. Nur and Abu Fatima—along with al-Barnawi—had facilitated the correspondence that enabled Shekau's pledge.

Similarly, Boko Haram, during the Shekau period, was able to raise funds through kidnappings in Borno State and northern Cameroon with the support of former Ansaru members as early as February 2013 with the kidnapping of a seven-member French family, for which the ransom money netted Boko Haram several million dollars. Shekau thus showed pragmatism and a willingness to negotiate with enemies and coordinate with his ideological rivals who overcame disagreements on operations.<sup>341</sup>

### *Delegating Authority*

The third way Shekau is a "corporatist" leader is the way authority was exercised on the basis of delegation to subordinates.<sup>342</sup> For example, it was Khalid al-Barnawi, Adam Kamar, and Mamman Nur who facilitated Boko Haram's relationship with AQIM and al-Shabaab and coordinated most of the financing for the training of Nigerian militants with AQIM in Mali between 2010 and 2012 before they set up Ansaru, a militant group separate from Shekau's leadership. Neither al-Barnawi, Nur, Kamar, nor any other militant under Shekau (with few exceptions), however, ever showed their faces or revealed their names, both for security and strategic reasons under Shekau's leadership. Furthermore, Habibu Bama and Kabiru Sokoto planned and executed the Christmas Day 2011 bombing of St. Theresa's Church in Madalla, Niger State, near Abuja, but neither of them showed their faces and

339 Jacob Zenn, Atta Barkindo, and Nicholas Heras, "The Ideological Evolution of Boko Haram in Nigeria: Merging Local Salafism and International Jihadism," *RUSI Journal* 158:4 (2013): pp. 50-51.

340 Dave Bohon, "Boko Haram Declares Islamic 'Islamic Caliphate' in Nigerian Town," *New American*, August 31, 2014.

341 Zenn, Barkindo, and Heras, pp. 46-53; "Boko Haram 'Holding' Kidnapped French Priest," *France24*, November 16, 2013.

342 Shekau set the agenda for Boko Haram by portraying its war as a 'jihad,' or struggle against the enemies of Islam and those who denigrate and undermine Islam. He not only redefined JAS's central ideology in a way that his followers could understand and that was consistent with the salafi-jihadi currents of al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State, but also pioneered the prolific use of the internet to release statements featuring al-Qa`ida's syntax and religious memes through jihadi websites and YouTube video statements, indicative of a wider intended audience than local recruits alone. Author translation, Shekau, "Western civilization is Atheism and anti-Islam."

allowed Shekau to claim their attacks.<sup>343</sup> Similarly, the Cameroonian arms dealer, Alhaji Abdalla, was a vehicle smuggler and hostage negotiator during Boko Haram's kidnapping of the 22 foreign hostages in five operations in Cameroon, but he, too, answered to Shekau and kept a low-profile.<sup>344</sup> Boko Haram's media office, food suppliers, and arms traffickers also operated under separate commanders, who were deferential to Shekau and kept their identities anonymous, leaving all of the spotlight on Shekau.<sup>345</sup> Indeed, Shekau has at times had to share leadership with other figures so long as he was the only leader to have a public face. Rivals such as Mamman Nur or Khalid al-Barnawi, in contrast, could operate with Shekau so long as they were behind the scenes, but Shekau waged war against them when they tried to challenge or usurp Shekau's authority. This style of leadership appears to be strategic, keeping in line with the principles of delegation within the context of centralized leadership. It may seem that it is also intended to make Shekau's deputies more elusive and effective in a conflict environment that is constantly changing.

### Shekau's Strategic Leveraging

Beyond his "corporatist" skill set, Shekau has also strategically leveraged language, symbolism, political context, and Kanuri social-cultural context to inspire his followers. Above all, Shekau utilizes this "non-managerial" skill set to connect with his target audience in the Lake Chad region and reveal the corrupt underbelly of the Nigerian state.

#### *Shekau's Strategic Leveraging of Language*

Shekau has leveraged his command of language to help him reach out to and control adherents, especially his fluency in his native Kanuri language. Shekau, however, also speaks Arabic and Hausa, and Fulani and adds "broken and disjointed English and French sentences" into his sermons often for the purpose of mockery.<sup>346</sup> His ability to speak classical Arabic and to cite verses seamlessly from the Qur'an upgraded his status as an Islamic thinker among many of his followers for whom deep knowledge of Islamic literature and science remains as embryonic as it is deformed.

This is evident in most of Shekau's YouTube videos, particularly his sermon on Islam and secularism

343 To the media, analysts, and policymakers, these less popular figures were therefore invisible, while all operations and attacks are attributed to Shekau as the lone face of a monolithic. Jacob Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel* 7:2 (2014): pp. 23-29; Jason Burke, "Bin Laden Files Show al-Qaida and Taliban Leaders in Close Contact," *Guardian*, April 29, 2012; "Ansaru Fighters Claim Nigeria Abductions," *Al Jazeera*, December 18, 2012; Baba Ahmed, "Leader of al-Qaida Unit in Mali Quits AQIM," *Associated Press*, December 2, 2012; Zenn, Barkindo, and Heras.

344 Shekau's leadership led to innovation in ways that for Boko Haram prioritized material advantage, including his introduction in 2011 of the first female suicide bombing in Nigeria. This surprised some scholars as there is no culture of suicide in Nigeria, and suicide terrorism was thought to be unlikely in the Nigerian cultural context (male suicide bombing continued, even with increasing reliance on female suicide attacks from June 2014 to April 2016).

345 The massive military offensive in July 2009 that killed founder Muhammed Yusuf and 1,000 other followers forced JAS to adopt a conflict strategy that made it necessary for Shekau to act symbolically as the "face" of JAS, even while other operatives took a leading role operationally. After July 2009, JAS went underground, and many of its key members migrated to North Africa and connected with other North Africa-based followers of the late Muhammed Yusuf, such as Adam Kamar, Khalid al-Barnawi, and Mamman Nur, with whom they coordinated a return to Nigeria and formed what became Ansaru. Shekau, who was in hiding in Borno State and Kano, accepted that Nur, who was an ideological rival to Shekau, could still direct major attacks so long as Shekau remained JAS's public leader in claiming attacks. Thus, although Nur masterminded the U.N. headquarters bombing in August 2011 with perhaps only the suicide bomber himself provided by JAS, Shekau—not Nur—claimed the attack for JAS. Nur was alleged to have fled to Somalia and is believed to have trained with al-Shabaab and AQIM militants before he returned to Nigeria and coordinated the bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Abuja in 2011. "JTF Claims 'Global Terrorist' Kamar Killed," *Vanguard*, June 7, 2013. Shekau permitted Sani Umar to act as a leader briefly. It was Sani who released a statement saying JAS "is an Islamic revolution ... and Yusuf has not died in vain, for he is a martyr. His ideas will live forever ... we shall make Nigeria ungovernable ... it is either you are for us or against us." Mallam Sani Umar, "Boko Haram Resurrects, Declares total Jihad," *Vanguard*, August 14, 2009.

346 This is seen in most of the YouTube videos released by Shekau. Author translation, Abubakr Shekau, "Only Allah Can take my Life," YouTube, October 5, 2014; author translation, Abubakr Shekau, "Tawhid: the Oneness of Allah," YouTube, October 28, 2004; author translation, Abubakr Shekau, "The Abduction of Chibok Girls," May 5, 2014.

from before 2009.<sup>347</sup> In that sermon, he argues that international institutions are dominated by Western nations; they symbolize the rejection of Allah's authority and usurp his supremacy. Shekau argues that global institutions propagate political systems, create social conditions, and enact economic laws that exploit Muslim nations and completely negate the teachings of the Qur'an. Moreover, Shekau said he was aware that Borno and Yobe states and the Lake Chad border region all have high regard for Islamic culture and scholars but that they have lost their economic and political weight in the modern era. Shekau's constant use of Arabic language, Borno State College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, not only boosts his status as an Islamic scholar but allows his content to reach target audiences.

Even when using Arabic or northern Nigeria's *lingua franca* of Hausa, Shekau seems to have been fully aware of his advantage as a native Kanuri speaker unlike most of the Hausa-speaking Islamic elites in northern Nigeria. Thus, Shekau usually summarized his sermons and messages from Arabic or Hausa into Kanuri for local audiences, as Kanuri is the channel for communications around the Lake Chad region.<sup>348</sup> Shekau, nonetheless, eschewed making Kanuri ethnicity a primary marker of Boko Haram ideology, even while maintaining a predominantly Kanuri inner circle; both tribalism and nationalism are contrary to salafi-jihadi ideology and the vision of a global Islamic caliphate.

Additionally, since the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group represents roughly 30% of the Nigerian population and the majority in the country's northern states, Shekau's use of Hausa in most of his sermons is aimed at reaching out to them. (English is the language of education and government in Nigeria, but it is mostly used only in the educated urban areas.) Shekau has, however, cleverly used English words and expressions in his statements. For instance, in a May 2014 video mocking the #Bringbackourgirls campaign Shekau recited the Nigerian national pledge in English but mocked its significance. Shekau also chanted in that video "Bring back our girls ... Oowowowwo ... Bring back our army!" referring to Boko Haram's raid of a military barracks days earlier.<sup>349</sup> In another video, Shekau claimed that English

347 A Boko Haram member nicknamed 'the engineer' confirmed that "under Shekau, Boko Haram's media and publicity structure moved from analogue to digital. Shekau's media team was later led by one Atta Bashir, who operated closely with other jihadi groups around the Lake Chad region." Shekau extended the role of Boko Haram's media wing beyond delivering sermons to joining the political debate, responding to government statements and debunking claims made by government spokesmen against the group. Earlier versions of JAS videos were recorded by the Sautus-Sunnah video (voice of Sunna). They were distributed freely in northern Nigeria at venues like Darul Islam. Author interview, Boko Haram member 'the engineer,' Kuje prison, Abuja, June 2015; author translation, Boko Haram 2013-2014 YouTube videos. In this video, Boko Haram denies Shekau's death and any existing ceasefire agreements or negotiations. Muhammad Yusuf, 2008. "Preaching against security deployment to Maiduguri," YouTube, 2008; Cibiyar Yada Musulunci na Darul Islam, Dake Block A., No. 16, Laushi Shopping Complex, Wunti Market, Bauchi, Bauchi State. Author translation, Shekau lecture, "Islam and Secularism in Nigeria," YouTube, dated June 2008.

348 The Kanuri language dominated the Hausa language in the region due to its early contact with Arabic and the influence of trade. Many of the Arabic loanwords to Hausa seem to have passed through Kanuri. Greenberg indicates how some words like the Hausa *kasuwa* (meaning market) came from the Arabic word *suiq* through the Kanuri word *Kasugu*. Political titles ending in the Kanuri suffix *-ma*, which surely came from Kanuri words, have found themselves in Hausa, such as like *Yerima* or *Galadima*; both are royal titles that depict being counsellors to the king. The *Galadima* was normally in charge of the western province of the Kanem-Borno Empire while the *Yerima* in charge of the northern province. Richard Olaniyan ed., *Nigerian History and Culture* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1985), p. 61. Kanuri language, in particular, is the medium through which Shekau uniquely connects with people in the Lake Chad region, which including Nigeria's Borno and Yobe states and neighboring parts of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The 1991 population census showed that the region had a population of about 22 million people, with 11.7 million in Nigeria, 5 million in Chad, 2.5 million in Cameroon, and 193,000 in Niger, but the population of this region now is estimated at 37 million or more people. The Kanuris inhabit Borno and Yobe states, as well as Bauchi State in northeastern Nigeria. In the Republic of Niger, Kanuris inhabit mostly the Diffa and Zinder provinces while in Cameroon and Chad, they are found in the Southern Kanem Prefecture and Lac Prefecture. Nur Alkali, "Pilgrimage Tradition in Nigeria," *Annals of Borno Vol. II* (Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri, 1985), p. 127; Joseph Greenberg, "Linguistic Evidence for the Influence of the Kanuri on Hausa," *Journal of African History* 1:2 (1960): pp. 205-212; Freedom C. Onuoha, "Environmental Degradation, Livelihood and Conflicts the Implications of the Diminishing Water Resources of Lake Chad for North-Eastern Nigeria," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 8:2 (2008): pp. 35-62; Eric Odada, L. Oyebande, and J. Oguntola, "Lake Chad: Experience and Lessons Learned Brief," *Lake Chad Brief*, 2005; op. cit., p. 77.

349 Author translation of Abubakr Shekau's video mocking the #bringbackourgirlscampaign, YouTube, dated May 5, 2014.

“is the language of the dog, and I cherish Arabic more than English.”<sup>350</sup> And in another video, Shekau read in nearly unintelligible French from a prepared script that a militant handed to him and said that he heard on the radio that France “insulted the Holy Prophet of Islam and a war against terrorism is the same as fighting Muslims.”<sup>351</sup> Shekau was using French to mock the French. Moreover, Shekau’s demonstrations of language faculty in English in addition to other local native languages, such as Fulani, is probably intended to build credibility and establish a legend status as a jihadi leader both locally and globally, despite his claimed antipathy to English.

Shekau also uses word choice cleverly. In the Giwa barracks video (Giwa translates as “elephant” in Hausa), for example, Shekau again taunted the Nigerian army by calling Giwa barracks, Alade barracks (pig’s barracks) in Hausa.<sup>352</sup> In another video about overrunning a barracks, Shekau accused the Nigerian soldiers of running away like “pigs” during confrontation.<sup>353</sup> Shekau also mocked international leaders and agencies. For example, he referred to the United Nations as the “United Nations for Immorality,” and while paraphrasing the statement of former U.S. President George W. Bush, Shekau said, “Every region, in every nation has a decision to make. Either you are with us the jihadists, the salafists, or you are with Obama, George Bush, François Hollande, Clinton, Ban Ki-moon, and the democrats, the unbelievers and the secularists. Listen to me, you infidels, just like your love of money builds your desire to spend it, so also my love of Allah motivates my desire to work for him.”<sup>354</sup> Shekau similarly has threatened Chadian president Idriss Déby for his offer to assist Cameroon, ridiculed Nigerian president Mahamadou Issoufou for commiserating with France regarding the Charlie Hebdo killings, and warned Paul Biya, who Shekau calls the “King of Cameroon,” that he would “taste what has befallen Nigeria.”

The former head of Nigeria’s countering violent extremism (CVE) program, psychologist Dr. Fatima Akilu, suggests that Shekau’s denouncements and mockery of other world leaders is a way of equating himself as being on their level. She notes that as a “poor guy from Maiduguri, Shekau never thought that a U.S. president would one day be calling him by name” (referring the U.S. designation of Shekau as a terrorist in 2012).<sup>355</sup> This may be one reason why Shekau has referred to himself in third-person as “that small boy” in videos to mock the fact that the once nameless Shekau became a focus of the world’s attention. Looking at the progress of Boko Haram from a localized preaching group under Shekau, other small boys from northeastern Nigeria could want to emulate his power and may see Shekau as a ‘rags to riches’ type of a success story.

### *Shekau’s Strategic Employment of Symbols*

Shekau’s strategic use of symbols suggests that he is in tune with his environment and fully aware of the significance of Boko Haram activities within the global war on terrorism. First, Shekau imitates and uses the same religious or conflict symbols used by prominent Islamists with whom he shares the same ideological belief. For example, Shekau has modeled some of his behavior on al-Zarqawi in the

350 Author translation, Shekau, “Only Allah Can take my Life.” Danjibo reported that by 2006, more than 280,000 people, both Kanuri and Hausa-Fulani Muslims, from northern Nigeria and parts of southern Niger, northern Cameroon, and Chad were familiar with the preaching of Boko Haram leaders. Nathaniel Danjibo, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The “Maitatsine” and “Boko Haram” Crises in Northern Nigeria*, Peace and Conflict Studies Programme, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 2012, p. 7.

351 Ola’ Audu, “Boko Haram leader, Shekau, brands Nigerian soldiers cowards; says Baga weapons enough to win war,” *Premium Times*, January 21, 2015.

352 Author translation of Abubakr Shekau’s video claiming responsibility for attacks on Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, YouTube, dated March 24, 2014.

353 Author translation of Boko Haram’s claim of victory over Nigerian Military forces, YouTube, dated May 29, 2013.

354 Author translation, Abubakr Shekau, “The Abduction of Chibok Girls,” YouTube, 2014; author translation of Shekau’s YouTube video on the “abducted Chibok Girls,” YouTube, dated May 5, 2014.

355 “Insane, Boko Haram leader, Abubakr Shekau uses brutality,” *News*, May 15, 2014.

way he frequently shoots a gun wildly in the air, wears a camouflage uniform, and raises the single finger symbolizing *tawhid* (oneness of Allah) when preaching. This was one of the reasons why Islamic State media activists were impressed by Shekau and had confidence in him to lead ISWAP.<sup>356</sup> In Shekau's earlier videos from 2010 to 2012, Shekau typically had a Kalashnikov rifle in his right hand with a strap around his neck or placed against a wall and wore a red *kaffiyeh*. This practice appeared to be in emulation of the leaders of international jihadi groups, such as bin Ladin who displayed his weapons in similar fashion.<sup>357</sup>

In terms of his appearance, Shekau often maintained a moustache and beard in the salafi style to portray piety and religiosity. His dresses have alternated between a traditional tunic and military camouflage uniform to represent himself as both an imam and a jihadi militant leader. In most of his videos, he is also shown holding an oversized *miswak* (twig) in his right hand and cleaning his teeth as a point of emphasis.<sup>358</sup> This is likely intended to highlight Shekau's adherence to the common traditional practice of the Prophet Muhammad and to demonstrate his rejection of Western items such as toothbrush.<sup>359</sup>

Locally, too, it is meant to attract the modern-day remnants of the Maitatsine Islamic Movement known today as Kala Kato.<sup>360</sup> This group is dominant in northeastern Nigeria, particularly Bauchi State. It continues to reject affluence, Western materialism, and technology. It bans its members from listening to the radio; wearing wrist watches; and riding bicycles, motorcycles and cars. It demands that members refuse sending their children to secular schools. The use of traditional and symbolic gestures by Shekau will appeal to extremist Islamic sects across northern Nigeria.

Before pledging his allegiance to al-Baghdadi in 2015, Shekau also delivered a video-taped sermon in a mosque and wore a similar dress and made similar gestures as al-Baghdadi as a way of demonstrating that Shekau was the local version of the Caliph. At times, Shekau can appear disciplined, while at other times his mannerisms are truncated by a large smile and grunts that amplify a sense of unpredictability. This is Shekau as a "righteous tormentor" who is able to contest power with the Nigerian state and the leading world powers and is understandably feared for his brutality.<sup>361</sup>

Finally, Shekau exploits Hausa *nasheeds* as a way of revealing his followers' fanaticism about him. This is very prominent in the video when Shekau claimed responsibility for attack on Giwa barracks in March 2014 and said in Kanuri that:

"You don't know my madness. Today, you will see my madness. By Allah, I will slaughter you. If I don't slaughter you, I will not feel contented. By Allah, I will slaughter ... Brothers! Wherever you are, may Allah make this cassette to reach you; I have given you the permission to rise, take arms, and start killing them even if you are three. Kill! Kill!! Kill!!! Today, our religion is

356 If there was any doubt about whether Shekau was really imitating al-Zarqawi or whether any jihadis noticed, it was dispelled in 2015 when the pro-Islamic State, North Africa-based media agency Africa Media wrote an explanation of why it had confidence in Shekau as the leader of the Islamic State's West Africa Province, a role that Shekau held from March 2015 to August 2016. The Africa Media authors said Shekau reminded them of al-Zarqawi with his shooting of a gun, that Shekau's repetition of the chant "Shekau ka ka kau kau kauuuuu" in his videos could "vex" enemies; and that Shekau's taking credit for "enslaving" the Chibok schoolgirls showed confidence, unlike other jihadis in al-Qa`ida who failed to show enthusiasm for that operations. The chant is intended to reassure his followers that Shekau is courageous and that they have nothing to fear.

357 Author translation of Boko Haram's claim of victory over Nigerian military forces, YouTube, dated May 29, 2013.

358 The *miswak* is a wooden twig, common in northern Nigeria and among Muslims, for teeth cleaning. Author translation of Abubakr Shekau's video claiming he is alive, YouTube, dated October 5, 2014.

359 Author translation of Abubakr Shekau's video claiming he is alive, YouTube, dated October 5, 2014.

360 The Maitatsine movement was started by Muhammad Marwa (a Cameroonian who lived in Kano). He lived in Kano in the Yan Awaki area with a history of dissident preaching. In 1962, he was deported but later returned to Nigeria. Maitatsine is a Hausa concept taken from the regular cursing in Hausa – Allah Ya Tsine. Maitatsine, therefore, means one who invokes Allah's condemnation upon infidels and those who disagree with his teachings.

361 Yan St-Pierre, "Re-enforcing Radicalisation with bad PR? The Nigerian Army's Handling of Boko Haram," *Journal of De-Radicalisation* 4:44-70 (2015): p. 56.

nothing but killing.”<sup>362</sup>

The *nasheed* that corresponded with the above speech opened with the verse:

“We would do our jihad to bring back the sharia; we will defeat you enemies of sharia ... we will kill you ... we will not leave you! ... We will follow your churches and demolish them all ... you should not listen to this poem like a joke ... it is the truth and is what we are doing.”

Other *nasheeds* specifically focus on Shekau. For example, Boko Haram’s first public *nasheed* about Shekau after he assumed leadership of Boko Haram in 2010 portrayed his cult-like following. The lyrics sung in Hausa folk style said:

“Greetings to you Abubakr Shekau, the hero, the masquerade (fearful figure) to the Jews. Shekau the hater of Jews, masquerade for the infidels and a big problem to the white race (Western nations). Oh people, our name is al-Qa`ida, if you are looking for terrorists, we are here and we are telling you, we hate the Americans.”

Another *nasheed* about Shekau in 2011 just after he assumed leadership was also sung in Hausa folk style and said:

“You are also a lion, Scholar Shekau, may God assist you. Lead us to follow the system of God, we do not oppose you. Everyone who wants to fight jihad should follow you. This is the representative of [Abu Musab] al-Zarqawi and Usama [bin Ladin] in Nigeria ... These scholars of Izala, who say that politics is better than prayers, you have heard. You said to us that we are Khawarij, and they know that we do not follow the Khawarij. Borno and Bauchi, Kano and Yobe, you [the Nigerian government] have killed our brothers.”<sup>363</sup>

The appeal of Shekau among his followers was such that the expectation that Shekau would release a media statement, a YouTube message, or a video message became a sensation in northern Nigeria—and not only among Boko Haram members. Shekau particularly timed many of these videos to counter reports of his death or address current events, such as his designation as a terrorist by the United States, the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, and the election of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton. A state official in Maiduguri highlighted the relevance of Shekau’s videos when said that, “sometimes to get the exact number of casualties, we wait for what [Shekau] will say rather than what the government or security forces announce.”<sup>364</sup> Indeed, becoming a “bogeyman” further elevated Shekau’s ability to instill fear, or at least mock and show the incompetence of the Nigerian authorities in the wake of Boko Haram’s attacks and conquests.

### *Shekau’s Strategic Leveraging of Political Context*

Shekau’s appeal can also be placed in the context of the relationship between Islamic political activism and the Nigerian government. The two main issues that Shekau—and Yusuf before him—capitalized on were, first, the relationship between Islamic parties and the Nigerian state and, second, the massive failure of the Nigerian political leadership in meeting the demands of its citizenry.

362 Among other lines, the *nasheed* says, “We will follow your churches and demolish them. You should not take this poem as a joke. It is the truth and what we are doing. You will see us do it. We will fight with law-making infidels; those infidels that are making obnoxious laws. There is no law except that of Islam. O you *taghut*, all of you should come and follow Allah. You should follow the sharia and establish your prayers. If you refuse, you will be faced with war.” Author translation of Abubakr Shekau’s video claiming responsibility for attacks on Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, YouTube, dated March 24, 2014.

363 Video was formerly available online.

364 Author interview, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Officials, Maiduguri, June 2014.

The relationship between Islamic parties and the Nigerian state began with Nigeria's independence in 1960. One of the two northern political parties - The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) - was considered a party of commoners (*talakawa*) and was linked to the Tijaniyya sect.<sup>365</sup> The other main political party - Northern People's Congress (NPC) - was a conservative aristocratic party led by the northern premier, Ahmadu Bello, and was linked to Qadiriyya sect.<sup>366</sup> Bello not only promoted the Qadiriyya sect, but portrayed himself heir to Usman Dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. He supported Islamic causes more broadly,<sup>367</sup> and promotion of the Islamic identity in northern Nigeria helped him get elected vice president of the Saudi-funded World Muslim League in 1964.<sup>368</sup> Bello also established the Jama'atu Nasir Islam (JNI) in 1962 with the help of Shaykh Abubakar Gumi, his Religious Affairs adviser, to unite Islamic sects and serve as the mouthpiece for all Muslims in all aspects.<sup>369</sup>

In addition to NEPU and NPC, in 1979, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) had strong links to the salafi and largely Saudi-funded Izala Islamic movement, whose support helped ensure the victory of NPN's Shehu Shagari during the 1979 presidential elections.<sup>370</sup> Similarly, the Maitatsine movement, which instigated the 1980 Kano riots, was alleged to have had a strong relationship with the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP) in Kano state.<sup>371</sup> Alhaji Abubakar Rimi (PRP), the governor of Kano accused of eating and praying with Maitatsine sect members, rejected the outcome of the federal government's commission of inquiry that indicted the group.<sup>372</sup> In contrast, he set up a commission that indicted the federal government and security forces.<sup>373</sup>

The entrenched role of religion in politics and the unique advantage Islamic parties offer in political calculations has meant that politicians have constantly donated, collaborated with, and even participated in the activities of different religious sects, most often in return for political support. In this way, they curry favors from religious leaders in return for mobilization. Thus, Yusuf, and largely Shekau, appealed to their followers because they represented emerging religious leaders who resisted (at least publicly) the chance to extract favors from Muslim politicians consistent with typical political-religious dynamics in northern Nigeria. Importantly, Shekau is seen by his followers as one of the few voices that has challenged the hypocrisy and fraud that lies at the core of Nigeria's exploitative Muslim elite.<sup>374</sup>

365 Abdul Rauf Mustapha and Mukhtar U. Bunza, "Contemporary Islamic Sects in Northern Nigeria," in Mustapha Abdul Rauf ed., *Sects and Social Disorder, Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (New York: James Currey, 2014), p. 54.

366 Ibid.

367 Liss Rasmussen, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa: The Cases of Northern Nigeria and Tanzania Compared* (New York: British Academic Press, 1993), p. 55; Loimeier Roman, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), pp. 135-148. Ahmadu Bello established a new Islamic sect, Usmaniyya, as a tribute to Uthman Dan Fodio. The sect slowly became inactive and disappeared after Ahmadu Bello's death in 1966. However, three months before his death, Ahmadu Bello publicly stated at the dedication of a hospital in Jalingo, capital of present day Taraba State, on October 16, 1965, Uthman Dan Fodio was the father of enlightenment and good. That Dan Fodio undertook the work of Salvation for all people and now that work has been handed over to him (Ahmadu Bello), and he dedicates himself totally to its completion. E. P. T. Crampton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979) p. 215f.

368 Marinus Iwuchukwu, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Post-Colonial Northern Nigeria: The Challenges of Inclusive Cultural and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 43.

369 Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), pp. 135-148. He established a new Islamic sect, Usmaniyya, as a tribute to Uthman Dan Fodio, but the sect slowly became inactive and disappeared after Ahmadu Bello's death in 1966.

370 Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (London: C Hurst and Co. Publishers, 1997), pp. 292-294.

371 Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1993), p. 155.

372 Ibid. To understand Islamic sects as vote banks for political patronage, see D.C. O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 262-285.

373 Nasir Zahradeen, *The Maitatsine Saga* (Zaria, Nigeria: Zaria Publishing Co., 1988), p.113.

374 Marc-Antoine Perouse De Montclos ed., "Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria," *West African Politics and Society Series*, Vol. 2, African Studies Centre and Institut Francais de Recherche Afrique, 2015, p. 155.

The Muslim elites exploit religion with what Yusuf called “false sharia” and have rode on the back of Islam to become governors and senators, only to turn around to denigrate and undermine Islam by implementing only partial sharia, while promoting democracy and Western values. This sort of image resonates with Boko Haram’s regional audience and has made Shekau a sort of folk hero.

Second, the appeal of Shekau and Yusuf before 2009 is also linked to the massive failure of the Nigerian political leadership in meeting the demands of its citizenry. With Nigeria’s return to multi-party democracy in 1999, Yusuf and Shekau promoted a message that contested Western values and the secularity of the Nigerian state and condemned the corruption at the underbelly of Nigeria’s predatory elite in a way that other religious leaders, such as the sultan of Sokoto, who were closer to the state did not. This message resonated with Boko Haram’s followers and provided fresh moral guidance in a socio-economic and political context infested by corruption.<sup>375</sup>

It is fair to suggest that in northern Nigeria, this initial appeal of the messages and sermons of Shekau were backed by natural support given to religious organizations (both Islam and Christianity). In particular, the appeal of Shekau and his message is driven by the socio-economic conditions of the region, a result of the destructive effects of corruption, bad governance, and total lack of security and welfare for many in the region.<sup>376</sup> This situation is reflected in the low level of education in the region, widespread poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. In most parts of Nigeria, many people turned to God for all their answers, creating the proliferation of religious groups.<sup>377</sup> In the north, old Islamic sects fragmented, and new ones emerged, encouraging Muslims to return to the original source of Islam for strength. This produced an environment where preachers practicing intolerance—as Shekau and Yusuf did—was a viable means of amassing support and followership.

In reality however, Shekau also places himself in the class of the Islamizing, anti-pagan, anti-colonial insurgents who opposed pagan worship as well as colonial legacies and Western influence in Muslim territories. Among such insurgents are Askia Muhammad I (1492-1528),<sup>378</sup> Ahmad Grant (the left handed),<sup>379</sup> Karamoko Alfa,<sup>380</sup> Sulayman Bal,<sup>381</sup> Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi,<sup>382</sup> Al-Hajj Umar,<sup>383</sup> and Usman Dan Fodio.<sup>384</sup> Others are the jihad of Abd al-Qadir in Algeria from 1808-1883; the jihad of the Mahdi in Sudan from 1844-1885;<sup>385</sup> the Egyptian resistance led by Ahmad Urabi against British occupation, the Sanusi resistance against Italian colonialism in Libya,<sup>386</sup> and the role played by the Fulani slave raider Hamman Yaji in the late 19th/early 20th century.

375 Ibid.

376 Simon Alozieuwa, “Contending Theories on Nigeria’s Security Challenge in the Era of Boko Haram Insurgency,” *Peace and Conflict Review* 7:1 (2012): p. 46; Nasir el-Rufai Nasir, “Bauchi’s Hopeless Budget,” *ThisDay*, April 12, 2012.

377 Moses Aluaigba, “Circumventing or Superimposing Poverty on the African Child? The Almajiri Syndrome in Northern Nigeria,” *Childhood in Africa* 1:1 (2009): pp. 19-24.

378 Askia is a prominent pre-colonial radical Islamist who led the jihad that captured Timbuktu in Mali and other territories along the River Niger and extended his radical jihad to the Mossi Empire, present-day Burkina Faso. Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa. A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta basin in the pre-colonial Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 164; P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. ii, 359.

379 Ahmad Gran (“the left handed”) is of Somali origin, and secured the control of Adal in Somalia, converted it to an Ottoman satellite state, and led a crushing jihad against Ethiopia (Abbyssinia) in 1529.

380 Karamoko initiated the jihad of Futa Jalon in 1725 and created the first Islamic state in present-day Guinea. Holt, Lambton, and Lewis, pp. 366-367.

381 Sulayman led the jihad of Futo Toro in 1775 to purify Islam and to Islamize Fulani pagans. Ibid.

382 Al-Kanemi quelled the Fulani rebellion against the Sayfawa dynasty in the 17th Century Kanem-Borno Empire and established the Al-Kanemi dynasty. Mukhtar Yakubu, *Trade, Merchants and the State in Borno, c. 1893-1939* (Koln, Germany: Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 2000); Ronald Cohen, *The Kanuri of Bornu* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

383 David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

384 Ibraheem Sulaiman, *A Revolutionary in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio* (New York: Mansell, 1986), especially pp. 122-148.

385 Richard Bonney, *Jihad: From Qur’an to Bin Laden* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 186-194.

386 Rudolph Peters, “Islam and Colonialism. The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History,” De Gruyter Mouton, p. 39-94.

### *Shekau's Strategic Leveraging of Kanuri Socio-Cultural Context*

The ethnic context exploited by Shekau is defined by three elements: geographic region, Kanuri language, and Islamic Kanuri identity.

Under Shekau's leadership, Boko Haram has carried out around 90% of its attacks in the Lake Chad region, which is defined as the territory of the former Kanem-Borno Empire—an historical heritage of the Kanuri people.<sup>387</sup> The territory has vast forests, with unprotected borders and the high Mandara Mountains that can support the type of guerrilla warfare Boko Haram has waged and arms trafficking that has benefited the group.<sup>388</sup> Moreover, the consequences of environmental degradation have destroyed the livelihood of millions of people who inhabit the territory.<sup>389</sup> This has encouraged an informal economy rooted in crime and lawlessness. Since 2009, the region has seen an increase in cross-border smuggling (via motorbikes using hillside tracks), changing the landscape of northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon's recent economic history. Consequently, Boko Haram appears to have recruited from this pool of smugglers whose knowledge of the back country and military/police tactics is second to none.

More than 80% of the people in the region are illiterate, primarily those in agriculture, fishing, and pastoralism. Environmental degradation as a result of severe decline in rainfall, excessive desertification, and drought has led to a drop in food production and a rise in unemployment. Irrigation projects have been abandoned, while parks, dams, and game reserves are closed. The Tiga and Challawa Gorge dams (located between Niger and Nigeria) meant for irrigation and water supply on the Komandugu Yobe basin, are closed due to declining water levels. Furthermore, there are the Borno drainages, which are fed by the Yedseram, Ngadda, and Gubio rivers. This hosts one of the largest irrigation schemes, which is now abandoned due to the shrinkage of these rivers and Lake Chad.<sup>390</sup> Although divided by artificial colonial boundaries, the inhabitants of this region are united by language and religion, and consider themselves common victims of environmental degradation and government neglect. Some of them have turned to poaching, organized crime, and terrorism.

As such, Shekau is able to target for recruitment the unemployed youths of the region who feel aggrieved by a neglectful government and can be swayed by Shekau's promise for a new "pure" Islamic government.<sup>391</sup> Across the border, in July 2014, Cameroon's Defense Ministry announced that Boko Haram was recruiting 15,000 to 20,000 members linked to poverty and joblessness.<sup>392</sup>

Furthermore, Kanuri identity and geography are also leveraged by Shekau. Shekau recruits most of his members from the Kanuri ethnic group, and most of his close advisors are Kanuri, even though Boko Haram features most propaganda in Hausa. Conservative estimates suggest about 75% of the attendees of Yusuf's and Shekau's lectures were Kanuris, while 20% were Hausa and 5% were converts to

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387 Richard Olaniyan ed., *Nigerian History and Culture* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1985), p. 61. The Kanuri ethnic identity permeated the empire while Kanuri chiefs enjoyed local support and authority over vast territories around Lake Chad, including parts of Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Sudan; Cohen, pp. 22-23; Odada, Oyebande, and Joguntola, p. 77. Historically, both the Sayfawa and el-Kanemi dynasties ensured the Kanurization of the socio-political, religious, and economic life of the empire, subjugating other ethnic groups to the Kanuri identity. The region, with a population estimated to be 37 million, is still dominated by the Kanuris, who are mostly found in Bornu, Yobe, and Bauchi states, Nigeria; Diffa and Zinder provinces, Niger; as well as Chad and northern Cameroon.

388 M. Kwaru, "Boko Haram: Senior Customs Personnel arrested over arms importation in Borno," *Peoples Daily*, May 29, 2013.

389 Author interview, Labaran Maku, former Minister of Information, Abuja, June 2014.

390 Haruna Bdliya Hassan and Martin Bloxom, "Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis of the Lake Chad Basin," prepared for The L.C.B.C. and G.E.F Project on the Reversal of Land and Water Resources Degradation," 2010, pp. 5, 43-44.

391 Author interview, Labaran Maku, former Minister of Information, Abuja, June 13, 2014.

392 "Cameroon Furious and Fearful over Boko Haram Infiltration," *Gulf Times*, July 12, 2014.

Islam from other ethnic groups.<sup>393</sup> Moreover, the Kanuri heartland provides the space, cells, and local networks for mobilization. With the help of Kanuri language across the borders, infiltration becomes easier, the movement of arms is made more accessible while secrecy is maintained. The Kanuri heartland provides the space and the local networks, such as fishing unions, market groups, and farming communities, for mobilization and recruitment. Using the Kanuri language and the local knowledge of the area, Boko Haram members ensured the movement of arms, training of new recruits, and setting up of camps. Thus, the language, religion, and region became channels for communications, indoctrination, infiltration, and operations.<sup>394</sup>

In leveraging the ethnic context, the use of the Kanuri language is also made easier by the religious identity of the region. During the reign of the Sayfawa and el-Kanemi dynasties, Kanuri identity was entwined with Islamic identity, established on Qur'anic values and Islamic jurisprudence, so much so that to be Kanuri has become synonymous with being Muslim.<sup>395</sup> To defend Islam is to defend the cultural heritage of the Kanuris. With this historical sentiment, before 2009, Shekau indirectly presented Islam as a Kanuri property or heritage that must be defended from Western contamination. In this way, language, religion, and region also became Shekau's channels of communication, infiltration, indoctrination, and operations.

To delegitimize contemporary traditional and religious institutions of Nigeria while also appealing to a Kanuri audience, Shekau praised the Sayfawa dynasty (pre-colonial Kanuri rulers of Borno) and indicted the al-Kanemi dynasty (current Kanuri religious rulers of Borno) for betraying Islam.<sup>396</sup> Shekau conveniently excluded the pagan origin of the Sayfawa dynasty.<sup>397</sup> He also neglected to mention the Tuareg and Fulani rebellion within the Kanem-Borno Empire. The former rebelled against the Sayfawa rulers in 1751 over the control of Bilma salt mines and the Komandugu Yobe River.<sup>398</sup> The latter organized a civil resistance for being treated as second-class citizens within the Kanem-Borno Empire.<sup>399</sup> Shekau also avoided any reference to Rabeh Fadallah, a conservative Muslim who initiated the decline of the Kanem-Borno Empire. He was a warrior and Muslim slave trader from Sudan. According to Cohen, "This man, Rabeh, is still remembered today in Borno for the tyrannical hold he attempted to establish and for the plundering and sacking of many Borno villages which he carried out while subduing the state."<sup>400</sup> He invaded Borno and conquered the el-Kanemi dynasty in May 1893,<sup>401</sup> and he moved the capital from Kukawa to Dikwa, another ancient town attacked several times by Boko Haram.<sup>402</sup> Additionally, Shekau completely disregarded the fact that the Sayfawa dynasty, a Muslim dynasty constructed by the Mais, was overthrown by the el-Kanemi dynasty, another Muslim dynasty.<sup>403</sup> It was the el-Kanemi dynasty that transferred the capital of the Kanem-Borno Empire from Birnin Gazargamo to Kukawa in 1814, a city repeatedly attacked by Boko Haram.<sup>404</sup>

393 Author anonymous interviews, individuals in Maiduguri. See also James J. F. Forest, "Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria," Joint Special Operations University, May 5, 2012, p. 1.

394 Kwaru.

395 Cohen, pp. 22-23.

396 Author translation, Shekau, "Western civilization is Atheism and anti-Islam."

397 Alkali Nur Muhammad, *Kanem-Borno Under the Sayfawa: A Study of the Origin, Growth, and Collapse of a Dynasty (891-1846)* (Maiduguri: Borno Sahara and Sudan Series, 2013), pp. 23-35; Mukhtar, p. 29; Cohen, p. 12.

398 Louis Brenner, *The Shehus of Kukawa: A History of the Al-Kanemi Dynasty of Bornu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 6-99.

399 Adeleye Rowland, "Hausaland and Borno 1600-1800," in Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder eds., *History of West Africa*, 2nd edition, vol. 1 (1971), p. 37.

400 Cohen, p. 18.

401 Adeleye Rowland, "Rabih B. Fadlallah and the Diplomacy of European Imperial Invasion in the Central Sudan, 1893-1902," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 5:3 (1970): pp. 399-418; Cohen, p. 18.

402 William Hallam, *The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1977), p. 279.

403 Mukhtar, p. 29.

404 Brenner, pp. 48-66.

Shekau presented the Kanem-Borno Empire as a perfect Islamic state, governed on the principles of sharia, equity, and justice. He emphasized the socio-economic and political dominance of the empire. He constantly referred to the influence of Kanem-Borno Islam outside the empire. He therefore mourned the remains of the empire and rejected Western influence over the territories of the Kanem-Borno Empire. Shekau revisited the historical rivalry between the Kanem-Borno Empire and northwestern Nigeria's Sokoto caliphate and Kano emirates, and he accused the sultan of Sokoto of undermining the legacies of Usman Dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto caliphate, and the Emir of Kano for betraying Islam. Shekau thus called for the title of the sultan (sarki) to be reduced to the tribal and non-religious title of chief (*serki*) and the emir's title to be reduced to the secular title of "King," since neither follow the Islamic system of government.<sup>405</sup>

The demise of the Kanem-Borno Empire and the rise of the Nigerian nation as a perceived Western construct constitute the historical narrative that has effectively been exploited by Boko Haram. While mourning the loss of the Kanem-Borno Empire, Shekau bemoaned the new Nigerian state as a Western construct that largely functioned on corruption.<sup>406</sup> Shekau has been very strategic in the use of the historical narrative presented above. He chose that part of history best suited to his agenda, embellishing the narrative so as to please listeners, stimulate interest, and engineer motivation. Above all, Shekau's interpretation of history expressed a will for political power contestation with the Nigerian state.

### Why Shekau is Misunderstood

The perception that Shekau is crazy, mentally imbalanced, or mad is a narrative without any credible substantive or medical evidence. It is a product of lack of deep research, and it is overly simplistic. One reason why Shekau is misunderstood is that since Nigeria's return to multi-party democracy, military offensives have been deployed against resistance and insurgent movements without accurate intelligence gathering but rather to "crush" the enemy. For example, in response to the November 1999 civil unrest in Odi, Bayelsa State, President Obasanjo sent troops with "27 five ton vehicles loaded with over 2000 troops, 4 armoured personnel carriers ... three 81mm mortar guns and 2 pieces of 105mm Howitzer Artillery guns, and they killed a total of 2,483 people."<sup>407</sup> This happened without any prior investigations by the government to understand the key actors, their motivations, or the environmental factors that serve as the basis of their agitations.

Furthermore, analysts have failed to listen to the coherence, logic, and clarity of Shekau's ideology. This is because Shekau expresses himself mostly in Arabic, Hausa, and Kanuri and, to a lesser extent, Fulani. These are four languages, which many researchers, including in Nigeria, do not speak and have not translated well into English. Indeed, it is ironic that Shekau's use of languages and gestures that are rarely understood in the West or in many parts of Nigeria are a cause of the perception that Shekau is crazy. Shekau has openly lamented that scholars who do not use English are automatically labeled as "ignorants" by English-speaking intellectuals. In contrast, those who, like Shekau, speak Arabic, which was the language of scholarship in the pre-colonial era in northern Nigeria, are not given the same esteem as English speakers.

Yet, Shekau has been misunderstood because for so many years he has been simply defined in the context of Islamist ideology common to most terrorist groups without clearly understanding the nature and content of his theological creativity and independent interpretation. Importantly, many experts

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405 Author translation of Abubakr Shekau's video threatening the Emir of Kano, YouTube, December 18, 2014.

406 Wale Adebawo, *Authority Stealing: Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics in Post-Military Nigeria* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2012), p. xxviii.

407 Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 201; *A Blanket of Silence, Images of the Odi Genocide*, Environmental Rights Action of Nigeria, 2002, pp. 7-8.

and analysts have failed to appreciate Shekau's capacity in reinterpreting salafi-jihadi ideology to fit the local Kanuri context. In fact, Shekau's ability to exploit Islam's historical relationship with the West in order to radicalize and recruit young people lies at the heart of his organizational capacity.

Those who do not understand Shekau's words are likely to examine instead his mannerisms and odd grunts and chants. Indeed, since Shekau is virtually the only 'face' that Boko Haram has revealed publicly to the world throughout the insurgency, many observers have acquired their perceptions of Boko Haram largely based on conspiracy theories and mere observations of Shekau's mannerisms. There is a need to listen more attentively to what the leaders of Boko Haram have to say, and Shekau in particular, in order to understand clearly the ideological narratives of the group.<sup>408</sup> However, much of what appears as 'crazy' in videos is very likely 'acting.' Before Shekau announced the jihad in 2010 but while he was already a public figure, there was nothing particularly eccentric about him. From 2010 until his pledge to al-Baghdadi, however, Shekau was boastful, noisy, and extremely unsettled in his video messages. Then, in the weeks before and after the pledge, he became withdrawn and less bombastic in his communications.<sup>409</sup> However, his extreme mannerisms resurfaced when he was replaced as the leader of ISWAP by Abu Musab al-Barnawi and he then became Boko Haram leader again.<sup>410</sup> This shows that Shekau is strategic, calculative, and crafty.<sup>411</sup> He deploys his acting skills when and where it suits his conflict strategy best.

Moreover, accounts of Shekau's youth do not reveal any common characteristic of a psychopath.<sup>412</sup> There is also no medical report or psychological tests to validate the claim that Shekau is insane or psychopathic.<sup>413</sup> It is thus reasonable to suggest that Shekau's antics and taunts in most of his videos as Boko Haram's leader are a deliberate strategy consciously chosen to intimidate the enemy, captivate his followers, and instill a sense of fear and loyalty. For more than six years, Boko Haram has contested power with the Nigerian state under Shekau's leadership. Despite the deployment of security services, including mercenaries, local vigilantes, and hunters, Shekau has not been eliminated; in contrast, he was even named as one of the 100 most influential people in 2015 by *Time* magazine.<sup>414</sup>

408 Atta Barkindo, "Listening to Boko Haram: How Boko Haram Exploits History and Memory," Africa Research Institute, 2016.

409 Frances Martel, "Alleged Boko Haram Leader Celebrates Charlie Hebdo Massacre," Breitbart, January 15, 2015.

410 Omar Mahmoud, "What led IS to announce a new Boko Haram leader? Here are two clues from its communications," African Arguments, August 5, 2016.

411 Author translation, "Shekau releases audio message after Isis names new leader," YouTube, accessed and translated August 7, 2016.

412 Shekau was born in a small village in Yobe State called Shekau on the Nigeria-Niger border reportedly in 1965, 1969, or as late as 1975. His teenage life was spent mostly in Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State. Shekau said in one of his sermons before he became JAS leader that "there is a primary school in Damaturu called Bindagari primary school. We were to be enrolled into the school when it was still constructed with zinc, but our grandparents staunchly opposed our enrollment and that was how we were saved from this godless Western imposition." Reports suggest that Shekau was later taken by his father to learn under a Qur'anic teacher in Maiduguri. The teacher's son remembers Shekau as being inquisitive, clever, smart, controversial, and "always arguing with the teacher." Shekau also helped out in the house of a retired civil servant, running errands and helping with domestic chores. Shekau left after 11 years of Qur'anic studies and embraced the street life, selling empty perfume bottles and hair gel (pomade) in Maiduguri's Monday Market, which is one of the largest in the Lake Chad region. At the market, Shekau made friends, including itinerant Islamic scholars and Qur'anic students from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Among this circle of scholars and students, Shekau came across a crop of enthusiastic Islamists who admired his Islamic scholarship and respected his courage but also feared his ruthlessness. It is thus notable that Shekau's historical background until his appearance in JAS does not reveal any of the elements normally associated with psychopathic or violent individuals. Adam Nossiter, "A Jihadist's Face Taunts Nigeria from the Shadows," *New York Times*, May 18, 2014; Iginla Ademola, "The Story Behind the Life of the Leader of Boko Haram, Abubakr Shekau," *Osun Defender*, May 8, 2014; author translation, Shekau, "Western civilization is Atheism and anti-Islam."

413 This included elements such as a violent or alcoholic father, sexual timidity and passivity, defective insight, emotional detachment from the consequences of one's actions, sexual role uncertainties, magical thinking, destructive attitudes, and adherence to violent subculture norms and weapons fetishes. D. G. Hubbard, *The skyjacker: His flights of fantasy* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); F. Ferracuti and F. Bruno, "Psychiatric aspects of terrorism in Italy," in Israel L. Barak-Glantz and C. R. Huff eds., *The mad, the bad and the different: Essays in honor of Simon Dinitz* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1981).

414 "TIME magazine names Buhari, Ezekwesili, Shekau among world's most influential people," *Premium Times*, April 16, 2015.

## Conclusion

In the age of information technology, terrorist leaders are finding innovative ways of transforming their groups to confront modern states espousing liberal ideas. Emerging terrorism literature has identified the corporate, symbolic, and psychological models of such leadership. In the context of Boko Haram, Shekau has demonstrated clearly that he is a “terrorist CEO.” Using the corporatist principles of business organizations, Shekau reinforced Boko Haram’s group ideology, established a central command structure while delegating authority to cell commanders across the region. Equally, Shekau has taken advantage of the conflict environment, deploying Islamic symbols and manipulating religious ideology, historical memory, and linguistic sentiments to sustain his campaign. Consequently, as part of future counterterrorism policy in Nigeria and the Lake Chad border region, certain realities must be taken seriously. Importantly, Shekau established regional-international alliances and creatively introduced conflict strategies and tactics of using female suicide bombers, negotiating for ransom and creating the opportunity for Boko Haram to confront the Nigerian state for almost a decade.

Despite Shekau’s ingenuity in applying corporatist principles and leveraging different strategies in his leadership of Boko Haram, it is necessary to mention that the group has not always been homogeneous. In the past, factions have emerged such as the Yusuffiya Islamic Movement (YIM) and Ansaru. In August 2016, Boko Haram was further fragmented when the Islamic State announced a change of leadership in the *al-Naba* magazine.<sup>415</sup> Shekau was replaced in ISWAP by Abu Musab al-Barnawi. Although Shekau sent an audio message to dismiss his removal,<sup>416</sup> Muhammad Nur, a former deputy to both Yusuf and Shekau, stated in an audio message that Shekau was dismissed because of abuse of office, corruption, dictatorial tendencies, and the killing of innocent Muslims.<sup>417</sup> In addition, Nur accused Shekau of deviating from the injunctions of the Qur’an and the salafi principles to promote his individual opinions on matters of faith.

In the midst of these splits and fragmentation, Shekau remains an appealing figure to his followers. He retains more supporters because of his creativity, fearlessness, and ability to maneuver, outwit, and outsmart his adversaries. He has also (at various stages) leveraged a pillage-driven patronage system whereby he rewards his lieutenants and followers with cash, women, and access to a centralized form of Boko Haram authority. He connects strongly with his followers, deploying his ability to place extremist ideology within local context and to instrumentalize the grievances of his followers. Shekau has the common logic to align with other foreign jihadi groups and depend on the material and logistic benefits that will accrue from such relationships. Lack of clear understanding of the strategies and ideological principles employed by Shekau will have serious security implications both at the domestic, regional, and international levels.

At the domestic level, it is too early to say whether Boko Haram is defeated. Shekau is likely to continue with the strategy of suicide bombing using children. The socio-economic condition and the growing sense of social exclusion in the Lake Chad border region continue to make it fertile ground for Shekau to exploit in terms of mobilization and recruitment. Another concern will be that of reprisal attacks if isolated communities refuse to join Shekau. Furthermore, recent events indicate the infiltration of Boko Haram members in local communities, civilian populations, and public places. The military has issued warnings to young people for potential enticement by Boko Haram using cash and other incentives. This trend is likely to continue if the government does not engage local communities and involve the civilian population in this fight.

At the regional and international level, the growing competition between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic

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415 Mahmoud.

416 Author translation, “Shekau releases audio message after Isis names new leader.”

417 Author translation, “Message from new Boko Haram leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi,” YouTube, August 5, 2016.

State is likely to make Shekau look like the new bride in town. The military pressure on the Islamic State by the coalition of international forces in Iraq and Syria is likely to bolster Boko Haram territories. As Islamic State fighters are forced to relocate from Iraq and Syria, some parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and West Africa will be the likely destination. Thus, the Lake Chad border region—Boko Haram's base—could become a recruitment hub for the Islamic State, where some local Islamic sects share similar ideologies as the Islamic State. Shekau will likely leverage the situation, playing al-Qa`ida against the Islamic State, and rejoining forces with the highest bidder.

It is therefore important that the Nigerian government, regional authorities, scholars, and security analysts do not dismiss Shekau as ignorant or clueless. In particular, such a perception should not form the basis of a policy approach to confronting Boko Haram. It is this type of perception as well as a policy of neglect that has allowed Shekau to transform Boko Haram into an organized terrorist group.

Second, even though Boko Haram is considered vicious, ruthless, and sadistic, there is a need to carry out a comprehensive study of the group while engaging with it. This would provide security agencies with the knowledge platform to understand the strategies of the group and ascertain the nature of the group's ideology and its historical justification for attacks as well as the narratives it uses for mobilization and recruitment.

Third, looking at the corporatist and strategic nature of Shekau's leadership of Boko Haram, it means that confronting the group goes beyond military offensive. The Nigerian government must take seriously the soft approach, engaging religious scholars, journalists, traditional rulers, community stakeholders, and civil society organizations to help prevent young people from being drawn to the ideology and rhetoric of Boko Haram. Even if Shekau and every member of Boko Haram is killed, the environment that has produced Boko Haram and its extremist ideology is still fertile, and the government must contend with this reality.

## CHAPTER 4: The Rise and Risks of Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force: Implications for Post-Conflict Recovery in Northeastern Nigeria

*By Idayat Hassan and Zacharias Pieri*

### Introduction

Since 2009, the violent activities of the jihadi group popularly known as Boko Haram have caused major upheaval and insecurity in Nigeria and the neighboring Lake Chad Basin (LCB) countries. The escalation of violence in 2013 culminated with a state of emergency being announced in the northeastern region of Nigeria, but the situation did not improve. Boko Haram continued to expand, declaring a so-called caliphate in 2014 and initiating in the next year a pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>418</sup> By November 2014, the deputy governor of Borno State commented that if Boko Haram continued at its current pace, it would only be a short time before “the three northeastern states will no longer be in existence.”<sup>419</sup>

Such predictions did not come true. A multinational force including Chadian and Nigerien troops to support Nigerian troops in Borno broke Boko Haram's momentum in the run-up to Nigeria's presidential elections in February 2015, and since then, Boko Haram has lost the majority of its territory, though not its operational capacity.<sup>420</sup> While many studies focus on the state response to the conflict, the aim of this article is to consider the response of non-state actors, and in particular community-based armed groups (CBAGs), to Boko Haram. The most famous CBAG in northeastern Nigeria has come to be the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), or *yan gora* (“youth with sticks”), which has been credited with a level of success in helping to change the tide against Boko Haram.

Set up in June 2013, the CJTF comprises predominantly young male civilians who want to identify and apprehend Boko Haram insurgents amidst growing insecurity in northern Nigeria. Initially, the CJTF “were not given arms, but armed themselves with sticks and machetes,” though over time they came to acquire locally made guns to aid themselves in manning checkpoints.<sup>421</sup> At its essence, the CJTF is a distinct typology of CBAG known as “vigilantism,” and vigilantes may be defined as “citizens who organize themselves into groups to take the law into their own hands in order to reprimand criminals,” or as “associations in which citizens have joined together for self-protection under conditions of disorder.”<sup>422</sup>

Vigilantes, according to Schubert, can be distinguished from militias and gangs “in that their primary function is providing security, rather than pursuing their political or economic interests.”<sup>423</sup> The problem, however, is that vigilante groups have the propensity to reorient towards militias or gangs over time. An example of this can be found in South Africa with the People Against Gangsterism (PA-

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418 Jacob Zenn and Zacharias Pieri, “How much Takfir is too much Takfir?: The Evolution of Boko Haram's Factionalization,” *Journal For Deradicalization* 11 (2017): p. 282.

419 Austin Ajai, “Borno Govt. Raises Alarms, Says Boko Haram May Capture Entire Three North-East States in Days,” *Premium Times*, November 3, 2014.

420 Zacharias Pieri and Jacob Zenn, “The Boko Haram Paradox: Ethnicity, Religion, and Historical Memory in Pursuit of a Caliphate,” *African Security* 9:1 (2016): p. 66.

421 “Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands: War crimes committed by the Nigerian Military,” Amnesty International, February 2, 2015.

422 R. M. Brown, *Strain of Violence: historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 130.

423 Moritz Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs and Vigilantes,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 36:2 (2015): p. 303.

GAD). PAGAD originated in a network of disparate anti-drug, anti-crime groups and neighborhood watches frustrated by the state's inability to tackle problems facing communities. PAGAD went from a popular anti-crime movement to a violent, "vigilante organization and, since 1998, an urban terror group threatening not just the state's monopoly on the use of coercive force but the very foundations of constitutional democracy."<sup>424</sup>

Because of their tendency to "turn bad and because of the threat to stability they pose when they have transformed, CBAGs are a serious problem for the countries in which they form and for international actors operating in those countries."<sup>425</sup> The Nigerian government will have to think carefully about how to manage the CJTF once Boko Haram violence is curtailed, and as such this article will consider possible avenues for the future trajectory of the CJTF.

The CJTF should be contextualized within the literature on CBAGs, most of which emerge in situations of state fragility when the state is unable to deal with increasing levels of violence toward civilian populations. Such groups form in order to protect their own communities, to address real grievances, and to right manifest injustices.<sup>426</sup> The significance of these groups, as Dowd and Dury note, is that they can attest to the ways in which communities in "conflict affected areas navigate security" and includes negotiating not only a "hostile insurgency force" but also the "sometimes predatory, often ineffective response of state security forces."<sup>427</sup> Aside from the CJTF, there are many examples of such groups, including PAGAD in South Africa,<sup>428</sup> the Arrow Boys in South Sudan,<sup>429</sup> and Local Defense Units in Uganda.<sup>430</sup> Vigilante groups in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have also played a major role in combating Boko Haram. As the International Crisis Group reports, "they make military operations less blunt and more effective and have reconnected these states somewhat with many of their local communities, but they have also committed abuses and become involved in the war economy."<sup>431</sup>

This article is primarily concerned with the way in which frustrated and seemingly marginalized civilians in northeastern Nigeria have mobilized themselves in the form of CBAGs against increased insecurity and violence in their localities from both Boko Haram and the Nigerian military. The article begins with a historical account of the origins, formation, and evolution of the CJTF and considers the role that it has played in the fight against Boko Haram. The chapter argues that by virtue of its knowledge of the local terrain, cultures, and languages of northeastern Nigeria, the CJTF has been effective in capturing myriad Boko Haram fighters, defending local communities, and helping to turn the tide against the group. The article also argues that an unintended but important consequence of CJTF activities has been to push Boko Haram to ramp up violence against civilians, especially those who are suspected of collaborating with the CJTF. The article also considers the changing dynamics in the relationship between the CJTF and the Nigerian military, as well as examining some of the allegations of human rights violations leveled against the CJTF. The CJTF operate within an ineffective state and as such have had to take on state-like roles, including security enforcement and intelligence gathering. In essence, the CJTF operates at the "frontier of the Nigerian state, blurring the boundaries

424 Bill Dixon and Lisa-Marie Johns, "Gangs, PAGAD and the State: Vigilantism and Revenge Violence in the Western Cape," *Violence and Transition Series 2* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2001).

425 Moritz Schuberth, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs and Vigilantes," *Contemporary Security Policy* 36:2 (2015): p. 312.

426 Ales de Waal and Rachel Ibrek, "Hybrid Social Movements in Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 31:2 (2013): p. 310.

427 Caitriona Dowd and Adam Drury, "Marginalisation, Insurgency and Civilian Insecurity: Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army," *Peacebuilding* 5:2 (2017): p. 148.

428 Dixon and Johns.

429 Magnus Taylor, "On the Trail of Uganda's Arrow Boys," International Crisis Group, March 16, 2017.

430 Justine Nannyonjo, "Conflicts, poverty and human development in Northern Uganda," *Round Table* 94 (2005): pp. 473-488.

431 "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram," *Africa Report* 244 (2017): p. i.

between the state and what normally falls outside of it.”<sup>432</sup> The article concludes by arguing that given the propensity for many CBAGs to turn violent over time, the Nigerian government will have to think carefully about how to reintegrate the group back into mainstream society. In that regard, this article also considers a number of potential trajectories for the CJTF.

### Origins of the CJTF

Nigeria’s response to the reign of terror by Boko Haram in the northeast of the country was to deploy its Joint Task Force (JTF), consisting of the various branches of the armed forces, State Security Services, and police, under a unified command structure. The JTF operations in the northeast “have generally been repressive relying heavily on operations to kill and capture ‘scores’ of Boko Haram insurgents since the movement was first brutally crushed in 2009.”<sup>433</sup> Despite a huge amount of spending on countering Boko Haram’s violence by the Nigerian government, little of that money was making its way to the frontlines, and insecurity in the region was on the rise in 2013. Trapped between the violence of Boko Haram on the one hand and the incompetence of the military response on the other, were civilians whose livelihoods were being destroyed.

In this context, the event that led to the formation of the CJTF was when in May 2013, Baba Lawan Jafar, a trader from Maiduguri who would later become the overall Chairman of the CJTF in Borno State, chased down and captured a Boko Haram gunman with only a stick handed to him by the soldiers of the JTF.<sup>434</sup> This act led one Modu Milo and thousands of other youths to follow Jafar’s example and to join the war against Boko Haram with whatever basic tools they had. By June 2013, roughly 500 vigilantes had come together in Maiduguri, and armed with rudimentary weapons such as sticks, clubs, machetes, daggers, and bows and arrows, “began organizing against Boko Haram by daily street patrols and house-to-house searches, complementing the ineffective counter-terrorism operations of the Nigerian army.”<sup>435</sup>

They became known as the CJTF, indicating that they operated as a counterpart to the JTF, or at the very least, that they considered themselves an elite unit of comrades who could thwart the activities of Boko Haram. In the words of one CJTF member who did not wish to be named, “We’ve passed many stages in Maiduguri, many of them terrible by nature and caused by Boko Haram. They pushed us to the wall and we had to bite back, so to speak,” and added that they swore to the Holy Qur’an to expose them.<sup>436</sup> The motivation behind setting up what became the CJTF was the frustration of youths and other civilians in Borno State over the lack of state capacity to prevent the incessant violence carried out by Boko Haram.

While Jafar’s actions were spontaneous, the need for a body like the CJTF by 2013 was already well recognized. As the campaign against Boko Haram intensified with a state of emergency offensive launched in the three states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa in May 2013, hundreds of youth were caught in between the crossfire of the military and Boko Haram. They had to choose a side. From the perspective of many locals in the northeast, “their community had to fight Boko Haram so as to deflect the security forces’ suspicion and retaliation.”<sup>437</sup> Many civilians felt caught between the military on

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432 Oluwaseun Bamidele, “Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) – A Community Security Option: A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach to Counter-Terrorism,” *Journal for Deradicalization* 7 (2016): p. 135.

433 Afeikhena Jerome, “Lessons from Colombia For Curtailing The Boko Haram Insurgency In Nigeria,” *PRISM* 5:2 (2015): p. 100.

434 The JTF responds to issues of piracy, pipeline vandalism, illegal oil bunkering, crude oil theft, illegal refining, kidnapping, and, with regard to Boko Haram, counterterrorism.

435 Daniel E. Agbiboa, “National heroes or coming anarchy? Vigilant youth and the war on terror in Nigeria,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (2017), p. 9.

436 Hamza Idris, Yahaya Ibrahim, and Ibrahim Sawab, “Who are Borno’s Civilian JTF?” *Daily Trust*, March 29, 2014.

437 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 5.

the one side engaged in arbitrary detention of youths, some of whom would disappear or be executed, while on the other side Boko Haram rampantly killed locals.<sup>438</sup> Those who sided with the military—the majority—sought the option of joining the CJTF.<sup>439</sup>

The security agencies welcomed the CJTF in recognition of the role grassroots CBAGs play in counterinsurgency operations.<sup>440</sup> One early member of the CJTF gave the following narrative as an explanation of why the CJTF came to be valued and promoted by the JTF:

“In late May last year [2013], some gunmen came to a shop in Babban Layi business district with the intention to rob, but were resisted. When we realized they had no ammo in their guns, we floored them and collected their guns, tied them up and handed them over to nearby soldiers. Later in the day, the soldiers came to thank us and urged us to continue doing we’re doing.” That was how the idea of “community policing” by the ‘Civilian JTF’ spread to other areas across Maiduguri, leading to hundreds of Boko Haram members being apprehended.<sup>441</sup>

More than this, however, the CJTF was also able to bring other skills to the table, such as knowledge of languages and the terrain in the northeastern Nigeria. Troops in the Nigerian military are recruited from throughout Nigeria, and so when deployed to the northeast to fight Boko Haram, these troops often lack knowledge of the local terrain and local languages. Because of this, it can be difficult for those troops to gather intelligence in a timely manner, and so allows insurgents to remain multiple steps ahead of the soldiers and police who are pursuing them.<sup>442</sup> This local intelligence gap was the challenge that the Nigerian military and Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin region constantly faced. At the onset of the insurgency, most of the deployed security personnel had no knowledge of the local terrain in northeastern Nigeria and could not speak Kanuri and other local languages, resulting in major challenges in distinguishing civilians and enemy combatants.<sup>443</sup> The CJTF, which is comprised of indigenes from among the over 30 ethnic groups in Borno, thus filled a gap for the military.

### Evolution of the CJTF

The CJTF has evolved into a complex and hierarchical organization with each local government area in each state in the northeast having its own commander. Further to this, the CJTF in Maiduguri is organized into 10 sectors within two major segments of concentration: the Maiduguri Municipal Council (MMC) and Jere Local Government Area (LGA).<sup>444</sup> The branch operating in the MMC is mobile and not limited to Maiduguri, with deployments outside of its mobilization area as far as Lagos State in southwestern Nigeria when perusing fleeing Boko Haram members. Fifty members of the CJTF work in both sectors and are supported by volunteers in different LGAs who have chosen to

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438 Rafael Serrano and Zacharias Pieri, “By the Numbers: The Nigerian State’s Efforts to Counter Boko Haram,” in Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos ed., *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria* (Leiden: French Institute for Research in Africa and African Studies Centre, 2014).

439 Afeno Super Odomovo, “Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria,” *Age of Human Rights Journal* 3 (2014).

440 There are some who argue that the military actually orchestrated the establishment of the CJTF and coordinated the set-up structure. “Civilian vigilante groups increase dangers in northwestern Nigeria,” IRIN News, December 12, 2013.

441 Idris, Ibrahim, and Sawab.

442 More often than not, this precise intelligence comes from residents of the communities in which insurgencies operate. The United States military recognized this in its counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and subsequently created local intelligence and security units known as the Sons of Iraq (SOI) and Afghan Local Police (ALP). These indigenous units helped secure local infrastructure from insurgent attacks and filled the conventional military’s intelligence gap at the local level, providing soldiers with timely and accurate information that led to the capture of insurgent leaders and disruption of insurgent cells.

443 Vesselin Popovski and Benjamin Maiangwa, “Boko Haram’s attacks and the people’s response: A ‘fourth pillar’ of the responsibility to protect?” *African Security Review* 25:2 (2016): p. 167.

444 Agbiboa, p. 12.

become members. (There are 27 LGAs in Borno State.)

Baba Lawan Jafar has reportedly said that the CJTF numbers 15,541 members, and is split in the following ways: 10,000 in Adamawa, 1,200 in Bauchi, 1,800 in Borno, 715 in Gombe, 1,156 in Taraba, and 670 in Yobe.<sup>445</sup> The size of the volunteer force grew to approximately 30,000 individuals, whose biometric data is supposed to be collected but it is doubtful that this has been implemented. Nearly 2,000 of the CJTF have received ‘formal’ paramilitary training, while the military, according to the CJTF, also trained an estimated 750 CJTF ‘special forces,’ who work closely with the military in their everyday operations in towns such as Mubi and Maiwa in Adamawa State.<sup>446</sup> There is also an intelligence-gathering unit in the CJTF, comprising 100 officers who are spread across the states of the country. Because of this, the CJTF has taken on some state-like roles and has been operating at the “frontier of the Nigerian state, blurring the boundaries between the state and what normally falls outside of it.”<sup>447</sup>

While the CJTF is mostly comprised of men who have reached the required age of 18 to be eligible to join, the organization also allows women to join its ranks, and this is an opportunity that women are starting to pursue. Importantly, to address Boko Haram’s increasing use of female suicide bombers and attackers, the CJTF set up a women’s wing. Boko Haram has played on the common perception of women as non-violent to recruit and mainstream women into its organization, including using them to gather intelligence, recruit, and promote radical ideologies to indoctrinate abductees and other converts to Islam in Boko Haram enclaves as well as to utilize them as suicide bombers. Because of this, the women in the CJTF conduct pat-downs of women in churches, mosques, and other public places; patrol towns and villages; gather intelligence; and arrest suspected female insurgents.<sup>448</sup> Their role is crucial and takes the upper hand away from Boko Haram, though it is not always easy for women to operate as part of the CJTF. One prominent female member of the CJTF, Fatima Mohammed, commented that “it’s harder to do this work as a woman” and admitted that she feels more “vulnerable if something were to go wrong.” Her family in her home village of Gamboru Ngala, 90 miles outside Maiduguri, wants her to stop, “but I have no option,” she said. “Boko Haram is now in a weaker position than when the C.J.T.F. was formed.”<sup>449</sup>

Some of the women recruited by the CJTF come from families of hunters, though there are many who do not. Women in some instances have been empowered to command groups of fighters and take part in active fighting alongside men.<sup>450</sup> Northeastern Nigeria has experienced many attacks by Boko Haram and through the efforts of the female CJTF members, several attacks have been thwarted through successful intelligence gathering.<sup>451</sup>

Funding for the CJTF has mostly come from the Borno State government, which donated over 60 vehicles to the group. Its formation was also facilitated by buy-in from Borno State Governor Kashim Shettima. In addition to the Borno State government, the CJTF also received handout donations from citizens and some private politicians as well as also sponsorship from the North East Regional Initiative (NERI), which supported training on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC).<sup>452</sup>

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445 Bamidele, p. 132.

446 Transcript of focus group discussion with State Executive Council of the CJTF, May 2016.

447 Bamidele, p. 135.

448 Idayat Hassan, “The role of women in Countering Violent Extremism: The Nigerian experience with Boko Haram,” *Peace Insight*, March 20, 2017.

449 Alexis Okeowo, “The Women Fighting Boko Haram,” *New Yorker*, December 22, 2015.

450 Chitra Nagarajan, “Gender Assessment for Northeastern Nigeria,” conducted for Managing Conflict in Northeastern Nigeria, 2017.

451 Hassan, “The role of women in Countering Violent Extremism.”

452 Interview by Idayat Hassan of CJTF members, Maiduguri, November 2017.

To curb discontent in the CJTF about its members sacrificing their current employment opportunities to join, the Borno State government also set up the Borno Youths Empowerment Scheme (BOYES). BOYES supports the work of the CJTF by providing each BOYES member with an allowance of 15,000 naira (approximately \$50 USD) per month.<sup>453</sup> In addition to this, the scheme allows for participants to receive limited military training, uniforms, patrol cars, and identification documents.<sup>454</sup> The CJTF has also received support from the Every Nigerian Do Something Foundation (ENDS), development partners, and residents of Borno State. It was initially hoped that the BOYES program would train up 6,000 members, but it was stopped in 2015 in order to convert the training site into a camp for an estimated one million IDPs in Borno.<sup>455</sup> “But stopped at around 1,850, apparently due to the army’s uncertainty about training so many potentially unreliable persons.”<sup>456</sup>

What makes the CJTF different from other militia groups operating in Nigeria is that most other militia groups are ethnic in orientation and oppose either the government or rival ethnic groups.<sup>457</sup> By contrast, the CJTF is based on an objective: to oust Boko Haram and end the insurgency in Borno State and its environs. Moreover, as part of the bi-religious nature of the CJTF, new recruits are required to swear an oath using the Bible or Qur’an—depending on the faith to which they belong—before joining. The CJTF also claims that members work under the strict rules that a member of the CJTF must not take laws into his/her hands and any insurgents identified must be reported to the police. In this regard, Abba Khalil, the state coordinator of CJTF, stated that “if you see an insurgent you know is a member of Boko Haram, and even if it is a member of your family that this person killed, you let us hand him over to the authorities.”<sup>458</sup> In the same vein, Khalil argues that CJTF are professional enough to even turn over to the authorities members of their own families who are found to have associations with Boko Haram. Khalil did this himself, turning over his 18-year-old nephew, whom he later watched executed by the military, and later said that he had “no regrets.”<sup>459</sup>

In another digression from other local militia groups in Nigeria, the CJTF initially operated as a pro-government force, working closely with the Nigeria security forces to gather intelligence and perform some combat roles alongside the Nigerian military in routing out the insurgents. It has been reported that the military frequently took CJTF members on military operations, and according to military documents, the military relied heavily on CJTF for its operations in the northeast.<sup>460</sup> For example, “in its August 2013 report, the army’s Joint Investigation Team (JIT) mentioned the contribution of CJTF to the success of military operations.”<sup>461</sup> However, there had been some level of confusion over “who is who,” and a power tussle ensued between the army and CJTF. As the CJTF evolved, the army started to see the latter as attempting to usurp its authority while the CJTF saw itself as the military’s eyes and ears and the first responders manning the roadblocks in towns and villages. The CJTF were also on the frontlines of Boko Haram violence often with none of the weapons available to the armed forces, and as such have often paid the price of its commitment to fight Boko Haram with their members’ lives. Armed with little more than traditional weapons, 680 CJTF members were

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453 The BOYES was introduced as an all-inclusive blueprint aimed at transforming “youths into becoming more productive,” according to Governor Shettima. See “War Against Boko: Borno Holds Orientation for 800 ‘Boyes’ Civilian JTF,” NewsRescue, September 28, 2013. The CJTF secretary in an interview claimed to have been the chair of the committee, and it was one attempt to stop the discontent within the group as no remuneration was going to be given to the volunteers or post-conflict plans. Idayat Hassan, in-depth interview, May 3, 2016.

454 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 5.

455 Agbiboa, p. 16.

456 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 5.

457 For example, the Ombatse militia in Nassarawa State functions as a vigilante group and also as an Eggon self-determination group.

458 Author interview, state coordinator of the CJTF, Abuja, Nigeria, May 2016.

459 Alexis Okeowo, “Inside the Vigilante Fight Against Boko Haram,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 9, 2014.

460 “Stars on their shoulders,” p. 26.

461 Ibid.

killed in the conflict from May 2013 to July 2017.<sup>462</sup>

The military also distrusts the CJTF and believes that CJTF ranks have been infiltrated by Boko Haram Fifth Columnists (which is probably true in some cases), along with criminals and other miscreants.<sup>463</sup> The CJTF, however, see themselves as community defenders who receive little or no remuneration for their work and no insurance coverage.<sup>464</sup> The relationship between the military and the CJTF began going awry around 2015, but it hit a nadir in February 2017 with the arrest of the founder of the CJTF, Baba Lawan Jafar, over his alleged links to Boko Haram, which caused some CJTF leaders to refuse to cooperate with the army.<sup>465</sup> The CJTF has also raised concerns about the military, alleging that some soldiers sell weapons to Boko Haram as a means of earning extra cash and that they are too lenient with suspects handed over to them by the CJTF.<sup>466</sup>

On top of the tussles with the military, the CJTF has also been reportedly weakened by factionalism and indiscipline; there are complaints that members abuse drugs and alcohol and refuse to heed instructions. Regular complaints of irregular pay from the Borno State government and the lack of health insurance and even fuel for their vehicles has also affected morale. Moreover, since the Nigerian government launched in April 2016, a program in Gombe State called “Operation Safe Corridor (OSC)<sup>467</sup> to engage in Deradicalisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DRR) of repentant Boko Haram members and cater for ex-insurgents, there has been discontent among CJTF members. They claim that several CJTF members are in detention for petty crimes that the government would not pardon, yet the government is intent on not only forgiving Boko Haram insurgents but even providing job opportunities and education for them.<sup>468</sup>

### Ups and Downs of the CJTF

As CJTF members operate largely near their places of residence, working with the CJTF has helped the Nigerian military overcome the problem of identifying Boko Haram members. From 2011 to 2013, elite elder statesmen in Borno under the auspices of Borno Elders and Leaders of Thought (BELT) criticized the Nigerian military for being heavy-handed and using indiscriminate force against the local population and called for the withdrawal of the JTF from the state.<sup>469</sup> BELT alleged that the Nigerian military came into the communities and maimed and destroyed property due to lack of knowledge of how to distinguish insurgents from the general populations. In a press statement dated July 12, 2011, BELT also accused Nigerian soldiers of arson, murder, looting, and rape of young girls.<sup>470</sup> However, the formation of the CJTF was able to stem the problem of identification for some time. According to the Borno State coordinator of the CJTF, Abba Khalil, “immediately after the CJTF became active, there was less bombing, less kidnapping, less killing. How did we achieve the success? We the good Samaritans [the CJTF] started showing members of Boko Haram to the security outfit, as we know who Boko Haram members are. They live in our communities, but previously we feared the military.”<sup>471</sup>

462 “Civilian JTF loses 680 Members to Boko Haram Insurgency,” *Vanguard*, July 9, 2017.

463 There have been many allegations of rape made against the CJTF. See Samuel Malik, “Civilian JTF: The Making of a Human Time Bomb,” *Premium Times*, May 19, 2015.

464 Idayat Hassan, “Boko Haram – the fear, the conspiracy theories, and the deepening crisis,” *IRIN Analysis*, August 30, 2017.

465 Idayat Hassan, “Boko Haram: Down but Far from Out,” *IRIN News*, May 24, 2017.

466 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 14.

467 See Max Siollun, “Can Boko Haram Be Defeated?” *New York Times*, May 18, 2016.

468 Focus group discussion with CJTF sector head, August 20, 2017.

469 Hamza Idris and Yahaya Ibrahim, “Nigeria: Borno Elders, JTF Trade Blames,” *Daily Trust*, July 15, 2011.

470 “Borno Elders Join Call on FG to Withdraw JTF,” *Sahara Reporters*, July 14, 2011.

471 Idayat Hassan, focus group discussion with communities in Maiduguri, Damaturu in Borno and Yobe states respectively, Borno, Adamawa, May 2017.

However, whatever the initial gain, this was to be short-lived, as the CJTF has been accused of fingering opponents as Boko Haram members, which has led to several allegations of human rights violations. In fact, in the quest for accountability, many of the victims of the insurgency claim they want accountability from the men of the CJTF who they allege violated their rights.<sup>472</sup>

The involvement of the CJTF in the fight against insurgency also had a significant impact on the casualties recorded during the insurgency—although paradoxically in a negative way at first. In areas where the CJTF has been active, violence against civilians from Boko Haram increased. The formation of the CJTF and its active perusal of Boko Haram has incited the movement to directly target civilians in order to deter them from joining or collaborating with the CJTF. In a statement sent to journalists by Boko Haram on June 18, 2013, the spokesperson of Boko Haram was quoted as saying, “We have established that the youth in Borno and Yobe States are now against our cause. They have connived with security operatives and are actively supporting the government of Nigeria in its war against us. We have also resolved to fight back. We hereby declare an all-out war on you because you have formed an alliance with the Nigerian military and police to fight our brethren.”<sup>473</sup>

To buttress the seriousness of the threat, a few hours after issuing this threat, Boko Haram killed around 22 people, including students and fishermen, in Borno and Yobe states.<sup>474</sup> Rather than the war abating in Borno State, it escalated, with Boko Haram resorting to more violence against civilians. Bama, for instance, witnessed a total of 11 heavy casualty attacks between May 7, 2013, and September 1, 2015. In the same vein, Baga and its surrounding villages were the site of the worst massacres committed by Boko Haram between January 3 and January 7, 2015, where Boko Haram is alleged to have killed between 150 and 2,000 people.<sup>475</sup>

This kind of escalated violence against civilians as a result of the formation and activation of CBAGs can be seen in areas outside of Nigeria, too. There is evidence of extreme Boko Haram violence in response to vigilantism in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In Niger, for example, “the communities of Lamana and Ngoumao, among the few to have set up armed units, were brutally attacked in June 2015, and 38 villagers were killed.”<sup>476</sup> In Uganda, areas of the country that had active CBAGs fighting against the Lord’s Resistance Army had “an average of 73 recorded attacks against civilians over the duration of the conflict; compared to an average of 25 attacks per region in areas with no recorded non-state actors.”<sup>477</sup>

According to Boko Haram, it was attacking the civilians and their villages to serve as a deterrent to other civilians considering joining the fight against it. This, however, led to a major shift in attitudes of the local populace toward Boko Haram. Many who may have initially been sympathetic toward the group’s claim of acting in favor of the people against the state started to see the brutal attacks on citizens as unacceptable. Thus, rather than intimidating civilians, Boko Haram’s attacks spurred more civilians to join the CJTF and support the government’s counterinsurgency efforts. This also resulted in improved confidence and collaboration between the CJTF and government forces.

The acceptance of the CJTF by the local population contributed to the decimation of the insurgents, particularly in populated urban areas and towns as well as an increase in local populations who had previously openly or tacitly supported the insurgents to collaborate against them. This was especially

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472 “Prospects for Transitional Justice Initiative in the North East Nigeria,” Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).

473 “Boko Haram Declares War on Borno, Yobe Youth for Assisting Vigilante Activities,” *Premium Times*, June 18, 2013.

474 Hamza Idris, “Nigeria: 22 Killed as Boko Haram Launches Reprisal on Youths in Maiduguri,” *All Africa*, June 19, 2013.

475 The Nigerian government put the official figure of dead at 150 while the Human Right Watch puts the figures between dozens and 2000 deaths. See Nnenna Ibeh, “Nigerian military denies 2,000 killed in Baga; says about 150 died,” *Premium Times*, January 12, 2015; Mausi Segun, “What Really Happened in Baga, Nigeria?” Human Rights Watch, January 14, 2015.

476 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 13.

477 Dowd and Drury.

the case in Maiduguri, where the insurgents operated on an almost daily basis between 2013 to 2015. With the formation of the CJTF, the insurgents have generally not been able to carry out high intensity operations. However, all of this changed as Boko Haram proved adaptable and resilient. Starting in 2015, Boko Haram began to regularly attack the Borno State capital of Maiduguri through the use of asymmetric attacks, IEDs, and child suicide bombers.<sup>478</sup> The insurgents have further perfected their travel logistics, now using camels, donkeys, and horses as means of movement. However, the success of the insurgents is also connected to the lack of discipline, war fatigue, low morale, and politicization of the CJTF.

### CJTF and Human Rights Abuses

While the CJTF model has had successes in curtailing the insurgency, it must also be noted that the group's operations have not entirely deviated from that of previous militias in different parts of Nigeria. The CJTF has come under increasing suspicion of working for politicians by providing fronts and attacking perceived political opponents. This is similar to the *modus operandi* of similar vigilante groups across Nigeria, such as the Bakassi Boys, the Oodua People's Congress, and the Yandaba boys, who also engage in similar political activities. Some observers suspect current Borno Governor Shettima's BOYES program is partially political clientelism, an attempt to turn the vigilantes into a political network using counterinsurgency funding.<sup>479</sup> The International Crisis Groups points to the 2015 election campaign in which numerous CJTF members were seen at rallies of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Shettima's current party, though "it is not clear how much control he has over the CJTF, but throughout the Lake Chad region politicians on all sides are keen on cultivating relations with these groups."<sup>480</sup>

The CJTF has also been accused of summary executions and participation in military-led extrajudicial killings. For instance, video footage published by Amnesty International of a gruesome attack alleged to have taken place on March, 14, 2014, shows what appear to be members of the Nigerian military and CJTF using a knife to slit the throats of a series of detainees before dumping them into an open mass grave.<sup>481</sup> As the cries for justice continue to be aired, victims' groups are also emerging to pursue accountability. One such group is the Knifar Movement (in Kanuri, this roughly translates to "we must get justice at all cost"), which is a loosely organized group of displaced women and victims of conflict in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>482</sup> The group is seeking truth-telling and compensation and to reunite with their relatives. In its petition, the movement attached a list of 466 persons they claim died in Bama Hospital between December 2015 and July 2016 and another 1,229 persons currently in detention.<sup>483</sup> It also expressed fear that children as young as five years old may be held in Giwa Barracks. It further alleged in a YouTube video that there was ill treatment, extrajudicial killings, and poor living conditions for the children in detention and accused the military and men of the CJTF of raping women and girls in Bama Hospital and the internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps near Maiduguri.<sup>484</sup> Presently, men of the CJTF have several cases before them in different courts, which were brought by relatives of victims against the CJTF for brutalizing, arson, maiming, or wrongfully accusing their family of being Boko Haram members.

The CJTF has also been accused of recruiting and using child soldiers in the war against the insur-

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478 For example, see "16 killed in Maiduguri suicide bomb attacks," *Premium Times*, October 23, 2017.

479 "Watchmen of Lake Chad," p. 18.

480 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

481 "Nigeria: Gruesome footage implicates military in war crimes," Amnesty International, August 5, 2014.

482 A video from the Knifar Movement is available at "Knifar petition," Knifar Movement, YouTube, May 24, 2017.

483 See Tobi Soniyi, "Displaced North-east Women Protest Presidential Panel's Snub," *ThisDay*, October 9, 2017.

484 See "Knifar petition."

gency,<sup>485</sup> although it signed an Action Plan with UNICEF to end the practice in November 2017.<sup>486</sup> In some cases, boys younger than the age of 18 were keen to join, wanting to show that they, too, could be part of the solution against Boko Haram, but many children may have also been forcefully recruited. In a joint report by UNICEF and the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Program, it was claimed that children associated with the CJTF were “mainly used for intelligence related purposes, search operations, night patrols, crowd control and to man guard posts.” Additionally, it was also reported that some children also “conducted arrests of suspected Boko Haram elements while others allegedly participated in combat during the initial emergence of the CJTF and were reportedly exposed to high levels of violence, including taking part in killings, body mutilation and even parading body parts.”<sup>487</sup> This was further buttressed by the indictment of the CJTF for using child soldiers by the United States in its Trafficking in Persons report in 2016.<sup>488</sup>

The CJTF has also been accused of raping women, false arrests, imprisonment, and arson. For example, reports from IDP camps allege the CJTF forcefully coerced females to have sex with them in return for food and protection. There is also evidence believed to be credible that CJTF resorts to arson on perceived enemies’ property. One such incident that generated public outcry was the burning down of the home of Mala Othman, the erstwhile chairman of defunct All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in Borno State, on allegations that he was a Boko Haram sponsor.<sup>489</sup>

Damning reports from human rights groups and citizens continue to suggest CJTF members have committed international war crimes and should be brought to book in order for peace, justice, and reconciliation to prevail in northeastern Nigeria. Meanwhile, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has established six possible cases of international crimes against Boko Haram and two others against the Nigerian military. Already, the conflict between the Boko Haram and the Nigerian government has been declared by the prosecutor of the ICC as a non-international armed conflict.<sup>490</sup> Preliminary investigations have alleged the Nigerian military committed gross human rights violations in the process of stemming the conflict, just as the CJTF has also been accused of committing war crimes against civilians and Boko Haram insurgents.

### Post-Conflict Scenarios

It is clear that while the CJTF have had a high level of success in combating Boko Haram and turning the tide against the movement, the future of the CJTF is unclear. Increasing allegations of human rights abuses and tensions with the military are pushing policymakers to think twice about the role of the CJTF, especially as Nigeria plans to move into post-conflict community rebuilding and development. Considering the history of other CBAGs (including the Bakassi Boys in southeastern Nigeria), there are further fears that if left unregulated, the CJTF may “use their power not to fight Boko Haram, but to intimidate personal enemies, and one day prove to be as dangerous as the insurgents.”<sup>491</sup> This is a point that Borno State Governor Shettima also commented on. “Unless deliberate efforts are made towards addressing issues of unemployment, illiteracy, hunger, and poverty, the Civilian JTF will be the Frankenstein monsters that might end up consuming us.”<sup>492</sup> The question that then arises is whether the CJTF, which is a group of “largely unemployed youth, desensitized to violence, and used

485 “Perceptions and Experiences of Children Associated with Armed Groups in NorthEast Nigeria,” NSRP and UNICEF, 2017.

486 “Civilian Joint Task Force in Northeast Nigeria Signs Action Plan to End Recruitment of Children,” UNICEF, September 15, 2017.

487 “Perceptions and Experiences of Children Associated With Armed Groups in Northeastern Nigeria,” NSRP/UNICEF, 2017.

488 “Trafficking in Persons Report 2016, Country Narratives, Nigeria,” U.S. Department of State, June 30, 2016.

489 “Youth Group burn Borno ANPP Chair House,” *Vanguard*, June 2, 2013.

490 “Report of the Preliminary Examination Activities 2013,” International Criminal Court, November 2013.

491 Agbiboa, p. 14.

492 Okeowo, “The Women Fighting Boko Haram.”

to having a feeling of power and purpose, pose a threat to the future of the region?”<sup>493</sup>

The Nigerian government has established the Presidential Committee on the North East (PCNI) to deal with rebuilding the region after the conflict, and as a result, several post-conflict reconstruction initiatives have commenced. The PCNI is mandated to serve as the national strategy, coordination, and advisory body for all humanitarian interventions and transformational and developmental efforts in northeastern Nigeria. Both state and non-state actors have made efforts toward ensuring peace building and rehabilitation, but there are gaps in terms of absence of effective linkages, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of these activities.<sup>494</sup> Moreover, none of these initiatives has sought to tackle seriously the reintegration of the CJTF, and this remain a limitation of current policy.

There is palpable agitation among the members of the CJTF about returning to living their normal lives after the insurgency. A portion of them are now employed full-time as members of the CJTF and receive a monthly stipend from the government, even if the payment is irregular. It is also important to point out that there is actually no status that is more uplifting today in Borno State than being a CJTF member. This is elevated not only through the issuing of official identity cards to members of the CJTF that state the individual is a member of the Borno Youth Association for Peace and Justice (BYAPJ), but also because the CJTF has captured the imagination of local populations.<sup>495</sup> The CJTF believe they have won the war *for Nigeria* and can completely decimate Boko haram if properly supported.<sup>496</sup>

The CJTF are, however, beginning to wonder what the government will do for them after the insurgency, particularly as they are witness to the ongoing OSC program in Gombe. According to Abba Khalil, “The [Civilian JTF] have protected the integrity of this country so they should not be dumped by the government. Government should come in and help the members of CJTF.”<sup>497</sup> Though about 250 CJTF members have been absorbed into the military, current members are requesting empowerment to enable them to take up gainful employment when disengaged from their current security duties. In essence, members of the CJTF do not wish to be discarded once the conflict is over, but hope that their willingness to fight against Boko Haram will leverage some form of employment and status for themselves in the post-conflict period. Moreover, as the International Crisis Group has noted, some joined the CJTF thinking of the rights and prospects they felt membership opened for future state rewards. Such benefits could include “post-war jobs, scholarship or demobilization money in mind. Some CJTF members mention the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Program, under which insurgents were pardoned, put on the government payroll and given vocational training or education: “These rebels get something, so what should we get, we who have fought for the state?”<sup>498</sup>

The CJTF further argue that they have lost more than 680 of their members to Boko Haram, that their families have become targets of the insurgents, and that the CJTF cannot be dispensed of without compensation to them from the federal government.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, recognizing the effectiveness of the CJTF, Boko Haram has carried out various espionage patrols of CJTF members and their families to threaten or target them for attack and to learn in advance where the next CJTF operations will take place. Efforts have been made by the Nigerian government to distribute some form of relief to the widows/family members of fallen CJTF members, through the government will have to ensure that moving forward this is continued and equitable.

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493 Agbiboa, p. 15.

494 Idayat Hassan, “Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) Signs Memorandum Understanding with Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative (PCNI),” Centre for Democracy and Development, November 22, 2017.

495 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 10.

496 Idayat Hassan, interview in Maiduguri, August 2017.

497 In-depth interview conducted in Abuja, May 4, 2016, by the co-author with the leadership of CJTF, Denis Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria.

498 “Watchmen of Lake Chad,” p. 18.

499 Idayat Hassan, in-depth interview, leadership of CJTF, Abuja, May 4, 2016.

While demobilization of the CJTF is high on the agenda of the Borno State government, it is firstly important to note that whatever strategy the government proposes must be exhaustive and timely, lest the CJTF become the next danger for northeastern Nigeria. The CJTF has had access to power since 2013, and Nigeria will have another election in 2019. Nigerian history has been fraught with the use of vigilante groups as enforcers in elections. It is also important to recall that there are several works tracing the emergence of Boko Haram itself to the ECOMOG, a political militia group operating in Borno in the 2000s.

Secondly, the CJTF already has a huge cache of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in their possession. Their leaders continue to argue that these arms can be easily retrieved since the biometrics of CJTF members, including those with arms in their possession, are captured in the CJTF member database. However, there are palpable fears in Borno State that the CJTF is looting the armories of Boko Haram fighters during the clearing off operations and refusing to surrender recovered arms and monies to the authorities.<sup>500</sup>

The CJTF is already facing fragmentation in the rank-and-file of the group. Some of the members are complaining of marginalization by senior members. This led to a reorganization within the group, with the creation of previously non-existent positions such as state coordinator, while the CJTF senate was dismantled.<sup>501</sup> However, this reorganization did not help in keeping the organization united. There are now open factions within the group linked to contestation over resources, with some sectors believed to be enjoying the patronage of the political class more than others. Criminality has since crept in, particularly in the sharing of the loot of war. In the course of writing this article, some of the CJTF members interviewed who preferred to remain anonymous confirmed that they share proceeds from sales of recovered cattle and also spoils of war (i.e., money recovered during operations).<sup>502</sup>

### **Moving to the Future: A Long-Term Plan of Transitioning for the CJTF**

Throughout this chapter, the author has argued that the CJTF has functioned as a vigilante type of CBAG that formed as a direct result of the state's failure to protect the population against excessive forms of violence from Boko Haram. Functioning as a civilian defense movement, the CJTF increasingly cooperated with the Nigerian armed forces to provide local intelligence and to identify and apprehend members of Boko Haram. The CJTF can be credited with turning the tide against Boko Haram, but at the same time, it caused a spike in reprisals from Boko Haram, which wanted to dissuade any civilian cooperation with the government. Over time, the CJTF has grown and become increasingly complex in its hierarchical structures, and as with many CBAGs has faced allegations of abuse of power, human rights violations, as well as questions over the potential for the movement to 'turn bad' in the future. Because of such trends, a focus must be placed on considering the future trajectory of the CJTF within the complex context of winning the counterinsurgency battle against Boko Haram.

Counterinsurgencies are difficult and dangerous endeavors for nations to undertake. Soldiers, government officials, and non-governmental organizations are required to place themselves between the insurgents and the population in a struggle over the population's cooperation. Insurgency is a form of warfare in which all decision-making and action revolves around the population's security and 'hearts and minds.' Programs such as the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and Sons of Iraq (SOI) are examples

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500 Idayat Hassan, focus group discussion with communities in Maiduguri, March 2017.

501 The senate is akin to an elders' council.

502 Idayat Hassan, three separate focus group discussion with communities in Damaturu, Yobe State, March 2017. (The groups included the CJTF of Borno State and Hunters Group in Yobe State.)

that Nigeria can borrow from for the post-conflict engagement of CJTF.<sup>503</sup> Nigeria can also learn from mistakes made by other governments (including itself) when CBAGs were not effectively managed or reintegrated into society. The CJTF are valuable allies that Nigeria must engage after the insurgency to guard communities as the people relocate back to their locales.

Modern counterinsurgency doctrine states that between 20 and 25 counterinsurgents should be employed for every 1,000 residents.<sup>504</sup> However, Nigeria has a population of around 167 million people with an estimated police strength of 370,000, so the police to population ratio stands at one to 432 (or approximately two to 1,000 residents). This raises the question of the numerical strength of the government to successfully prosecute the counterinsurgency without the CJTF. Presently, the police are yet to be fully deployed in any of the villages (particularly in Borno State), so language and knowledge of the terrain will always constitute a challenge.

However, the continued incorporation of the CJTF into the counter-Boko Haram campaign will require flexibility and decentralized decision-making. As experiences from the ALP and SOI reveal, what works in one area may not necessarily work in another. The forces must be engaged only in defensive operations such as checkpoint defenses and infrastructure security and intelligence gathering. These civilian volunteers should not be employed in offensive operations, except when their assistance is necessary in guiding military and other security forces to known Boko Haram locations.

A security program in which the CJTF are employed must also be largely supported by the local population. It was Boko Haram's own brutality that prompted civilians to organize into CBAGs, and it was local civilian cooperation that "did far more to help expel the insurgents from Maiduguri and other major population centers than did the state's at times indiscriminate and retaliatory violence against civilians."<sup>505</sup> The public *must* continue to view these citizen volunteers as protectors and defenders and not individuals who conduct raids on private residents and businesses. Civilians in Borno State must see these groups as legitimate members of the larger Nigerian security forces. Therefore, alleged abuses by CJTF must be swiftly and publicly handled.

Credibility with the local population is crucial if the CJTF is to continue to collect the vital 'grassroots' intelligence that will eventually lead to a complete disruption of Boko Haram and help to prevent the group's reemergence. A review of Boko Haram since its departure from preaching to full-blown destructive jihad in 2010 has shown the group to be resilient and adaptable. While some of the Boko Haram camps in Sambisa Forest have been dismantled, the group has continued asymmetrical attacks in both rural and urban centers through the use of suicide bombing, including females, IEDs, and kidnapping-for-ransom. Unless official policing can be improved upon and until civilian militia groups such as the CJTF are involved in gathering intelligence while also providing community policing services, the war against the insurgency will drag on and casualties may increase.

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503 Michael Bush, "The Invited Leviathan in Iraq and Afghanistan: Strong-Men, The Afghan Local Police, And the Sons of Iraq," Naval Postgraduate School, December 2012.

504 Ibid.

505 Nathaniel D. F. Allen, "Unusual Lessons from an Unusual War: Boko Haram and Modern Insurgency," *Washington Quarterly* 40:4 (2017): p. 128.

## CHAPTER 5: Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram's Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks

*By Omar Mahmoud*

### Introduction

In the run-up to the U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation of the movement commonly referred to as Boko Haram in 2013,<sup>506</sup> one point of debate revolved around the group's domestic focus and potential for a more international trajectory in the future.<sup>507</sup> Since that time, Boko Haram has demonstrated a clear focus beyond Nigeria's borders. It has unleashed a wave of violence in all of Nigeria's Lake Chad region neighbors (Cameroon, Niger, and Chad), and in March 2015 joined the dozens of jihadi organizations around the world that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>508</sup> Nonetheless, the Nigeria-centric nature of the movement remains dominant in terms of Boko Haram's leadership, the location of its safe havens, and locus of most of its violent attacks.

It is this framing of Boko Haram—whether it is considered a Nigerian, sub-regional, regional/African, or an international movement—that has influenced how and why certain actors have responded to it. Indeed, a memo from the incoming U.S. administration under Donald J. Trump to the State Department in January 2017 reportedly even questioned why the United States has been involved in the fight against Boko Haram, ostensibly wondering how the movement affects U.S. interests.<sup>509</sup> This consideration was likely based on a narrow framing of Boko Haram as primarily a domestic Nigerian threat.<sup>510</sup>

This article examines the question of whether Boko Haram is a “domestic” or “international” movement—or where it fits on a spectrum in between those two poles—by using the following methodology.

### *Four Key Factors*

The article will undertake a historical review of Boko Haram and utilize a framework that examines four key factors underpinning the group's activity—messaging, strategy, membership, and support

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506 Boko Haram is the most common name for the movement. However, prior to the March 2015 pledge, the group's official name was *Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad*. After the March 2015 pledge, the movement became *Wilayat Gharb Afrqiyyah*, or West Africa Province. Following the split into two factions in August 2016, the Shekau group has returned to its original namesake, while the al-Barnawi faction has continued its Islamic State moniker. The term Boko Haram will be employed here for the sake of clarity, while post-August 2016 distinctions will be made by faction (Shekau or al-Barnawi).

507 For a review of some of the discussions surrounding the FTO debate, see the following. The Heritage Foundation took a strong stand in arguing that while Boko Haram has mainly targeted the Nigerian government, the movement could evolve to target the United States in the future. Morgan Lorraine Roach, “The U.S. State Department Should Designate Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization,” The Heritage Foundation, May 22, 2012. An alternative view put forth by a group of academics, led by Carl LeVan, argued against the FTO designation, stating that such a process would, in fact, internationalize a movement that had been overwhelmingly domestic to date. “Boko Haram FTO Letter to Secretary Clinton,” carllevan.com, May 21, 2012.

508 Moreover, however, the common portrayal of Boko Haram as “domestic” is not sufficient because it presumes a focus on all of Nigeria when, in fact, Boko Haram's activities have been concentrated on the northeastern portion of the country for most of its history, with less than one percent of attacks reported in southern Nigeria, and only one period in 2012-2013 when the Middle Belt was consistently the subject of violence. Boko Haram's only major attack in the south of the country was a female suicide bomb attack on a fuel depot in Lagos in June 2014. While security officials initially called the incident an accident, Shekau claimed the attack in a subsequent video message. Tim Cocks, “In Nigeria, Boko Haram-style Violence Radiates Southwards,” Reuters, July 14, 2014.

509 Helene Cooper, “Trump Team's Queries About Africa Point to Skepticism About Aid,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2017.

510 Lily Kuo, Abdi Latif Dahir, and Yomi Kazeem, “Here are answers to Donald Trump's many dubious questions about Africa,” Quartz Africa, January 17, 2017. Furthermore, delayed action against the group by countries in the Lake Chad Basin region has been due to perceptions of Boko Haram as an internal Nigerian problem. “Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram,” International Crisis Group, 2016, p. 22.

networks.<sup>511</sup> “Messaging” evaluates what Boko Haram says to determine what the group has wanted to project about the conflict, and what influences have been present in its messaging content. “Strategy” revolves around how Boko Haram has chosen to carry out its violence. The factors underlying strategic shifts in tactics, target and location, and type of attacks can explain where Boko Haram has focused its attention and why. “Membership” refers to the ethnic and national backgrounds of the foot soldiers and leaders. This data seeks to answer the question ‘who is Boko Haram?’ and provide an indication as to where the locus of the movement lies. Finally, “Support Networks” examines how Boko Haram has been able to resource itself from supply chains (funding, arms, and other goods) and patronage of both domestic and external groups.

### *Geographical Range*

The driving forces behind each of the four factors will be evaluated according a four-tiered geographic scale—domestic (internally within Nigeria’s borders); sub-regional (the Lake Chad sub-region, encompassing Cameroon, Niger, and Chad); regional (a wider range across the African continent to include activity in Senegal, Algeria, and Mali, as well as Libya, Sudan, and Somalia); and international (encompassing activity outside Africa and focused on ties to international extremist organizations like al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State).

### *Phases*

Since Boko Haram has evolved significantly since its founding, this article assesses the geographical scope of the four key factors during three phases of Boko Haram’s history. Phase I refers to when Boko Haram was a preaching group that generally abstained from outright violence from the beginning of Muhammad Yusuf’s involvement in the leadership of the group in 2002 until the July 2009 uprising.<sup>512</sup> Phase II refers to when the group began to pursue violence as a means toward societal change after Yusuf’s death in 2009 with attacks against the Nigerian government, security forces, churches, and oppositional Salafi clerics, among other targets. This covers the post-July 2009 period until the Nigerian government’s May 2013 declaration of a state of emergency. Phase III refers to when the group shifted from a primarily urban to rural focus as a result of growing military pressure, and began to more overtly align itself with international jihadi movements, culminating with Abubakr Shekau’s pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in March 2015. This phase begins in May 2013 and runs until the present.<sup>513</sup>

It is hoped that through this approach a more nuanced framing of Boko Haram can be achieved, while demonstrating shifts in both factors and time. In turn, this analysis can help policymakers and

511 The first two categories—messaging and strategy—focus on actions, in terms of what Boko Haram says (through the full range of mediums and spokesmen) and does (largely through acts of violence). The latter two categories—membership and support networks— focus on sources of sustenance, in terms of where Boko Haram’s membership comes from, and the origins and sponsors of its supply chains and other forms of assistance.

512 Members of the group did engage in a series of violent attacks on police stations in 2003-2004, causing Yusuf to even flee Nigeria for a while. This was conducted by a breakaway faction, and it is unclear the degree to which Yusuf exerted control or direction over it. The attacks were largely repelled, and Yusuf returned to the country in 2005.

513 A fourth phase could reasonably begin after Abubakr Shekau’s pledge, given that it places Boko Haram firmly on the international jihadi scene and ostensibly subordinated Shekau’s leadership to an outside actor. Nonetheless, while significant changes have occurred during this time period, it is this author’s estimation that these have been driven less by outside influence over Boko Haram and more by internal factors, which are largely seen as a continuation of dynamics resulting from the mid-2013 reinvention as a rural movement and pursuit by security forces. Moreover, the split of the movement into two major factions in August 2016 has been another major turning point in this trajectory, but largely continues previous dynamics in many ways rather than ushering in a drastic change, with Shekau reverting to pre-Islamic State practices and the Islamic State-backed Abu Musab al-Barnawi-faction continuing the Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyya mantle. “Boko Haram Has No Face, Says Jonathan; Adds He Doesn’t Give a Damn About Asset Declaration,” Sahara Reporters, June 24, 2012; Conor Gaffey, “Goodluck Jonathan Lost ‘Millions’ to Fake Boko Haram Leaders: Buhari Adviser,” *Newsweek*, January 12, 2016; “Thirty Percent of Terror Funds Sources From Outside Nigeria – Investigation,” *Vanguard*, August 2, 2015; Daniel Flynn, “Buhari Win Means Nigeria, Not Chad, to Lead Boko Haram Fight,” Reuters, April 2, 2015.

practitioners to determine appropriate intervention responses, whether they concern the overall classification of the group or revolve around a specific factor's geographic and temporal underpinnings.

## Phase I (2002-2009)

### Overview

Phase I of the group encompasses Boko Haram's evolution under founder Muhammad Yusuf. During this time, Yusuf preached openly in mosques and appeared in local media, allowing him attract a following in northeastern Nigeria. However, his base and core followership were largely centered in the Borno State capital of Maiduguri. Phase I culminated in a now infamous clash in July 2009 between Yusuf's followers and the Nigerian police. This gave way to a military-led crackdown in four cities in northeastern Nigeria from July 26-29, 2009, in which over 800 of Yusuf's followers and about two dozen Nigerian security officers were killed. The uprising ended when the Nigerian police extrajudicially killed Yusuf, thus ending his leadership over the movement and allowing for Shekau's ascension during Phase II.

### Messaging in Phase I

Messaging is one key area to evaluate the drivers of Boko Haram through an examination of references present in the group's propaganda. Messaging during Phase I primarily came in the form of sermons from Yusuf, which were an important part of his preaching (dawa)—and revenue—as they were recorded and sold throughout Nigeria and neighboring countries on audiocassettes, videos, and later CDs.<sup>514</sup> Local radio and television stations also interviewed Yusuf or broadcasted his preaching, giving him additional exposure.

In his sermons, Yusuf traced the perceived powerlessness of Muslims in Nigeria to a historical narrative regarding the impact of European colonization on diluting the Islamic character of northern Nigeria, which occurred through the introduction of Western (and English) education (i.e., boko), secular law, and democracy. According to Yusuf, the entrenchment of these developments in the Nigerian post-colonial state reflected its illegitimacy.<sup>515</sup> Yusuf advocated for a return to Qur'anic dictates that governed northern Nigeria before the colonial era as a solution, in addition to the imposition of strict sharia law. Yusuf believed it was an Islamic duty to reject the Nigerian constitution, service in the government, and participation in elections. For him, jihad was also an obligation and a means to achieving change, although his sermons indicate he was focused on *Iqamat ul-Hujja*.<sup>516</sup>

In this sense, the content of Yusuf's Hausa- and Kanuri-language discourses showed that his main drivers were his grievances rooted in the Nigerian environment, such as the Nigerian government; other Muslim leaders; and Western influences in education (like English language and mixed gender classes) and cultural norms (like the public acceptance of homosexuality and the promulgation of

514 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 10; Sani Umar, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42 (2012): pp. 118-144.

515 Yusuf also exploited bouts of Muslim-Christian violence in Nigeria as part of an overall conspiracy that was being waged against Muslims, and to present Islam as under attack. The roots of the specific contention with Western education lies within this narrative, as Yusuf viewed it as a foreign form of schooling imposed by colonizing Christian powers at the expense of traditional Muslim teachings and values.

516 This refers to "providing evidence [that the Nigerian government was *taghut*] to his followers before declaring jihad."

Christian holidays and the Christian calendar).<sup>517</sup> Nonetheless, while Nigeria-centric, the problems Yusuf raised, the solutions he sought, and his calls for a return to “pure” Islam resonated throughout the sub-region, including in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon as well.

In addition, external influences were also present. For example, Yusuf cited the Algerian experience during its civil war in the 1990s, when the military disregarded elections that the Islamists won, as an example of the futility of democracy. In his sermon on the history of Muslims, he also extolled the ideology of Usama bin Ladin, the Taliban, Sayyid Qutb, and Hassan al-Banna. In this sense, Yusuf demonstrated overlapping thought patterns with the international salafi-jihadi movement, which in turn provided the ideological underpinnings of his own movement that was based on the Nigerian experience.<sup>518</sup> This focus on jihadi movements external to Nigeria imbued Yusuf’s messaging with a distinct international flavor and implied a degree of influence and emulation, despite the fact that Phase I messaging was primarily was preoccupied by domestic considerations.

### *Strategy in Phase I*

Strategy, namely examining what actions a group pursues and why, also can reveal important insights in terms of geographic framing. Although outwardly focused on preaching during Phase I, Yusuf created an exclusive society of his followers—a “state within a state”—with institutions such as “welfare” and micro-finance that reflected the group’s worldview.<sup>519</sup> In addition, an offshoot of Yusuf’s followership in the early 2000s under the leadership of one of Yusuf’s mentors established a community in Yobe State named “Afghanistan,” where the group lived in isolation in its own Taliban-styled community. (It was eventually broken up after clashes with security forces.) These episodes indicate that Yusuf likely held aspirations for some type of territorial and administrative authority. The strident anti-government nature of his sermons also ensured a clash was almost inevitable, with Boko Haram also storing arms in its mosques and members’ homes in anticipation of a showdown.

The breakaway faction that established Afghanistan did engage in violent activity in 2003-2004, including assaulting police units in Yobe State and Borno State.<sup>520</sup> Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia to avoid being held responsible for these attacks and returned to Nigeria in 2005 only after negotiations between his followers and the government were reached.<sup>521</sup> This agreement was, however, symbolic of Yusuf’s engagement with the Nigerian state during this period, despite frequent critical rhetoric,

517 In some of his final speeches, Yusuf focused primarily on local events, complaining about the increased military presence on the streets of Maiduguri (known as Operation Flush), castigating a new rule requiring helmets for motorcycle riders, and referring to the Governor of Borno State as a “mad man.” Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf, “Tarihin Musulmai (History of Muslims),” YouTube, October 28, 2011; Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf and Mamman Nur, “Masu Gabatarwa,” YouTube, 2009; Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf, “The Foundation of the Jihadists,” 2009; Andrew Walker, “Join Us or Die: the Birth of Boko Haram,” *Guardian*, February 4, 2016; Adam Nossiter, “Niger Adds its Troops to the War on Boko Haram,” *New York Times*, February 10, 2015.

518 Alex Thurston has documented how Yusuf was influenced by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, considered to be one of the most influential modern-era jihadi theorists. Thurston noted Yusuf’s focus on concepts such as *al’wala wal bara’* (disavowal of non-Muslims) and *izhar al-din* (the active spread of Islam), stem from Maqdisi’s own work, demonstrating a degree of external overlap. Alex Thurston, “Insights into Boko Haram’s Early Thought: Muhammad Yusuf and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi,” *Jihadica*, November 2, 2016. Yusuf was not the only one inspired by external jihadi forces, which earned the group the moniker Nigerian Taliban. Key leader Aminu Tashen-Ilimi cited external inspiration during a 2006 interview, stating, “I respect them [the Taliban] and what they did very much,” followed by the foreboding admission that “Bin Laden did very good work ... with attacks he strikes fear in the enemies of Islam. I may not be ready now, but if I could do the same I would.” Emmanuel Goujon and Aminu Abubakar, “Nigeria’s ‘Taliban’ Plot Comeback from Hide-outs,” *Mail and Guardian*, January 11, 2006.

519 Walker; Ahmed Salkida, “The Genesis of Boko Haram: An Insider’s Account,” *Abusidiqu*, May 9, 2014.

520 The primary goal behind these attacks is unclear, but they appeared to degenerate into a cycle of retaliation, hostage taking, and arms seizures, aspects that would become regular futures of future Boko Haram violence.

521 One other major violent incident often attributed to Boko Haram during this period is the April 13, 2007, assassination of former Yusuf mentor Ja’afar Mahmud Adam in Kano. Ja’afar and Yusuf had clashed publicly during religious debates prior to his death. While responsibility has never officially been determined, the elimination of clerics opposed to Boko Haram’s vision of the world would become a commonly utilized tactic, and may have its roots in this period.

complicating the relationship between his preaching and actions.<sup>522</sup>

Nonetheless, relations with the government ultimately floundered, leading to occasional clashes with security forces in the run up to the July 2009 uprising, which is also when Yusuf and his followers began experimenting with the construction of explosive devices.<sup>523</sup> This would suggest that Yusuf was in the process of organizing the next step in his strategy and moving from preaching to jihad—hence Boko Haram’s post-July 2009 name as the Sunni Muslim Group for Preaching and Jihad.

In this sense, Yusuf’s strategy in Phase I was mostly driven by domestic concerns, with a goal to accumulate followers in northeastern Nigeria and convince them of his movement’s righteousness; establish quasi-state institutions, particularly in Maiduguri; and later on to prepare for a clash with the Nigerian state. On the ground level, there was little in terms of advising from organizations outside of Nigeria, or a focus on extending the struggle beyond Nigeria’s borders at this point, although inspiration behind Yusuf’s group, which was commonly known as the Nigerian Taliban at this time, certainly derived from external sources.

### *Membership in Phase I*

Examining the makeup of both leadership and rank-and-file membership can also help in determining frames. Leadership of Boko Haram during Phase I centered on Yusuf, who was born in Yobe State (Girgir).<sup>524</sup> Yusuf’s mentor, Muhammad Ali (Borno State) and some key deputies, such as Shekau (Tarmuwa Local Government Area, Yobe), Aminu Tashen-Ilimi (Bama, Borno), and Mamman Nur (Maiduguri, Borno), all hailed from northeastern Nigeria.<sup>525</sup> Yusuf’s followers at this time also primarily were Nigerians or from the bordering areas of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and tended to be from Yusuf’s Kanuri ethnic group.<sup>526</sup> In addition, sub-regional linkages were facilitated by Maiduguri’s role as a center of commerce and Islamic education in the wider Lake Chad sub-region.<sup>527</sup> Thus while the demographics of Boko Haram had a distinctive northeast Nigerian composition under Yusuf, it proved impossible to detach the movement completely from the sub-region—a common theme throughout Boko Haram’s evolution. Beyond this sub-regional aspect, however, there are few examples of Yusuf garnering significant following throughout the country.

522 It is possible Yusuf was leveraging his relationship with the Borno State government to provide space to practice his activities, while building up a support base in which he could more actively challenge the government in the future. Nonetheless, the fallout from this relationship also clearly contributed to a hardening of positions on both sides. See the ‘Support Networks’ section below for more on this aspect.

523 Walker. Borno State Deputy Governor Adamu Dibal, who was instrumental in facilitating Yusuf’s return from exile in 2005, claimed shortly after the 2009 uprising that Yusuf had been planning a major bomb attack during Ramadan a few weeks later. “Interview – Nigerian Sect Planned Bomb Attack During Ramadan,” Reuters, August 4, 2009. Yusuf reportedly was also stockpiling guns from Chad prior to his death. “Curing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency,” p. 12. In addition, weeks before the uprising, followers of Yusuf were reportedly arrested in Biu with explosive devices, while another was killed in an accidental explosion at his house, ostensibly while experimenting with explosives. Ahmed Salkida, “Sect Leader Vows Revenge,” *Daily Trust*, July 27, 2009.

524 Senator Iroegbu, “Court Releases Suspected Killers of Boko Haram Leader, Muhammad Yusuf,” *This Day*, December 21, 2015.

525 Nur, however, has also been reported as having Cameroonian origins, while others refer to his parents as from Chad. Nonetheless, he likely spent his formative years in Maiduguri. Ludovica Iaccino, “Could Ansaru Leader Mamman Nur be the Man Behind Boko Haram Split?” *International Business Times*, August 11, 2016; Uduma Kalu, “How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram,” *Vanguard*, September 3, 2011; “Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II),” pp. 19-22.

526 For example, a Nigerian security official involved in combating the July 2009 uprising noted that individuals from Niger and Chad were among the dead, while around the same time Niger expelled some of its citizens who were suspected of being Boko Haram members. “Captives Freed in Nigeria City,” BBC, July 29, 2009; “Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II),” 2014, p. 25; “Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict,” International Crisis Group, 2010, p. 37. Also in July 2009, dozens of Nigeriens with Boko Haram ties were expelled. “Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel?” International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 42. Jacob Zenn’s interviews with former Islamic students in Maiduguri in N’djamena, Chad and Yaoundé, Cameroon, June 2015.

527 A common practice is for parents from the neighboring countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to send their children to Nigeria for long periods to study Islam, with Maiduguri serving as a particular center of such activity. For example, this practice and the influence of northern Nigerian Islamic education on northern Cameroon is noted in “Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram,” pp. 3, 6.

### *Support Networks in Phase I*

Muhammad Yusuf's early rise was enabled by agreements he fostered with northern Nigerian political elites. Yusuf's return to Nigeria from Saudi Arabia after the 2003-2004 violence, for example, was due to the intervention of then Deputy Governor of Borno State, Adamu Dibal.<sup>528</sup> Yusuf also entered into a pact with aspiring Borno State Governor Ali Modu Sheriff and used his followers to support Sheriff's 2003 election bid in return for the implementation of strict sharia law across the state.<sup>529</sup> While that agreement ultimately floundered and was later cited by Boko Haram as evidence of the incompatibility of Islam and the Nigerian Government, it provided Yusuf with a platform to preach openly and increase his support base up until the 2009 clashes.<sup>530</sup>

Some funding for Yusuf's movement came from local elites, including Alhaji Buji Foi, a wealthy businessman who was appointed Commissioner of Religions Affairs in Borno State as part of the agreement with Governor Sheriff.<sup>531</sup> In addition, Yusuf's movement generated income through the provision of small enterprises, such as microcredit schemes, motor taxis, and selling drinking water.<sup>532</sup> Members also reportedly paid daily dues of N100 (0.67 USD), while wealthier supporters provided more substantial donations.<sup>533</sup> Furthermore, Yusuf did receive some external contributions from jihadi actors, including a portion that was likely funneled into Nigeria from al-Qa`ida via Sudanese salafi groups.<sup>534</sup>

In this sense, support for Yusuf's movement in Phase I came from political patronage of Nigerian actors seeking power in Nigeria or, more specifically, Borno State, along with localized financial streams from followers' donations and some direct financial support from al-Qa`ida or other salafi donors. This rendered Yusuf's movement mostly reliant on domestic support networks, which were driven by political self-interest and group loyalty, but also indicated a limited global contribution to Yusuf's support network.

### *Assessment of Phase I (2002-2009)*

Overall, Boko Haram's actions and sources of support were primarily domestic under Muhammad Yusuf from 2002 to 2009, albeit with a sub-regional and international salafi-jihadi reach. The main

528 "Interview – Nigerian Sect Planned Bomb Attack During Ramadan."

529 Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, *Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency?* (London, Chatham House, 2014), p.33; Hamza Idris, "Boko Haram: Now, Senators Sheriff, Zanna Clash on the Truth," *Daily Trust*, October 28, 2012.

530 Yusuf denounced Sheriff for not following through on his end of the bargain to implement sharia law, punctuated by the resignation of Alhaji Buji Foi from his post as Borno state's Minister of Religious Affairs in 2007. Ikechukwu Amaechi, "My Last Encounter With Boko Haram Financier – Sheriff," *Daily Independent*, August 11, 2009; Nurudeen M. Abdallah, "How Boko Haram Began, by Borno PDP," *Daily Trust*, November 23, 2011.

531 Familial connections proved important as well. Yusuf established Ibn Taymiyyah mosque in Railway Quarters of Maiduguri on land he bought with the help of his father-in-law, Baba Fugu. Ahmed Salkida, "The Genesis of Boko Haram: An Insider's Account," *Abusidiqu*, May 9, 2014.

532 Pérouse de Montclos, p. 12; Freedom Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," in Marc Antoine Pérouse de Montclos ed., *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security, and the State in Nigeria* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014); p. 163.

533 Onuoha, pp. 163-164.

534 The early linkages between Boko Haram under Yusuf and al-Qa`ida or its affiliated organizations have been covered in detail elsewhere, but the main data points revolve around the following. Usama bin Ladin dispatched a Nigerian by the name of Mohammed Ali in 2002 to support salafi groups with \$3 million, some of which reportedly found its way to Yusuf. "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 23. Mohammed Ashafa, who reportedly served as an intermediary between Boko Haram and al-Qa`ida, was arrested with Yusuf in 2005 and charged with sending 21 militants for training as a GSPC camp in Niger and receiving terrorist funding. Ikechukwu Nnochiri, "Boko Haram: How We Caught Nigerian Al Qaeda Leader – SSS," *Vanguard*, April 4, 2012. In 2007, *Daily Trust* editor Mohammed Damagun was arrested and charged with sending 14 Nigerians to a Mauritanian training camp, in addition to receiving al-Qa`ida funds and being linked to elements of Yusuf's group. Ise-Oluwa Ige, "Nigeria: FG Arraigns Damagun for Terrorism," *Vanguard*, January 17, 2007. Moreover, just after the uprising in September 2009, an arrested sect member claimed to have been trained on bomb-making techniques in Afghanistan. Isa Umar Gusau, "Taliban Taught Us Bomb Making in Afghanistan – Sect Member," *Daily Trust*, September 3, 2009.

challenge to viewing Phase I in any strict domestic or sub-regional lens is the role foreign jihadi actors may have played in inspiring group strategy and messaging, and their provision of some funding.

PHASE I	DOMESTIC	SUB-REGIONAL	REGIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Messaging	•			•
Strategy	•			•
Membership	•	•		
Support Networks	•			•

PHASE I	DOMESTIC	SUB-REGIONAL	REGIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Messaging	<i>Yusuf focused on local events</i>			<i>Yusuf preaching influenced by global Salafi movement</i>
Strategy	<i>Institutional experimentation and majority of preaching confined to Nigeria; preparing for clash with Nigerian state</i>			<i>Institutional experimentation of ‘Taliban’ group similar to external movements</i>
Membership	<i>Leadership and rank-and-file predominantly Nigerian</i>	<i>Some membership from neighboring countries</i>		
Support Networks	<i>Patronage from northeast political elites; majority of funding derived from domestic sources</i>			<i>Limited funding from AQ-linked sources</i>

**Phase II (2009-2013)**

Phase II in Boko Haram’s evolution revolved around Abubakr Shekau’s assumption of leadership following Yusuf’s death in the July 2009 crackdown. During a year of dormancy from July 2009 to September 2010, Boko Haram members regrouped clandestinely within Nigeria and the Lake Chad sub-region, with some traveling as far as the Sahel and Somalia. After Shekau announced publicly that he was the new leader, Boko Haram began carrying out attacks with an unprecedented scale of violence and a geographic reach extending throughout northeastern Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, Nigeria’s Middle Belt. Shekau was primarily responsible for initiating this path of indiscriminate violence to enact the goal of “bringing Nigeria to its knees,” as the movement pursued revenge for the

July 2009 clashes and sought the realization of a more widespread insurgency.<sup>535</sup>

### *Messaging in Phase II*

Boko Haram messaging after Yusuf's death in 2009 underwent a major transition and largely fell into three categories: video messages primarily containing speeches from Shekau (18 total in 2012-13); frequent press statements from Boko Haram spokesmen (mostly Abul Qaqa, who issued more than 50 statements between September 2011 and September 2012); and fliers distributed in northern Nigerian cities and villages. The frequency of Shekau's video messaging increased progressively starting in 2012, while press statements became infrequent after Abul Qaqa's tenure as spokesman came to an end. Fliers were utilized only sporadically.<sup>536</sup>

Shekau's initial messages starting in 2010 were strongly driven by national dynamics, and often addressed to then Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. Although Shekau spoke mostly in Hausa (with infrequent summaries in Kanuri), his speeches included Qur'anic recitations in Arabic and occasional English when mocking the Nigerian constitution, national anthem, or other colonial legacies. He also often claimed attacks, rejected rumors of his death or negotiations with the government, and engaged in anti-Christian polemics.<sup>537</sup> The list of Boko Haram's demands reflected Shekau's domestic position, as he insisted the constitution be suspended, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan renounce Christianity, the government implement sharia law throughout the country, and Nigerian security forces release women and children of sect members from detention.

Nonetheless, Shekau styled his video statements on international jihadi messaging. He placed AK-47s in the background of his videos, surrounded himself with veiled gunmen, prominently displayed a miswak (twig) in his mouth, and wore an Arab-style *kaffiya*. In addition, he utilized many of the same Qur'anic phrases to open his videos that al-Qa'ida messaging employed.<sup>538</sup> The imitation of such external messaging likely denoted an aspiration for Shekau's statements to be seen within an international jihadi context, rather than any specific external direction over them.

535 Monica Mark, "Boko Haram Vows to Fight Until Nigeria Establishes Sharia Law," *Guardian*, January 27, 2012.

536 The first major video message from Shekau emerged in January 2012. Prior to that, the sect put out one video featuring the United Nations suicide bomber after that attack in September 2011, while a video interview of Shekau in Maiduguri emerged in April 2010. Video messages featuring Shekau rose from two prior to 2012 to six in 2012 to 12 in 2013. In addition, occasional video messages that did not feature Shekau emerged, such as a clip explaining attacks on media offices in May 2012 and two videos depicting Boko Haram militants in training in April 2013. During a yearlong span from September 2011 until his reported death in September 2012, Abul Qaqa issued at least 53 statements to the press. This may have been a penname for multiple individuals, but after security forces announced the death of a Boko Haram spokesman during an operation in Kano in September 2012, statements from Qaqa ceased. In a March 2013 video, Shekau nominated Abu Zinnira as Qaqa's replacement, but he issued only two statements in early 2013 (and potentially another in September 2014). In addition, a media official by the name of Abu Zamira surfaced as part of a faction negotiating with the Nigerian government in the summer of 2013, though it is unclear if it was the same individual. Nonetheless, Shekau himself did not officially nominate another spokesman on his behalf, despite the introduction of Abu Musab al-Barnawi in that position during a January 2015 video. During audio recording of Shekau dated from December 2016, however, Shekau admitted to murdering Abu Zinnira during a leadership dispute. Nigerian press reported sightings of Boko Haram fliers on a number of occasions during this time period, which tend to be confined to just a single city or section of town. In this sense, it is difficult to accurately gauge the frequency of this tactic, given that their limited dissemination radius prevented wider outreach. Nonetheless, at least six different Boko Haram fliers were reported in 2012, a rate that became less frequent in following years. This is based on a compilation of media sources by the author. Salihu Garba, "Kwamandoin Boko Haram Sun Bar Shekau Cikin Rana," VOA Hausa, July 22, 2013; "Abubakar Shekau Kills Boko Haram Spokesman over Leadership Plot," *Vanguard*, February 24, 2017.

537 Some examples of the domestic rhetoric in Shekau's messaging include a January 2012 statement in which the Boko Haram leader said "we are also at war with Christians because ... they killed our fellows and even ate their flesh in Jos;" another January 2012 message that was directed to the residents of Kano and related the story of a Qur'an dumped in a sewer in Maiduguri; and an August 2012 statement complaining about those who say "I pledge to Nigeria, my country." Shekau also often discussed the inadmissibility of democracy and the Nigerian constitution, and mentioned events in Nigeria's Middle Belt in which Muslims were killed. His preoccupation with domestic events was also evident through specific concerns, such as the detention of wives and children of sect members by Nigerian security personnel. Some Boko Haram videos and transcripts are available online but others are not. The author has compiled many of them based on a variety of sources.

538 Jeffry R. Halverson, R. Bennet Furlow, and Steve R. Corman, "How Islamist Extremists Quote the Qur'an," Arizona State University Center for Strategic Communication, July 9, 2012.

Shekau also increasingly incorporated internationally focused themes in his messaging, with threats to world leaders ranging from Barack Obama to Ban Ki-moon to the late Margaret Thatcher; expressions of solidarity with global jihadi struggles, such as Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq and Palestine; and praise for jihadi leaders, including al-Qa`ida head Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (at least two years before the latter's declaration of a caliphate in 2014).<sup>539</sup> Also Shekau's sermons were often prefaced with Hausa—and later Arabic—*nasheeds* that venerated Shekau and outlined his anti-Christian, -Jewish, and -American views, a type of “art” also common in al-Qa`ida messaging.

The biggest departure in Phase II occurred in November 2012 when a video of Shekau saluting the “Soldiers of God in the Islamic State in Mali” was distributed through a jihadi forum. The clip featured Shekau speaking primarily in Arabic (as opposed to Hausa, which was his regular discourse prior to then) in a desert, praising bin Ladin, al-Zarqawi, and both Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>540</sup> Subsequent videos built on these themes: for example, an April 18, 2013, clip featured a group of militants shooting at targets with the words “Obama’s head” and “Kansas” inscribed above it, and in a May 2013 video Shekau called for militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq to come fight in Nigeria.<sup>541</sup> After these videos, the use of Arabic in videos with Shekau became more common.<sup>542</sup> In this sense, while the vast majority of air time was limited to domestic rhetoric, Shekau may have already begun utilizing video messaging as a means of positioning himself and elevating Boko Haram to “membership” in the broader global jihadi movement, which was then led by al-Qa`ida.

While Shekau's messaging was strongly driven by national dynamics with several semblances of international jihadism, fliers from Boko Haram—often signed in Shekau's name—and statements from Boko Haram spokesmen were primarily rooted in local dynamics, and even specific to certain cities or villages. Fliers, for example, focused on themes such as warnings to citizens against collaborating with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) militia, or to the Nigerian or Cameroonian governments against arresting Boko Haram members.<sup>543</sup> Statements from spokesman Abul Qaqa similarly were specific, such as threats to news stations about the consequences of reporting “falsehoods” about Boko Haram and cell phone providers about not sharing data with the government, or for claiming attacks.<sup>544</sup> While Abul Qaqa avoided the religious and ideological discourses that typified Shekau's messages, he explained the rationale behind attacks, issued new threats, and countered government narratives. In this sense, Abu Qaqa's messaging was closely intertwined with Boko Haram's operations, which were then concentrated in Nigeria.<sup>545</sup>

539 Some of this was not necessarily a new development, however, as Shekau told America to “die with your fury” in a September 2010 message, while a January 2012 compared his struggle with the Nigerian Government to al-Qa`ida's battle against the United States.

540 Previous Shekau statements had been filmed indoors. Following this clip, filming outdoors became a dominant setting.

541 “Boko Haram Claims Victory Over Nigerian Army in New Video,” *Premium Times*, May 29, 2013.

542 A quantitative look at messaging typifies these dynamics. Of the 16 Boko Haram video clips during this time span, 11 featured Shekau, of which five prominently dealt with international themes. Additionally, four out of 10 videos after November 2012 were distributed via jihadi forums, a break from typical methods as previous videos were primarily uploaded on YouTube or distributed directly to journalists. This is based on a compilation of media sources by the author.

543 One example is an August 2012 leaflet distributed in Maiduguri warning residents to cease providing information to security personnel. Another example is an April 2012 flier distributed in Kaduna, which warned of attacks if sect members continue to be arrested in the city. The content of these and other fliers largely came in response to localized incidents. “Boko Haram Set to Attack Kaduna, Police Say They're Ready,” *Leadership*, April 1, 2012; “Disregard Threat Messages from Boko Haram, JTF Tells Residents in Maiduguri, Channels Television, August 29, 2012.

544 Yahaya Ibrahim, “Boko Haram Threaten to Attack GSM Providers,” *Daily Trust*, February 13, 2012; Sunny Nwankwo, “Why We Attacked Maiduguri Market – Boko Haram,” *Leadership*, February 22, 2012.

545 Abul Qaqa did mention in an interview with *The Guardian* in January 2012 that “al Qa`ida are our elders brothers ... we enjoy financial and technical support from them.” Mark, “Boko Haram Vows to Fight Until Nigeria Establishes Sharia Law.”

### Strategy

Beginning in late 2010, Boko Haram attacks occurred almost daily in northeastern Nigeria, especially Maiduguri. At the same time, Abuja, Jos, Kaduna, and the Middle Belt more generally also experienced Boko Haram violence, albeit less frequently. Many operations in the Middle Belt were suicide attacks targeted at churches to create sectarian strife and portray Boko Haram as defending Muslims against the “Crusaders.”<sup>546</sup> In contrast, attacks in the northeast initially were mostly assassinations of anti-Boko Haram clerics, traditional leaders, and government officials; improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at bars and markets; arsons of churches, anti-Boko Haram mosques, and government buildings; ambushes on soldiers; bombings of cell phone masts and media houses; attacks on schools; and “urban invasions,” such as that of the Yobe State capital Damaturu in November 2011.<sup>547</sup>

In 2012, Boko Haram also incorporated Kano and Sokoto into its area of operations with high-profile attacks in both cities. Boko Haram fliers and statements from Abul Qaqa forewarned attacks in those two cities if imprisoned Boko Haram members were not released.<sup>548</sup> This was an indication of Boko Haram’s underlying grievances regarding membership welfare that drove domestic expansion and a reminder that its threats needed to be considered as credible.<sup>549</sup>

Despite the domestic approach to target selection, the second suicide attack Boko Haram ever undertook targeted the United Nations building in Abuja in August 2011. (Boko Haram’s first suicide attack struck the Federal Police headquarters in June 2011.) The international focus of the U.N. headquarters bombing stands out as a significant outlier, and the nature of that attack suggested external support

546 A key part of Boko Haram’s strategy evident in both its messaging and violence in Phase II was to generate sectarian strife between Nigeria’s Muslim and Christian communities, particularly in the religiously mixed Middle Belt. The end of 2011 saw Boko Haram deliver a three-day ultimatum for Christians to leave Nigeria’s north, while a campaign of VBIED attacks during Sunday church services in 2012 targeted central Nigerian cities. The February 26, 2012, and June 10, 2012, suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attacks on churches in Jos were both claimed by Boko Haram spokesman Abul Qaqa. Seriki Adinoyi, Ahamefula Ogbu, and Michael Olugbode, “Eight Killed as Bombers Target Jang’s Church,” *This Day*, February 27, 2012; Hamza Idris, “Boko Claim Responsibility for Jos, Biu Attacks,” *Daily Trust*, June 11, 2012; Emma Johnson and Anthony Awunor, “Boko Haram Issues 3-Day Ultimatum to Southerners,” *The Moment*, January 2, 2012.

547 These types of coordinated assaults involved 50 to 200 fighters, such as in Damaturu in November 2011 and Kano in January 2012, and became a common feature of Boko Haram violence in rural areas of Nigeria in the latter half of 2013 and 2014. “Nigeria’s Kano Rocked by Multiple Explosions,” *BBC*, January 21, 2012; “Over 136 Dead in Yobe Boko Haram Attacks,” *This Day*, November 6, 2011.

548 The forewarnings of the major attacks in both cities were also an indication of Boko Haram’s credibility and that leaders could no longer dismiss its statements and threats. The first major incident in Kano was a coordinated assault on multiple police stations and other locations in the city on January 20, 2012. “Nigeria’s Kano Rocked by Multiple Explosions,” *BBC*, January 21, 2012. While in Sokoto on July 30, 2012, initial violence involved suicide bombers also targeting police institutions. Mahmoud Mohammed, “Police Stations, AIG’s Office, Powa Bombed in Sokoto – Five Killed,” *Leadership*, July 31, 2012. The targeting of a police station likely ties into demands to release detained sect members.

549 Boko Haram initially threatened Kano in 2011 over the detention of its members there, and Kano Governor Kwankwaso released sect members in August of that year. “Boko Haram Writes Gov, Emir, Others ... Threatens to Bomb Kano,” *iReports-NG*, July 29, 2011; Abdulaziz, “Governor Kwankwaso Wants Boko Haram Members Released,” *Leadership*, August 31, 2011. Nonetheless, Boko Haram issued a second threat in late 2011, and spokesman Abul Qaqa explained the January 2012 assault on the city as a response to the lack of compliance. Ibrahim Shuaibu and Michael Olugbode, “Police Seize Would-be Suicide Bomber’s Car,” *This Day*, December 19, 2011; “Boko Haram: Why We Struck Kano,” *Sahara Reporters*, January 22, 2012. On January 29, 2012, Abul Qaqa further warned that similar violence would occur in Sokoto if imprisoned members there were not released, which was followed up by attacks in July of that year. Ndahi Marama, “We’ll Attack Sokoto, Boko Haram Warns Sultan, Tambuwal, Others,” *Vanguard*, January 29, 2012.

and/or coordination, raising concerns about Boko Haram's international jihadi orientation.<sup>550</sup> In this sense, strategy followed a similar balance as messaging, with a predominant domestic focus, laced with snippets of international influence that raised Boko Haram's external profile and perhaps laid the groundwork for future relationships. Nonetheless, Boko Haram has not repeated a similar internationally focused attack in Nigeria since August 2011, with other violence during Phase II directed at local targets within Nigeria's borders, indicative of a predominately domestic approach.

### Membership

In the immediate aftermath of Yusuf's death and the uprising, Boko Haram members fled from northern Nigeria and sought refuge in neighboring Cameroon, Niger, and Chad and, in some cases, further away with AQIM in Algeria and Mali and al-Shabaab in Somalia.<sup>551</sup> This flight deepened sub-regional linkages between Boko Haram and AQIM, with leading Boko Haram members gaining training and bomb-making expertise. It did not, however, alter the primarily domestic and sub-regional composition of Boko Haram membership, as the group did not attract new members from Mali and Somalia. Rather, militants who had joined the movement prior to 2009 returned to Nigeria from abroad, with new training and connections.<sup>552</sup>

Additionally, in 2010 Shekau took over and continued Boko Haram's Nigerian—and particularly Kanuri—leadership, albeit with some sub-regional composition.<sup>553</sup> Rank-and-file membership was more diverse, within some members coming from throughout Nigeria and, increasingly, the sub-region, but Kanuri and then Hausa remained the *lingua franca* of the militants, demonstrating its

550 The targeting of the U.N. headquarters via a SVBIED was similar to an AQIM-claimed attack at U.N. offices in Algiers in 2007, while the FBI noted that the bomb construction resembled previous al-Qa`ida blasts, further suggesting an external role in the attack. Chinedu Offor, Femi Ogbonnikan, and Ekene Okoro, "FBI Links Al-Qaeda to Abuja Blasts - Bomb Scare in Lagos, Motorways Building Evacuated," *Daily Independent*, January 6, 2011. A series of attacks on polio workers in Kano in early 2013 mirrored similar violence by Islamist militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, polio carries a controversial history specific to Nigeria, and it may help explain the attacks (which dates back to unauthorized drug trials by the pharmaceutical company Pfizer in Kano in 1996, and rumors, supported by many respected Islamic clerics, that polio vaccinations in 2003 were part of a conspiracy to render Nigerian Muslim women infertile. Immunizations resumed a year later after further testing and the sourcing of dosages from Muslim nations, but scattered resentment against polio inoculations remains.) "Muslim Suspicion of Polio Vaccine Lingers On," IRIN, February 19, 2004. A similar argument could be made with regard to the attacks on cell phone towers in that they had a domestic root (Boko Haram threatened cell phone companies over perceived cooperation with Nigerian security forces), but mirrored attacks by militants in Afghanistan. "Boko Haram Threatens to Bomb MTN, Airtel, Glo, and NCC," Information Nigeria, February 14, 2012; Jon Boone, "Taliban Target Mobile Phone Masts to Prevent Tipoffs From Afghan Civilians," *Guardian*, November 11, 2011. In this sense, target selection may have been rooted in domestic dynamics, even if inspiration came from abroad. The kidnapping of a French family in Cameroon in early 2013 may have also signaled an increasing awareness of Islamist struggles outside of Nigeria, but the family was eventually released for a three million dollar ransom, reducing it to an income generation tactic, "Nigeria's Boko Haram 'Got \$3m Ransom' to Free Hostages," BBC, April 27, 2013.

551 This apparently was a previously utilized tactic, with members fleeing into Cameroon and Niger following previous clashes with the police in 2004. "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict," pp. 36-37.

552 Some of the most prominent members who fled to AQIM areas, such as Khalid al-Barnawi, Adam Kamar, and Abu Muhammed, would go on to lead the breakaway movement Ansaru, an indication of the impact their external experience may have had in influencing strategy upon return to Nigeria.

553 Although Boko Haram deliberately did not publicly reveal leadership posts other than Shekau, the Joint Task Force in Maiduguri released a wanted list of four Shura Council members and 14 other Boko Haram commanders in November 2012. Given the opaque nature of Boko Haram leadership, the JTF list likely reportedly simply what was known at the time, and thus it should not be viewed as a thorough profile of the organization's hierarchy. Nonetheless, the list does provide some insight into leadership trends. While details beyond their names were scarce, two of the four reported Shura Council members originated from Borno and at least one commander likely came from Niger and Cameroon each, revealing a dominant northeast Nigerian focus at the highest levels of Boko Haram, but also the presence of militants from the sub-region in leadership positions. "JTF declares 19 top Boko Haram members wanted; N50 million bounty placed on Abubakar Shekau's head," *Pilot Africa*, November 23, 2012. Reported Shura Council Members Momodu Bama came from Bama in Borno State ("Killed Boko Haram Commander Spearheaded Kidnap Of Ali Monguno. Seven French Citizens, Others – Security Sources," *Premium Times*, August 14, 2013) while Khalid al-Barnawi was born in Maiduguri. "Khalid al-Barnawi," Rewards for Justice, accessed February 19, 2016. Commanders Ali Jalingo and Alhaji Mustapha (Massa) Ibrahim likely come from Niger and Cameroon respectively. "Terror Suspect Escapes Arrest in Benue," *Leadership*, January 7, 2013; "Cameroon : Un Coursier Du Boko Haram Aux Arrêts à Waza," *Camerbe*, accessed February 19, 2016.

domestic nature.<sup>554</sup>

### *Support Networks in Phase II*

This section discusses external linkages, funding, and arms in Phase II. As mentioned above, many Boko Haram members returned to Nigeria from abroad after the 2009 crackdown with foreign training, which likely played a crucial role in expanding capabilities. For example, Mamman Nur, Yusuf's former third-in-command, reportedly led a group of 90 militants who received instruction in IEDs and suicide attacks in Somalia, and played a major role in planning the U.N. headquarters attack in August 2011 upon his return. Such trends continued in a limited fashion, with 60 militants reportedly returning from Libya in 2011.<sup>555</sup>

The most significant international linkages, however, came from AQIM. In October 2010, AQIM's media wing Al-Andalus uploaded an Eid message from Shekau on a jihadi-run website, while during the height of AQIM's territorial conquests in northern Mali, Boko Haram fighters and couriers with money and messages traveled between the two groups via Niger.<sup>556</sup> Up to 100 Boko Haram members (or perhaps simply Nigerians) were reportedly present in Gao and Timbuktu, Mali, in April 2012.<sup>557</sup>

554 In this phase, active Boko Haram recruitment efforts in the sub-region began to pick up pace. For example, a number of suspected Boko Haram members were arrested in southern Niger, particularly in the Diffa region in 2012, while U.S. security officials claimed Boko Haram had been recruiting in the area since the late 2000s. In February 2010, Cameroon President Paul Biya also expressed concerns about extremist recruitment in the north of his country. In this sense, Boko Haram had begun to lay the seeds for sub-regional recruitment and potential expansion at this time. "US Soldiers Quietly Help Build Wall Against Boko Haram," Reuters, September 18, 2015. In February 2012, Diffa authorities arrested a number of suspected Boko Haram militants attempting to set up a cell in the city, Sudarsan Raghavan, "Niger Struggles Against Militant Islam," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2012. Five more militants were suspected in Zinder in 2012. "Niger Police Arrest 5 Suspected Boko Haram Members," *Vanguard*, September 27, 2012. While in September 2012, other suspected militants were arrested in the town of Kwanni on the Nigeria border. "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 17; Dibussi Tande, "Boko Haram and the Fear of Islamic Extremism in Cameroon: Part 1 – Boko Haram's Cameroon Connection," Scribbles from the Den blog, January 10, 2012. Rank-and-file membership during this time period likely remained largely Nigerian, with a few individuals from the sub-region. Within Nigeria, there was a strong focus on membership originating from the northeast, but suspected militants from as far as Osun, Sokoto, and Oyo states, including Yorubas, were arrested during this period. Overall, while the vast majority of Boko Haram members appear to have had Nigerian roots, militants from all sub-regional nations with suspected ties to Boko Haram were also expelled from Nigeria during this phase, while others were caught up in battles on Nigerian soil, an indication of the sect's continued cross-border appeal. Based on a database maintained by the author of Boko Haram members reported in local media outlets, 123 suspected militants were identified during this period, 85 of which did not have their country of origin identified. Out of the 38 whose country of origin was clearly defined, 36 came from Nigeria. Nonetheless, the example of Abdullahi Guto, a Chadian national arrested in Niger state in February 2012, indicates the presence of non-Nigerians in the sect as well, "Police Arrest Chadian, Islamic Teacher in Niger," Nigerian Eye, February 18, 2012; Abdul Salam Muhammad, "JTF Arrests Suspected Sect Leader, Wife in Kano," *Vanguard*, May 11, 2012; Nnenna Ibeh, "Jaji Military Church Bomb Planner Sold Yams to Spy on Targets," *Premium Times*, January 18, 2013; Lawan Danjuma Adamu, "The Untold Story of Kabiru Sokoto," *Daily Trust*, February 13, 2012. In November 2010, 400 Chadians living in Maiduguri were expelled; some may have belonged to Boko Haram, but the majority were kicked out for lacking official documents. "Chad's North West: The Next High Risk Area," International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 11. In August 2011, 43 Cameroonian members were also expelled from Nigeria, Ntaryike Divine, Jr., "Cameroon Serving As Hideout For Nigeria's Boko Haram - Cleric," Backstage Cameroon, August 14, 2011. Chadian and Cameroonian nationals were part of a July 2011 gun battle in Maiduguri that killed 36 suspected Boko Haram members. Ntaryike Divine, Jr., "Cameroon Serving As Hideout For Nigeria's Boko Haram - Cleric," Backstage Cameroon, August 14, 2011.

555 "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 24; "Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, December 1, 2015.

556 A U.N. report noted that seven Boko Haram members were arrested in Niger in January 2012 on their way to Mali with training materials and the contact details of AQIM members on their persons. "Report of the Assessment Mission on the Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the Sahel Region," United Nations Security Council, 2012, pp.11-12. Between March and August 2012, Niger also arrested 13 suspected Boko Haram members on their way to Mali. Sudarsan Raghavan, "Niger Struggles Against Militant Islam," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2012. In June 2012, a courier was arrested in Niger with two letters from AQIM addressed to Shekau and 35,000 Euros. "Terrorist Financing in West Africa," Financial Action Task Force, 2013, p. 24. While in October 2012, a Nigerian military official informed Reuters that Boko Haram members were crossing its border daily in an attempt to reach Mali. "Niger Seeks joint Southern Border Patrols to Bar Boko Haram," Reuters, October 7, 2012.

557 Some of these reported members may have been more closely linked to Boko Haram offshoot Ansaru, given the discovery of an Ansaru flier at Mokhtar Belmokhtar's house in Gao after French forces intervened. The relationship between Ansaru and Belmokhtar was further demonstrated by the presence of a self-identified Ansaru member during a September 2013 put out by Belmokhtar's al-Mulathamun Brigade. "Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali's Rebel Seize Gao," *Vanguard*, April 2, 2012; Jade Haméon, "Au Mali, Dans la Maison du Djihadiste Mokhtar Belmokhtar," *L'Express*, September 2, 2013.

The lessons gained from this experience likely resulted in the boost in Boko Haram's desert warfare capabilities, including the appearance of technicals [vehicles with a mounted gun] and the use of RPGs for the first time in Nigeria in early 2013, along with 'shaped charge' IEDs for suicide attacks.<sup>558</sup> This enhanced Boko Haram's capabilities, allowing it to overrun military barracks and ensure the flight of security actors, laying the seeds for a more formal occupation of territory during Phase III.

Despite the international training and financial support, the majority of Boko Haram's funding remained domestic or sub-regional. Financing largely derived from bank robberies, which earned the group an estimated \$6 million; criminal activities like extortion and the theft of government worker salaries; and the kidnapping of wealthy Nigerians, which the U.S. government estimated could net up to \$1 million per incident.<sup>559</sup> Kidnapping foreigners for ransom also became a source of income, with four incidents in northern Cameroon netting Boko Haram several millions of dollars in ransoms in 2013 and 2014.<sup>560</sup> Political support likely did not play an important role in Phase II like it did during Phase I, despite claims that some northern governors paid Boko Haram to avoid attacks in their states, and the arrest of a few political officials accused of ties with Boko Haram.<sup>561</sup>

Arms and supplies followed a similar path as the above, albeit with a higher reliance on sub-regional smuggling networks. Boko Haram began to pillage arms from Nigerian military barracks and other

558 "Baga Clashes: Nigeria Army Seizes Heavy Weapons," BBC, April 23, 2013; "Boko Haram: From Motorcycle Fighters to Flame Throwers," *Nation*, May 09, 2013; Drew Hinshaw, "In Nigeria Battle, Militants Reveal Bolstered Firepower," *Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 2013. The deadlier 'shaped-charged' IEDs were initially used by al-Qa'ida militants in Iraq, and some analysts point to the employment of the technique by Boko Haram as evidence of external training, likely from AQIM. Oscar Nkala "Nigeria Police Claim Drop in IED Attacks in 2013," Defence Web, April 16, 2014; Anneli Botha, "Practical Guide to Understanding and Preventing Suicide Operations in Africa," (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2013), p. 95.

559 Terrence McCoy, "This is How Boko Haram Funds its Evil," *Washington Post*, June 6, 2014; Hamza Idris, "JTF – Boko Haram Extorts Money Through SMS," *Daily Trust*, October 27, 2012; Kingsley Omonobi, "Army Blocks Move to Hoist Flag in Damaturu," *Vanguard*, October 26, 2012; "JTF Arrests Suspected Killers of Gen. Shuwa," *Vanguard*, May 7, 2013; "Robbers Kill 3 Soldiers, Snatch LG Salary," *PM News*, August 2, 2012; "Gunmen Snatch Workers Salary in Yobe," *Premium Times*, accessed February 19, 2016; "Bandits Killed 2 Soldiers in an Ambush," *PM News*, June 14, 2012. The estimate provided by the United States might be on the high end. For example, former oil minister Shettima Ali Monguno was kidnapped from Maiduguri in May 2013 but released after a N50 million (approximately \$300,000) ransom was reportedly paid. Ola' Audu, "How Boko Haram Turned to Kidnapping to Raise Funds in Borno," *Premium Times*, May 20, 2013; "Former Nigerian Oil Minister, Ali Monguno, Released After N50million Ransom Paid," *African Spotlight*, May 6, 2013; Phil Stewart and Lesley Wroughton, "How Boko Haram is Beating U.S. Efforts to Choke its Financing," Reuters, July 1, 2014.

560 Based on media reporting, Boko Haram earned more than \$15 million from four kidnappings in northern Cameroon. This included \$3 million from a French family of seven abducted in February 2013, \$12.5 million after the seizure of a French priest in November 2013, and undisclosed amounts for the release of two Italian priests and a Canadian nun abducted in April 2014 and 10 Chinese construction workers taken in May 2014, in addition to the family of Cameroon Vice President Amadou Ali, seized from Kolofata in July 2014. "Nigeria's Boko Haram 'Got \$3m Ransom' to Free Hostages," BBC, April 27, 2013; Yuh Timchia, "Boko Haram 'Was Paid' \$12.5 Million to Release French Priest," *Africa Review*, January 7, 2014; Ann Mereille Nzouankeu, "Kidnapped Italian Priests and Canadian Nun Freed in Cameroon," Reuters, June 1, 2014; "Boko Haram: 27 Chinese, Local Hostages Released in Cameroon," *Vanguard*, October 11, 2014. A recent report from the International Crisis Group put the figure slightly lower at \$11 million, but also a total of \$5.7 million for the Chinese construction workers and the family of Cameroonian Vice President Amadou Ali. "Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram," pp. 16-17.

561 The governors of Kano and Bauchi in 2011 were rumored to pay Boko Haram to avoid attacks in their states, a point one-time Boko Haram spokesman Ali Sanda Umar Konduga seemingly confirmed when he stated "most of them [northern governors] pay us monthly to leave them alone." "Faces of Boko Haram Sponsors," 9jabook, January 26, 2012; "We're on Northern Governors Payroll – Boko Haram," *Vanguard*, January 24, 2012; Pérouse de Montclos, p. 13; "Terrorist Financing in West Africa," p. 21. Senator Mohammed Ali Ndume was arrested in 2011 after Konduga named him and Nigeria's Ambassador to Sao Tome and Principe Saidu Pindar as key supporters. Ndume was eventually cleared of all charges in mid-2017, while Pindar died in a car crash in 2011 before he could deliver the N10 million he reportedly promised for the sect. "SSS: Statement, Nigerian Lawmaker Ran Boko Haram," Sahara Reporters, November 21, 2011; Ikechukwu Nnochiri, "Boko Haram Spokesman Bags 3-year Jail Term," *Vanguard*, November 7, 2011; "Boko Haram Sponsors: SSS Detains Senator," *Daily Post*, November 22, 2011; John Chuks Azu, "Terrorism: Court Admits Phone Evidence Against Ndume," *Daily Trust*, February 24, 2016; "Court Frees Ndume From Terrorism Charges," Channels Television, July 4, 2017. These were two most high-profile public investigations into Boko Haram support during this period, although Boko Haram subsequently denied Konduga was a member of their group after his arrest. Nazifi Dawud Khalid, "Boko Haram Disowns Konduga ... Says Ndume Also a Target," *Daily Trust*, November 24, 2011. Other rumors that northern political elites funded Boko Haram as an outlet for their frustration regarding the reelection of southerner Goodluck Jonathan as president in 2011 never materialized into sufficient evidence.

police stations that they raided, which was a tactic also utilized during the 2003-2004 police clashes.<sup>562</sup> Explosive materials were also stolen from local construction sites and fertilizer markets, while the regional arms pipeline proved important as Boko Haram weapons were reported to have originated from locations such as Chad, Mali, Libya, and as far as Darfur.<sup>563</sup>

The influence of sub-regional and regional elements within Boko Haram's support networks in Phase II are likely explained in the context of a group reaching out to available mediums of support to enhance capabilities, while pursuing a strategy that ultimately remained largely confined within a domestic lens. Nonetheless, while subtle, such elements may have also laid the groundwork for a future adjustment of strategy based on the influence of these linkages.

### *Overall Assessment in Phase II*

During Phase II of the group's evolution, messaging in the form of Shekau videos, press statements from spokesmen, and the use of fliers showed that Boko Haram was driven predominantly by a domestic focus. Nonetheless, Shekau videos revealed a growing identification with the global salafi-jihadi movement in terms of style.<sup>564</sup> This was indicative of a shift in messaging dynamics, which included a greater non-Nigerian emphasis through the prism of international jihad.

Strategy also reflected domestic dynamics, as Boko Haram restricted operations to within Nigeria, and in turn focused efforts on sectarian conflict in the Middle Belt. The bombing of the U.N. building in Abuja, however, remains an important incident—albeit an aberration—that more closely mirrored the targeting and tactics practiced by al-Qa`ida. It is significant that a similar event was not repeated, as other violence was directed at national targets. The expansion of attacks to northwestern Nigeria was often driven by grievances regarding the treatment of its members, marking Boko Haram as a domestic movement primarily pursuing a strategy of confrontation with Nigerian Christians and the Nigerian state.

Boko Haram membership in Phase II was also principally Nigerian, but, like Phase I, had a significant number sub-regional members. This can be credited to the flight of members to neighboring countries after the crackdown in Nigeria in July 2009, the emergence of leadership with sub-regional roots, the need for increased recruitment in bordering regions to supply the growing insurgency in Nigeria. These trends would manifest themselves more substantially in Phase III.

Support networks remained principally Nigerian in terms of funding, but regional linkages, in particular to AQIM, proved important for training and on-the-ground experience in northern Mali. The sourcing of arms typified this duality: Boko Haram's stockpiles of weapons grew through the raiding of Nigerian army bases and police stations, while other arms and equipment were acquired from the sub-region and region more broadly, such as Chad and Libya.

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562 For example, an early 2013 video displayed arms allegedly seized during an attack at a military base in Monguno, Borno State. "Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons 'Captured' From An Army Barack Raid," Sahara TV, YouTube, April 29, 2013.

563 A 2012 Nigeria police report concluded that the majority of IEDs are constructed from local sources. "Nigeria Presentation at the 2012 CCW Group of Experts Meeting on IED," Nigerian police, accessed August 5, 2014. Officials investigating the August 2011 suicide bomb at the U.N. headquarters deduced it "probably consisted of both stolen factory-made explosives and home-made materials." Joe Brock, "Special Report: Nigeria's Boko Haram: Between Rebellion and Jihad," Reuters, February 2, 2012. Meanwhile, militants were also suspected of stealing C4 for construction sites and raiding fertilizer markets for inputs. "Boko Haram Storms Fertiliser Markets For Bombs," Nigeria News blog, accessed February 18, 2016. A Boko Haram arms smuggler captured in Damaturu in 2011 admitted that weapons were purchased in Chad and Cameroon. "Borno Police Uncover Boko Haram Hideouts ... Kill 6, Alleged Foreign Connection," Gist Mania, accessed February 18, 2016. In August 2012, Nigerian security officials intercepted a cache of arms, including eight rocket propelled launchers, in Daban Mara town by the Chadian border. "Task Force Intercepts Arms Cache, Kills Two," *Guardian*, July 31, 2012. Rumors of regional arms trafficking through Libya, especially in the immediate aftermath of the fall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi persist, but little concrete open source evidence has materialized.

564 This occurred in tandem with Shekau's increasing use of Arabic, threats to world leaders, and greetings to jihadi leaders in other conflict areas.

Although sub-regional, regional, and international elements became more visible during Phase II, the majority of activities and linkages for Boko Haram still reflected its Nigeria-focused strategy. In this sense, the group’s operational tempo remained firmly directed at the Nigerian Government during Phase II, despite mounting indications that the next phase would hold a decidedly broader outlook.

PHASE II	DOMESTIC	SUB-REGIONAL	REGIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Messaging	•			•
Strategy	•			•
Membership	•	•		
Support Networks	•	•	•	

PHASE II	DOMESTIC	SUB-REGIONAL	REGIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Messaging	<i>Shekau videos, press statements, and fliers mostly focused on domestic events</i>			<i>Rhetoric and style of Shekau messaging increasingly mirrored messaging from international jihadi groups</i>
Strategy	<i>Vast majority of violence confined locally; strategy to confront Nigerian state and focus on Middle Belt dynamics</i>			<i>U.N. attack in Abuja important outlier similar to attacks by jihadi groups elsewhere</i>
Membership	<i>Nigerian focus at leadership and rank-and-file levels continued</i>	<i>Emergence of some leadership with sub-regional linkages; recruitment expanding beyond Nigerian borders</i>		
Support Networks	<i>Funding and most arms sourced domestically</i>	<i>Sub-regional arms pipeline tapped</i>	<i>Training from regional jihadis formative; ties with northern Mali militants grew</i>	

### Phase III (2013-2016)

In May 2013, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in the three northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, while vigilante forces collectively referred to as the Civilian JTF emerged, initially in urban centers. This turn of events pushed Boko Haram from its urban area of operations, especially Maiduguri, and forced it to become a rural-based insurgency. Phase III, under Shekau's direction, then saw Boko Haram shift toward increasingly targeting civilians as "punishment" for perceived collaboration with the military and Civilian JTF, while attempting to consolidate territorial control, duplicating the Islamic State's successes in Syria and Iraq, and fulfilling Muhammad Yusuf's original vision of an Islamic state in Nigeria.

Boko Haram also saw its most significant change in affiliation with Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi—and al-Baghdadi's acceptance of it—in March 2015, making Boko Haram the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP). While this led to Boko Haram's adoption of Islamic State's professional media techniques and use of social media, it did not translate into operational success. Rather, a military offensive launched in 2015 forced Boko Haram out of some of the territory it had taken over prior to the pledge.

An emerging rift centering around Shekau's targeting of Muslim civilians also split the movement into two main factions in August 2016. Abu Musab al-Barnawi, a son of Boko Haram founder Muhammad Yusuf, continued in the role of ISWAP leader and maintained operations and messaging consistent with the Islamic State's approach in the aftermath of the split. Shekau withdrew from the al-Barnawi-led ISWAP (but did not officially withdraw his overall recognition of al-Baghdadi as Caliph), and instead led his own faction under Boko Haram's pre-Islamic State name. He has continued his struggle in a manner similar to before his March 2015 pledge, especially in terms of calling for indiscriminate violence and creating messaging marked by a lower degree of professionalization, but also bombastic outbursts.

#### *Messaging in Phase III*

Initially, Shekau continued to dominate Boko Haram messaging in Phase III, appearing in 11 of 13 official Boko Haram messages in 2014.<sup>565</sup> In early 2015, however, Boko Haram set up an official Twitter account called Al-Urhwa Al-Wutqha (AUAW) in coordination with the Islamic State. Shekau did not feature on this Twitter account for the first month of its operation, which foreshadowed the diminished role he would play in messaging after his allegiance to the Islamic State.

Prior to the setting up of the Twitter account and even in the first few weeks of its opening, Shekau's videos, which were still aired separately from the Twitter account, used Boko Haram's regular branding. The content was also fairly similar to Phase II.<sup>566</sup> Some notable distinctions, however, were Shekau's more frequent taunts of sub-regional and world leaders, such as the Cameroonian, Chadian, and Nigerian presidents or then U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; praise for international jihadi violence like the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris; condemnation of other Islamic groups like Shi`a's, Zaydis, and Naqshbandis; the use of Arabic subtitles during Hausa speeches; and the incorporation of

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565 This is based on author's compilation of media statements.

566 Videos remained largely grainy copies, although some clips in 2014 demonstrated a noticeably high-quality resolution.

tanks, technicals, and militants in outdoor settings behind Shekau during his speeches.<sup>567</sup> To counter government narratives, Boko Haram videos also began to show footage of specific Boko Haram attacks and seized weaponry, or *ghanima* (“spoils”) from barracks to demonstrate the group’s victories over government forces.<sup>568</sup>

The AUAW Twitter account first appeared in mid-January 2015 as Boko Haram’s official Twitter account and was subsequently “verified” by Islamic State media operatives.<sup>569</sup> AUAW released high-quality videos in addition to tweets on organizational and battlefield updates, photos, and other documents, such as a written statement threatening neighboring countries. The last AUAW account was shut down on March 8, 2015, one day after Shekau issued his pledge al-Baghdadi. That no other productions with the same logos emerged afterwards suggests that AUAW was a platform to preview and promote the transition to a ‘new’ Boko Haram, which was rebranded as ISWAP after Shekau’s pledge.<sup>570</sup>

After Shekau’s pledge, the Islamic State-coordinated “Media Office of the West Africa Province (MOWAP)” took over Boko Haram messaging. In roughly its first year of operation starting in March 2015, it released 12 videos. Two audio statements from Shekau also emerged during this time, but were rooted in Shekau’s own personal desire to refute public rumors of his death and that Boko Haram was engaging in negotiations with the Nigerian and Chadian governments, rather than official publications. Both revolved around themes Shekau had frequently addressed in Phase II when those issues arose in the media.<sup>571</sup>

MOWAP videos featured West Africa Province attack scenes, displays of captured weaponry, beheadings of security personnel, the administration of sharia justice, and interviews with or speeches by local

567 Shekau had released 26 different messages after May 2013, and at least 18 of them mentioned President Obama or other world leaders predominately of Western nations, based on a compilation of media sources by the author. A display of captured weaponry during a November 3, 2013, video and an attack scene at an air base in Maiduguri during a December 12, 2013, clip were among the first to utilize Arabic subtitles to describe the scenes. A February 19, 2014, video of Shekau firing from a technical and then reading his speech in front of a tank, two technicals, and 10 masked gunmen outdoors, was one of the first to include both war vehicles and gunmen in the scene. As early as December 2013, Shekau stated, “Don’t think we will stop in Maiduguri; tomorrow you still see us in America itself,” but this was largely dismissed as bluster from the Boko Haram leader at the time. “Boko Haram Threatens to Attack U.S. in New Video,” Channels Television, December 12, 2013; Mohammed Lere, “Boko Haram Threatens Cameroon,” *Premium Times*, January 8, 2015; Mustapha Muhammad, “Nigeria’s Boko Haram Leader Applauds Charlie Hebo Attackers,” Bloomberg, January 14, 2015. Less than a month later, Shekau continued on this sub-regional trend, directly threatening Chadian President Idriss Déby during a February 8, 2015, clip in which he also derided the emerging regional coalition aimed at countering the spread of his group. “Boko Haram Leader in New Video Talks Tough,” *PM News*, February 9, 2015.

568 A December 13, 2013, video was a particularly damaging example, as it showed militants attacking an air base in Maiduguri around dawn and setting fire to fighter jets seemingly unimpeded. A March 2014 video showing an attack on the notorious Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, a detention center for suspected Boko Haram militants, had a similar effect, with hundreds of purported detainees fleeing in the aftermath. Videos from December 13, September 25, and May 28, 2013, either contained messaging claiming to have stolen weapons during operations against Nigerian security forces or displayed neatly arranged stacks of the seized arms.

569 As early as late 2014, Boko Haram messages had already become more varied, with multiple media outlets disseminating Boko Haram rhetoric, often without the appearance of Shekau. This was a major shift as of 48 likely official Boko Haram videos prior to the March 2015 *bay`a*. Shekau appeared in 37 of them, in contrast to not a single one of MOWAP produced clips, based on a compilation of media sources by the author. Four different Twitter accounts were used until March. (Each account was eventually suspended.)

570 As described by Jacob Zenn in an August 2015 article for the Combating Terrorism Center, Islamic State media operative Shaybah al-Hamad and the North Africa-based Africa Media cooperated to run AUAW’s Twitter accounts and facilitate media connections to the Islamic State. Jacob Zenn, “Wilayat West Africa Reboots for the Caliphate,” *CTC Sentinel* 8:8 (2015).

571 The audio clips were released in August and September 2015 and came in reaction to events reported in the local press. Both were also released through non-official Islamic State channels, suggesting a disconnect between Shekau and his sect’s new Islamic State-linked messaging wing. In the first, Shekau rejected claims by Chadian President Idriss Deby that he had been deposed in favor of a new leader, while in the second, Shekau denied that his movement was negotiating with the Nigerian government. Shekau likely felt compelled to counter these developments. Otherwise, the formerly loquacious leader was remarkably quiet. The fact that both messages were in audio rather than video format also raised questions as to his status. In addition, a clip of Shekau surfaced on March 24, 2016, but it was likely dated in that he made no mention of the Islamic State, the logos were derived from a previous media outlet, and it was of poor quality. Thus, it likely did not represent a new or official message from the Boko Haram leader. “Buhari is a Liar and Has Deceived You, Says Shekau,” *Vanguard*, September 20, 2015; “Shekau Rebuffs Idriss Deby’s Claims, Says I am Alive, in Charge,” *AllAfrica*, August 16, 2015.

fighters, largely utilizing a combination of spoken Hausa and Arabic subtitles. Some of these elements were present in Boko Haram messaging prior to the emergence of West Africa Province, but the newer videos released by the Islamic State were of higher quality and designed to widen appeal to the Islamic State's international followership and bolster the Islamic State's own narratives about "expanding (tatamadad)"—to West Africa in this case. Moreover, the new West Africa Province videos covered certain themes that the Islamic State coordinated throughout its provinces, which further demonstrated how West Africa Province was integrated with the Islamic State media network.<sup>572</sup>

Following the split between Shekau and al-Barnawi, messaging has continued on two separate tracks, with Shekau reverting to his pre-Islamic State messaging style as Boko Haram leader, but the al-Barnawi faction showing enduring linkages and collaboration with Islamic State media operatives.<sup>573</sup> Nonetheless, messaging from the al-Barnawi faction has been infrequent, while Shekau in early 2017 began putting Islamic State logos back on his videos, an indication that he still considered his faction to be in league with the international jihadi outfit.<sup>574</sup> In this sense, the heavy international influence on Boko Haram messaging has continued.

### *Strategy in Phase III*

Two events led to major changes in Boko Haram's strategy after mid-2013: first, the rise of the Civilian JTF and, second, the Nigerian government's declaration of a state of emergency in the three north-eastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa on May 14, 2013.<sup>575</sup> Taking these shifting dynamics into account, elements of Boko Haram's strategy regarding civilian targeting and urban bomb attacks, escalating sub-regional violence, territorial control, and post-territorial control are discussed below.

Boko Haram reacted to the rise of the Civilian JTF by targeting civilians as 'punishment' for them

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572 Signs of external influence and even coordination with Islamic State media outlets go beyond production quality and language usage. An October 2015 video featured an older Boko Haram militant urging Somalia-based al-Shabaab militants to join the Islamic State. It came out less than two weeks after similar videos emerged from other Islamic State wilayat in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Sinai, and showed that Boko Haram was now in the Islamic State network. In addition, a November 2, 2015, video showed the sharia punishment of amputation for thieves, a theme commonly featured in Islamic State videos, which was repeated just days later in a Wilayat Homs video. Also an October 7, 2015, video reaffirming Shekau as emir depicted militants in a circle extending their hands upon one another, similar to how Wilayat Khursan and Wilayat Sinai *bay`a* videos closed. Islamic State auxiliary media outlets similarly released Boko Haram messages, which provides further evidence of external involvement in Boko Haram. Amaq Agency, an Islamic State-associated media outlet, for example, published an infographic on December 16, 2015, of West Africa Province operations between November 13 and December 12, 2015 (corresponding to the month of Safar in the Islamic calendar). Wilayat in Yemen and Iraq have circulated similar statistical reporting. Another Islamic State-related media outlet, Al Naba Agency, also released an info graphic on ISWA operations three days later covering the previous two months (Safar and Muharram). Aaron Zelin, "New video message from The Islamic State: 'Amputate Their Hands In Recompense For What They Committed – Wilayat Hims,'" *Jihadology*, November 7, 2015.

573 In the year following the split, only four al-Barnawi faction videos have emerged, as it has relied on Islamic State/Amaq statements on social media to claim attacks (21 total incidents), and increasingly toward the end of 2016 and beginning of 2017, distributed photos in lieu of videos. An Al-Naba production from January 2017 interviewed a "source" from al-Barnawi's group, demonstrating the continued media linkages with the Islamic State. Shekau's faction, on the other hand, has issued 18 video messages since August 2016, of which nine have featured Shekau himself. This resumed focus on leadership messaging is an indication of the lessened Islamic State messaging dynamics and Shekau's centralization of his faction's messaging wing, but the lack of complete domination also reflects trends incorporated from the Islamic State's period.

574 This dovetails with the fact that Shekau never officially withdrew his *bay`a* to the Islamic State caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Arabic also dominates al-Barnawi faction's messaging, but in early July 2017, the Islamic State released an attack claim on social media on behalf of the al-Barnawi faction that was translated into Hausa as well. This was the first recorded instance of a Hausa attack claim, and it may signal a greater desire to ensure local resonance of Islamic State/al-Barnawi messaging.

575 The combination of local youths scouting urban neighborhoods backed up by an increased security presence in Borno State precipitated Boko Haram's flight to the countryside, and it is fundamental to understanding the evolution in Boko Haram tactics and violence in Phase III.

allowing the vigilantes to operate in their towns.<sup>576</sup> Moreover, unlike in Phase II when Boko Haram focused on the cities, Phase III saw a countryside focus as militants were pushed to rural areas that Boko Haram devastated, and then used to orchestrate attacks on cities in a Maoist fashion.<sup>577</sup> One effect of this was that Boko Haram attacks became deadlier, with casualty rates spiking during indiscriminate assaults on lightly protected rural communities.<sup>578</sup>

Boko Haram also carried out symbolic—albeit sporadic—bombings in major Nigerian cities as well. In early 2014, for example, Boko Haram carried out major bombings in Abuja, Kaduna, Jos, and Kano.<sup>579</sup> Nonetheless, the pace of attacks did not match the frequency of 2012, and none have succeeded from November 2015 to mid-2017.<sup>580</sup> In this sense, these major bombings were an exception, with the locus of violence predominantly in the three states affected by the state of emergency.<sup>581</sup>

Boko Haram's strategy became distinctly more sub-regional in Phase III. Cross-border activities, which previously involved mostly smuggling and recruiting, transformed into active targeting, with Cameroon suffering its first major Boko Haram violence in March 2014 and near daily incidents throughout 2015.<sup>582</sup> Cameroon also witnessed increased targeting against its own vigilante groups akin to the Civilian JTF in Nigeria, traditional leaders, and civilians who were opposed to Boko Haram.<sup>583</sup> Boko Haram spread attacks to Niger and Chad in 2015 for the first time as well, albeit at lesser rates than in Nigeria or Cameroon, marking the group as a bona fide sub-regional threat.<sup>584</sup>

576 This was not an immediate shift. At first vigilantes themselves were targeted, then the family members of vigilantes, then communities where vigilantes operated, and eventually to civilians in Borno State as a whole. An Amnesty International report in 2015 also described how towns in Borno State with a civilian vigilante presence, such as Gwoza and Bama, were heavily targeted by Boko Haram, compared to towns like Dikwa that did not have similar groups and thus suffered less violence. "Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter, and Kill," Amnesty International, 2015), p. 30. Initially restricted to Borno State, the focus on civilian targeting expanded as vigilante groups correspondingly sprung up elsewhere, with revenge attacks also occurring in Cameroon. An April 17, 2015, attack in Bia and October 15, 2015, violence in Amchidé were revenge attacks in response to the development of vigilante organizations in those towns. "Human Rights Under Fire: Attacks and Violations in Cameroon's Struggle With Boko Haram," Amnesty International, 2015, pp. 27-29.

577 Mao Zedong said, "The countryside surrounds the cities (*nongcun baowei chengshi*)." As one Maiduguri resident explained to the author, prior to 2013, his family in rural southern Borno begged him to leave Maiduguri and come live with them due to the security issues in the city. By the beginning of 2014, his family left his home village for the relative safety of Maiduguri instead. This is exemplified by a database on Boko Haram attacks maintained by the Navanti Group, which recorded a decline in violent incidents in Maiduguri from 159 in 2012 to 58 in 2013 to just eight in 2014. Nonetheless, the targeting of Maiduguri has increased since the August 2016 split, primarily by the Shekau faction.

578 Incidents such as the February 2014 assault on Bama or May 2014 large-scale attack on Gamboru-Ngala, each with more than 100 estimated killed, signal this trend. "Nigerian Senator: '135 Civilians Killed' in Attacks," BBC, April 12, 2014; "Boko Haram Attack Kills Hundreds in Nigeria," Al Jazeera, May 8, 2014.

579 Examples of such attacks include a March 18, 2014, VBIED detonated in a predominately Christian area of Kano; the April 14, 2014, VBIED at Nyanya motor park in Abuja that killed 75 (claimed by Shekau); back-to-back blasts in Jos on May 20, 2014, that killed over 100 (also claimed by Shekau); and twin attacks on July 23, 2014, in Kaduna, which may have targeted influential cleric Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi and then-presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari. "Police: 4 Killed in Kano Car Bomb," *PM News*, May 19, 2014; Ayorinde Oluokun, "Abuja Bus Station Blasts Came from 2 Bombs, 71 Killed," *PM News*, April 14, 2014; "Jos Bomb Toll At Least 118 – NEMA," *Vanguard*, May 20, 2014; Misbahu Bashir, "Kaduna Suicide Bombs Kill 85," *Daily Trust*, July 24, 2014.

580 This may not be from a lack of trying. Nigerian authorities have consistently reported on the arrest of Boko Haram militants elsewhere in the country, such as the arrest of three Chadians linked to the al-Barnawi faction in Gombe in February 2017. "Nigerian Troops Capture Foreign Terrorists," PRNigeria, February 26, 2017.

581 This is the author's reflection based on conflict tracking.

582 In January 2016, Cameroon Communications Minister Issa Tchiroma Bakary informed reporters that his government counted 315 separate attacks mainly over the past two years, resulting in 1,168 deaths. "Boko Haram has Killed Nearly 1,200 People Since 2013 – Cameroon," AFP, January 15, 2016. This is likely a conservative estimate, as a Cameroonian reporter closely following developments in the north stated that in 2015 alone Boko Haram attacked the country 296 times, or nearly once per day. Chief Bisong Eta, "Within the past 12 months, (January 1 to December 31), Boko Haram attacked Cameroon 296 times!" Twitter, December 31, 2015.

583 For example, see the November 21, 2015, suicide bombing at the traditional chief of Leymarie's house and the July 7, 2015, attack on vigilante forces in Mbrece. Sylvain Andzongo, "Female Suicide Bombers in Cameroon Attack that Kills Eight," Reuters, November 22, 2015; "Cameroun: Deux Attaches Attribuées à Boko Haram Dans L'Extrême-Nord," RFI, July 8, 2015.

584 The first major attacks on both Chadian and Nigerian soil occurred in February 2015. Abdoulaye Massalaki, "Niger Forces Kill 109 Boko Haram Militants in Battle – State TV," Reuters, February 7, 2015; Madjiasra Nako, "Boko Haram Attacks Village in Chad as Revolt Spreads," Reuters, February 13, 2015.

The lead-up to violence in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon followed the same pattern as Boko Haram's expansion to Kano and Sokoto in 2012: warnings from Shekau to political leaders to cease involvement in anti-Boko Haram operations, followed by attacks, and a deepening of the militant presence to the point where violence became regularized.<sup>585</sup> This was likely an indication that Boko Haram's sub-regional expansion was a deliberate, retributive strategy rooted in an attempt to retaliate against governments that were cooperating with Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts.

In July 2014, Boko Haram began occupying towns and villages in northeast Nigeria for the first time. The decision to occupy rural towns, and in many cases restrict populations from leaving, marked a strategic shift toward territorial control and governance. At its height in late 2014, Boko Haram occupied up to 20 Local Government Areas in an approach that mirrored the territorial consolidation of Islamic State months prior in Iraq and Syria. Given Shekau's *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi thereafter, Boko Haram's strategy to control territory—and especially the promotion of it in Boko Haram media—appears to have been part of his pre-pledge positioning.<sup>586</sup> Nonetheless, administration in these territories was limited, and most visibly evident through the renaming of towns, the appointing of new Boko Haram commanders to replace traditional elites, and the provision of sharia punishments for alleged infractions, such as disrespecting Islam, committing adultery, engaging in alleged homosexual activity, or spying on Boko Haram.<sup>587</sup>

Before Nigeria's presidential elections in early 2015 and continuing after the inauguration of new President Muhammadu Buhari, the military renewed its offensive with more troops, military contractors from South Africa, and a new round of airstrikes on Boko Haram positions. The militants were dislodged from territories under their control and scattered to hideouts throughout the sub-region. This spurred a return to Boko Haram's previous tactics, such as the employment of asymmetric bomb attacks, especially the use of female suicide bombings, instead of mass raids.<sup>588</sup>

The rural locus of Boko Haram's strategy in Phase III has continued since the split between al-Barnawi and Shekau. The al-Barnawi faction has primarily focused efforts in northern Borno State and along the borders with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, with a preference to target military forces rather than civilians, while Shekau's troops have been more present in central Borno and along the Cameroon

585 This path was followed closely in Kano, but the sect was never able to recreate a similar level of violence in Sokoto after its initial assaults. In Cameroon, a flier reported to be from Shekau surfaced in early February 2014, warning Cameroon not to attack the sect or the group would be forced to react ("Boko Haram Met en Garde le Cameroun," *Le Septentrion*, February 6, 2014) ahead of the onset of regular Boko Haram violence in March 2014. "7 Dead in Boko Haram Attack in Cameroon," AFP, March 3, 2014. Shekau also threatened Mahamadou Issoufou and Idris Deby, the leaders of Niger and Chad, respectively, in two late January/early February 2015 video messages after both countries became involved in a regional anti-Boko Haram coalition, but prior to Boko Haram's first violent operations there. "Boko Haram Leader in New Video Talks Tough."

586 Julia Payne, "Insight – Nigerians Face Killings, Hunger in Boko Haram's 'state,'" Reuters, January 19, 2015; Chika Oduah, "Executions, Beatings, and Force Marriage: Life as a Boko Haram Captive," *Al Jazeera*, March 23, 2015; Adam Nossiter, "Boko Haram Refugees Recount Brutality and Random Killings in Nigeria's North," *New York Times*, February 6, 2015.

587 For example, the primarily Christian area of Gwoza was renamed Dar el Hikma, Arabic for "House of Wisdom." Nonetheless, Boko Haram mostly engaged in predatory activity, such as looting villages, in contrast to the level of bureaucracy imposed by the Islamic State in areas under its control in Syria and Iraq, or that which it appears in propaganda in places like Wilayat Sinai or Khurasan (Afghanistan). From all indications, the degree of governance in towns under Boko Haram control varied depending on the emir appointed, and has also been described as "haphazard." "Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter, and Kill," Amnesty International, 2015, p. 15; Monica Mark, "This is How Boko Haram is Trying to Turn Captives into Suicide Bombers," BuzzFeed, February 15, 2016; Payne, "Insight – Nigerians Face Killings, Hunger in Boko Haram's 'state,'" "Dead Bodies Found in Bama Wells," PRNigeria, March 19, 2015; "Boko Haram Renames Another Town in Borno, 21 Killed in Clash With Military," *This Day*, November 7, 2014; "Boko Haram Renames Another Town in Adamawa: Witnesses," *Vanguard*, November 6, 2014; Jonathan Landay, Warren Strobel, and Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: Seized Documents Reveal Islamic State's Department of War Spoils," Reuters, December 28, 2015.

588 It is important to note that while declining in frequency, Boko Haram remains capable of mass raids on rural villages, as the January 30, 2016, attack by over 50 militants on Dalori, a town just 12 kilometers from Maiduguri, would indicate. Complex operations, involving multiple suicide bombers detonating simultaneously or in various parts of the same location, also have become the norm, with civilian soft targets such as markets, transport stations, and mosques commonly hit. Official Islamic State messaging on Boko Haram attacks, however, ignored the more than 100 female suicide attacks that Boko Haram carried out, as well as its civilian casualties. Ola' Audu, "Update: Scores Killed in Boko Haram Attack on Dalori Village, Borno," *Premium Times*, January 31, 2016.

border, and engaged in a high number of indiscriminate suicide attacks.<sup>589</sup>

Notably, out of the over 100 attacks West Africa Province carried out in the first year of its operation, the Islamic State only claimed those with a high propaganda value, such as an attacks on Shi'as in Kano in October 2015 or other geographically significant male suicide bombings, like those in N'djamena, Chad, and Abuja, in June 2015.<sup>590</sup> In this sense, while external influence grew in ISWAP messaging, the average ISWAP attack did not seem to meet the requirements to be 'advertised' by the Islamic State. This suggests that the vast majority of decisions regarding violence were made at a national or sub-regional, rather than international, level.<sup>591</sup> Such dynamics may have precipitated the movement's split, with the Shekau faction rejecting the Islamic State's influence on internal group strategy.<sup>592</sup>

### *Membership in Phase III*

Phase III saw a rise in sub-regional recruitment, forced recruitment, and the first operational cells external to Nigeria, which will be discussed below. In addition, there were signs of non-Nigerians in leadership roles, which was representative of Boko Haram's decreasing Nigeria-centric approach.<sup>593</sup>

589 Nonetheless, by the end of 2016, the al-Barnawi faction was also present in southern areas of Borno State near Damboa and in Yobe State as well. This is the author's reflection based on conflict tracking.

590 Considering that West Africa Province conducted more than 130 suicide operations between its March 2015 pledge and August 2016 split into two factions, the relatively few claims by the Islamic State represent a small fraction of total operations. An Al-Amaq infographic in December 2015 outlined a list of targets deemed appropriate, which included the armies of each Lake Chad Basin country, pro-government gunmen (civilian vigilante groups), pro-government parties, and Shiites militias—and all claimed attacks have corresponded to this list. Initial attack reporting in 2015 only claimed incidents in highly symbolic locations (such as N'Djamena, Chad—the organization's first attack there—and Abuja and Kano, all major Nigerian cities that demonstrate reach), and those perpetrated by male suicide bombers, often publishing the names and photos of the 'martyrs,' in contrast to the silence over the female bombers. Just prior to the 2016 split and continuing thereafter, attack claims became more frequent and less strict in terms of the importance placed on geography and male suicide operations. From June 2016 until August 2017, the Islamic State or Al-Amaq News Agency claimed 29 different West Africa Province attacks, as more routine clashes in rural areas became the dominant theme. Nonetheless, the stringent reporting dynamics on targeting remained, as all of those claimed attacks targeted security personnel.

591 One oft cited example of potential external influence in Boko Haram target selection is the November 2015 suicide attack on a procession of Shiite Muslims in Kano state, given the Islamic State antipathy toward Shi'as and the fact that the attack was publicized by multiple Islamic State-media outlets. Shiite Muslims in Nigeria, however, have been attacked in the city of Potiskum, Nigeria, on at least four separate occasions since 2012. Boko Haram has not officially claimed any of the incidents, but the use of suicide bombers in July and November 2014 points to the sect's responsibility, while in a December 2014 video statement, Shekau referred to Shiites as pagans and noted his sect would continue to target the group. Mohammed Lere, "Boko Haram Leader, Shekau, Releases New Video; Vows to Attack Emir Sanusi of Kano," *Premium Times*, December 17, 2014. These attacks occurred prior to the *bay'a* to the Islamic State, potentially diminishing the extent of external influence in ISWA's decision-making. Maina, "Boko Haram: Suicide Bomber Kills 11, Injures 37 in Mosque Blast Near Emir of Fika's Palace," *Daily Post*, July 30, 2014; "Scores Dead, Other Injured in Potiskum Explosion," Channels Television, November 3, 2014.

592 It is likely that Shekau's refusal to alter his attack patterns based on Islamic State demands contributed to the global jihadi organization's move away from him. AFRICOM head Lieutenant General Waldhauser stated in June 2016, two months prior to the split, that some in the movement had left Shekau over his refusal to halt the usage of child suicide bombers. An audio statement from key operative Mammam Nur, who joined the al-Barnawi faction during the split, also complained about Shekau's view on the permissibility of indiscriminately killing of Muslim civilians, rehashing a debate that initially surfaced with the breakaway movement Ansaru. The complete lack of reporting from Islamic State media outlets on female suicide attacks, a tactic commonly used by Shekau, further points to likely differences in approach, leading to the split. Phil Stewart, "Boko Haram Fracturing Over Islamic State Ties, US General Warns," Reuters, June 22, 2016; "New Boko Haram Leader, al-Barnawi, Accuses Abubakar Shekau Of Killing Fellow Muslims, Living In Luxury," Sahara Reporters, August 5, 2016.

593 While details on leadership remained elusive, some information could be gleaned from the publication of three Nigerian Army lists of 100 'Most Wanted' militants. Those lists largely did not provide the names of wanted militants, but rather relied on photographs. Nigerian security officials have claimed some success as a result of the lists' dissemination, capturing six members within a month of the first list's distribution, then issuing the second in February 2016, which was followed by a third list of just 55 militants in November 2016. Nonetheless, the credibility of initial list has also been called into question, as Shekau appeared twice as number 97 and 100, with both images screengrabs from video messaging. In addition, the validity of the list as an identification tool was diminished when the capture of presumed number 28 was later revealed to be a case of mistaken identity. In total, the arrests of 15 militants across the three lists had been announced by mid-2017, according to a count by the author. Ndahi Marama, "Military Declare 100 Boko Haram Terrorists Suspects Wanted in Borno," *Vanguard*, October 28, 2015; "Joint Investigation Committee Clears Mister Abubakar Sadiq," PRNigeria, December 18, 2015; "Boko Haram: Nigerian Army Reopens Key Highways, Releases More Names of Wanted Terrorists," *Premium Times*, February 27, 2016.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the leader of both factions following the split—al-Barnawi and Shekau—are Nigerian Kanuris with ties to Borno State, an indication that power and influence within the movement remains dependent on these demographics.

Boko Haram compensated for its loss of popular support as a consequence of its violence against civilians by increasingly engaging in financial inducement, religious manipulation, coercion, and even drug use to acquire new recruits, while refocusing efforts outside of Nigeria, especially in northern Cameroon.<sup>594</sup> A similar recruitment pattern also existed in southern Niger, particularly around the Diffa area that borders Borno State, but with youth recruits often lured by the promises of material gain.<sup>595</sup> Recruitment in Chad was not as pronounced as Cameroon or Niger, but the emergence in November 2014 of a video in which a militant spoke Chad's Buduma language, the arrest of 60 Boko Haram militants in late June 2015 in N'Djamena, and Niger's December 2015 decision to deport dozens of Chadian Boko Haram members detained in Niger indicated that recruitment in Chad had achieved a level of success.<sup>596</sup> The expansion of violence to all sub-regional nations, especially in urban settings such as Maroua, Cameroon; Diffa, Niger; and N'Djamena, Chad, was another indication of successful external recruitment efforts, given the likelihood that some cell members originated from

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594 Eleven young boys abducted in Cameroon and taken across the Nigerian border to Adamawa to enroll in a Qur'anic school escaped in August 2014. "Boko Haram Kills Three, Abducts 12 in Cameroon," *This Day*, August 20, 2014. While the Cameroonian Army claimed to release 900 hostages during operations along its border region in late November 2015, "Cameroon Says Frees 900 Boko Haram Hostages in Military Operations," Reuters, December 2, 2015. At the same time, Boko Haram engaged in forced recruitment. The militants abducted thousands of young men and women during operations and enlisted others at gunpoint during periods of territorial control. Reports of this phenomenon were most prominent in Nigeria, although Cameroon also suffered a similar fate. Cameroon became a particular source of concern by early 2014. Both Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group estimated between 3,000 and 4,000 northern Cameroonians joined Boko Haram. In August 2014, Cameroon Deputy Prime Minister and Kolofata native Amadou Ali also claimed he possessed a list of 450 youths from his hometown who had become Boko Haram members. Hans de Marie Heungoup, "Cameroon's Rising Religious Tensions," *African Arguments*, September 8, 2015; "Boko Haram Plans More Attacks, Recruits Many Young People," AFP, August 8, 2014. Separately, a Cameroonian security official noted in April 2014 that 200 youth from the Kolofata region had been recruited in the past two months, traveling to Nigeria, "Cameroon: Boko Haram Enrôle de Jeunes Camerounais à la Frontière," AFP, April 3, 2014; "Boko Haram Plans More Attacks, Recruits Many Young People," AFP, August 8, 2014; Celia Lebur, "Boko Haram's Increasing Attacks Worry Cameroon," AFP, November 20, 2014; "No Shortage of Recruits for Boko Haram in Cameroon's Far North," IRIN, March 5, 2015; "Boko Haram Recrute des Jeunes Camerounais Dans l'Extrême-Nord," *Le Septentrion*, May 19, 2014; "Boko Haram Plans More Attacks, Recruits Many Young People," AFP, August 8, 2014; Salihu Garba, "Yan Boko Haram Sun Sace Mutane Fiye da Dubu Uku Banda na Chibok," VOA Hausa, August 19, 2014. With estimates of male abductees running into the low thousands, this tactic has ensured that rank-and-file membership in Boko Haram retained a Nigerian character, and helped offset losses inflicted by government troops. A compilation of claims by regional security agencies indicates that more than 6,000 suspected Boko Haram militants have been killed since the beginning of 2015. These figures should be taken cautiously, however, as the inflation of death tolls has been a common aspect of the battle against militancy in the region.

595 In May 2015, journalist Jochen Stahnke talked to locals on the town of Bagara who claimed Boko Haram offered potential recruits 300,000FCA (approximately \$500), a motorbike, and a bride to join the movement. Jochen Stahnke, "Guest Post: An Account from Diffa, Niger About the War with Boko Haram," *Sahel blog*, July 16, 2015. The BBC in April 2014 met a gang in southern Niger that claimed they received money to aid Boko Haram activities. Thomas Fessy, "Niger Hit by Boko Haram Fallout," BBC, April 22, 2014. An ECOWAS report from 2014 also stated Boko Haram was increasingly targeting Nigerian youth for recruitment. David Lewis, "Niger Fears Contagion from Nigeria's Boko Haram Analysis," Reuters, March 19, 2014.

596 Up to 1,000 individuals associated with Boko Haram surrendered to Chadian forces at Baga Sola on Lake Chad in the latter half of 2016, although up to 70 percent were reportedly women and children. Nonetheless, the majority were confirmed as Chadians, further evidence of Boko Haram's recruitment (voluntary or forced) in the country. Ashley Hammer, "The Human Cost of Chad's War Against Boko Haram," IRIN, December 5, 2016; "Chad Arrests 60 Suspected Militants After Suicide Bomb Attack," Reuters, June 29, 2015; "Insight – Chad's Deby Plays for High Stakes in Boko Haram Talks," Reuters, November 3, 2014; "Boko Haram: Le Niger Va Remettre Des Centaines De Détenus Au Nigeria," RFI, December 8, 2015. In addition, a former University of Maiduguri professor alleged in November 2015 that Boko Haram works with Buduma and Kalumba ethnic groups found in Chad, while persistent rumors suggest that many suicide bombers in the Lake Chad region have been ethnic Buduma. Aminu Abubakar, "Questions over Boko Haram Attacks Despite Military Claims of Success," AFP, November 27, 2015; Xavier Aldekoa, "La Tribu Maldita del Lago," *Revista 5W*. The Buduma may engage with Boko Haram in an attempt to "counter the economic domination of Hausa traders." "Boko Haram on the Back Foot?" International Crisis Group, May 4, 2016, p. 10.

the area in which they operated.<sup>597</sup> This also reportedly resulted in sub-regional recruits, especially from Chad or Cameroon, taking up leadership positions, such as commanders.<sup>598</sup> Phase III also saw reports of new Boko Haram recruits from the region more broadly, including Tuaregs, Gambians, Guineans, and other North Africans, whose interest in joining Boko Haram coincided with an Islamic State call for foreign fighters to migrate to Libya or Nigeria.<sup>599</sup> Nonetheless, these fighters have not appeared in Boko Haram messaging nor largely have they been substantiated in any other way. More significant was Senegal's arrest of Makhtar Diokhané, Diokhané's wife and sister-in-law, two imams who were in contact with Boko Haram members, and another individual whose brother had fought and died for Boko Haram. Diokhané had sought to establish a Boko Haram cell in Senegal, but was arrested in Niger in 2015 and later extradited to Senegal. The case was representative of a newfound desire to export Boko Haram ideology outside its previous sub-regional bounds and the potential for the Lake Chad Basin to become a hub for militancy in the region.<sup>600</sup>

597 Using local members to plan and conduct attacks reduces the risk of detection and relies on local knowledge of the operating environment, while militants have also been known to conduct attacks within their home regions, sometimes even as a means of initiation into the sect. A reliance on this tactic would indicate that a high rate of attacks in a new area is likely predicated on successful prior recruitment efforts in that area. An example of this dynamic was seen in August 2015 when militants originating from areas nearby to Kukuwa-Gari in Yobe State participated in a major attack killing over 150. "Death Toll in Nigeria Boko Haram Massacre Rises to 160: Locals," AFP, August 18, 2015. Externally, Cameroonian security officials claimed that recruits from Kolofata partook in a major kidnapping operation in the town in July 2014. "Boko Haram Plans More Attacks, Recruits Many Young People," AFP, August 8, 2014. Perpetrators of an April 2015 attack in Bia, Cameroon, also came from the town. "Human Rights Under Fire: Attacks and Violations in Cameroon's Struggle With Boko Haram," Amnesty International, 2015, p. 29. Then in December 2015, an imam in a Nigerian village was killed by his own nephew during a Boko Haram attack. "Niger Says Boko Haram Gunmen Kill 18 in Village Bordering Nigeria," Reuters, November 27, 2015. Nonetheless, Nigerians belonging to Boko Haram have also operated throughout the region, as the December 2015 decision by Niger to return 457 suspected Boko Haram Nigerians caught on its soil would signify. "Boko Haram: Le Niger Va Remettre Des Centaines De Détenus Au Nigeria," RFI, December 8, 2015.

598 During Boko Haram's period of territorial rule, the militants appointed foreigners to leadership positions. For example, a 'foreigner' of unknown origin was killed near Mafa, Borno State, in May 2015, but had reached the level of emir status before his demise. In addition, a video seen by Reuters in May 2015 featured a judge reportedly of likely Sudanese origin overseeing sharia punishments, while other sharia courts and tank repairmen were reportedly under the guidance of Chadian nationals. The ability of foreigners to serve in positions of authority on Nigerian soil is reflective of a diminished Nigeria-centric focus at the leadership level. "Nigeria Troops Kill Boko Haram Commander and Others, Foreign Currency Recovered," PRNigeria, May 25, 2015; Julia Payne, "Captured Video Appears to Show Foreign Fighters in Nigeria's Boko Haram," Reuters, May 26, 2015; Jacob Zenn, "Mindful of the Islamic State, Boko Haram Broadens Reach into Lake Chad Region," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, February 6, 2015.

599 Rank-and-file membership throughout the wider West African region also likely increased, especially since Shekau's *bay`a*, with persistent rumors asserting the presence of small numbers of foreign fighters in the Lake Chad Basin region. Seini Boukar Lamine, a Cameroonian traditional leader who spent three months as a hostage of Boko Haram, noted he saw many "fair-skinned combatants" who could have been from "Sudan, Algeria, and other Arab countries." Additionally, during the June 2015 crackdown on Boko Haram in the Chadian capital, some of the arrestees reportedly came from Mali. The Cameroonian government also announced the death of two Tuareg militants during an attack in Fotokol in September 2014, while a prominent northern Cameroonian journalist claimed several light-skinned Tuareg or Arabs were sighted in Sigal, Cameroon, in April 2015. The Islamic State has supported the influx of foreign fighters to Boko Haram, calling those who cannot make it Syria or Iraq to travel to other wilayat such as West Africa. This emerging phenomenon was further exemplified by the January 2016 arrest in Mali of a Gambian, Guinean, and two Guinea-Bissau nationals reportedly making their way to join Boko Haram. James Schneider, "Boko Haram: Fearsome yet Reliant on Exploited Children," *New African*, July 22, 2015; "Chad Arrests 60 Suspected Boko Haram After Suicide Bomb Attack," Reuters, June 29, 2015; William Wallis, "Boko Haram Opens New Front Against Nigerian Forces," *Financial Times*, September 9, 2014; "Le Cameroun en Guerre," *L'Oeil du Sahel*, April 20, 2015; "IS Fighters Call for Migration to IS Outside of Iraq/Syria, Lone Wolf Attacks," SITE Intelligence Group, August 3, 2015; "Echos de nos marches avec tamani : Kayes : le 1er arrondissement a interpellé hier 4 suspects jihadistes," Mailweb, January 27, 2016. Some Ghanaian students also reportedly trained in Niger or Nigeria before traveling to join the Islamic State in Syria. "Ghana Investigates Islamic State Recruitment in Universities," BBC, August 28, 2015. In December 2016 and January 2017, the Nigerian Army reported the arrest of an individual from Burkina Faso and Mali, respectively, during counter-Boko Haram operations in northeast Nigeria. "Boko Haram Suspects: Troops Arrest 26 Foreigners, 3332 Civilians," PRNigeria, February 2, 2017; "How we dislodged Boko Haram from Sambisa Forest — Nigerian Army," *Premium Times*, December 29, 2016.

600 Baba Ahmed, "Senegal Fears Extremism and Imam Arrests, Regional Attacks," Associated Press, February 8, 2016; Sanna Camara, "In Sweeping Offensive, Senegal Arrests Imams, Women With Suspected Links To Boko Haram," *Premium Times*, November 13, 2015; "Terrorisme : Le Sénégal Demande au Niger l'Extradition de Makhtar Diokhané," *ActuNiger*, November 5, 2015. Half a dozen Senegalese were also reportedly arrested in Mauritania for trying join Boko Haram as well in mid-February 2016. "La Mauritanie Extrade Discrètement des Prémumés Jihadistes au Sénégal," *Seneweb*, February 19, 2016. Senegal has not suffered from terrorist violence to date, but it shows some worrying signs. Recent reports suggest that up to 30 Senegalese have traveled to Libya in support of the Islamic State. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Scrambles to Contain Growing ISIS Threat in Libya," *New York Times*, February 21, 2016.

### *Support Networks in Phase III*

Boko Haram's shift to rural hideouts in Phase III triggered new demands for the militants, such as the need for food, medicine, and fuel in large quantities. This caused Boko Haram to begin a 'live-off-the-land' approach and strengthen localized logistics networks to support its emerging state. As a result, stealing food, medicine, and other supplies during operations, including hijacking trucks and cattle-rustling, became an increasingly common tactic.<sup>601</sup> The simultaneous looting of civilian property in towns that Boko Haram raided as well as the militants' purchasing of goods at markets helped ensure steady access to resources, notwithstanding occasional rumors of low stockpiles.<sup>602</sup> Even despite Nigerian army efforts to disrupt Boko Haram's cross-border logistics routes, especially for fuel supplies, Boko Haram proved resilient, indicating the presence of a robust resupply system.<sup>603</sup>

The main sources of arms in Phase III continued to be Nigerian security forces and sub-regional trafficking, while explosives came from construction sites in Nigeria and Cameroon.<sup>604</sup> The discovery of major arms caches in Cameroon and Chad highlighted the role of the sub-regional arms pipeline, along with the discovery in Chad of an army convoy from Libya, destined for the Lake Chad region in April 2016.<sup>605</sup> Nonetheless, arms seized from Nigerian stockpiles in Boko Haram's barracks raids re-

601 As an example of the importance of sourcing food during operations, Boko Haram militants, during a January attack on Dalori just outside of Maiduguri, first went house-to-house looking for food and livestock. Shehu Abubakar, Omirin Olatunji, Maiduguri, and Ibrahim Kabiru Sule, "Attack on Maiduguri Villages ... 85 Corpses Recovered," *Daily Trust*, February 1, 2016. Two thousand cattle were found at a Boko Haram camp in Sambisa forest in December 2015. "Military Strikes Inside Sambisa," PRNigeria, December 6, 2015. During a December 2015 operation in Borno State, militants stole four trucks worth of foodstuffs from Takulashi village, burning four more they were unable to take. "Boko Haram Torches Village Near Kidnapped Girls' Town," AFP, December 8, 2015. The hijacking of food trucks has also involved a cross-border element as many targeted in northern Cameroon have been driven into Nigeria. In a February 2015 incident, 500 sacks of rice were intercepted by militants in northern Cameroon and taken across the border. Aziz Salatou, "Un Camion Suspect Intercepté à Kangeléri," *Le Jour*, February 26, 2015; "Le Cameroun en Guerre," *L'Oeil du Sahel*, July 1, 2015. A March 2014 attack in Buni Yadi saw gunmen specifically go after two buses full of food. "Gunmen Kill 111 in Katsina, Benue, Yobe," *Leadership*, March 14, 2014. And the Emir of Gwoza complained about militants seizing harvests in Borno state in April 2014. "Emir Says Insurgency Paralysed Economic Activities in Gwoza," *Leadership*, April 13, 2014. For example, drug stores were looted during an attack in June 2015 in Borno State. "Aminu Abubkar, 'Civilians Hit Again in NE Nigeria, as Boko Haram Kills 42,'" AFP, June 24, 2015. In November 2014, 800,000 CFA (approximately \$1,500) worth of medical supplies were stolen during an attack in northern Cameroon. David Wenaï, "Le Centre de Santé D'Aïssa-Hardé Pillé par Boko Haram," *L'Oeil de Sahel*, November 12, 2015.

602 Julia Payne, "Nigeria's Boko Haram in Disarray as Government Forces Advance," Reuters, May 5, 2015. Local Nigerian media reports have claimed that militants trade in weekly markets in both Bida and Boboshe in Borno State. Shehu Abubakar, "Borno Market Where Boko Haram Trades," *Daily Trust*, December 5, 2015; "Soldiers Kill 100 Insurgents, Rescue 1,200 Captives in Borno," *Leadership*, February 3, 2016. The Nigerian Army assured that it would shut down markets benefiting Boko Haram in February 2016. "Unpatriotic Elements Aid Terrorists, as Soldiers Arrested with Unauthorized Military Items," PRNigeria, February 9, 2016.

603 A Boko Haram food and fuel supplier was arrested in August 2015. "Troops Discover Poles for IEDs ... Nabs Boko Haram Supplies," PRNigeria, August 6, 2015. A Boko Haram fuel depot in Guzamala LGA, Borno State, was disrupted in September 2015, "Troops Dismantle Boko Haram Terrorists Fuel Depot," PRNigeria, September 24, 2015. In October 2015, a Boko Haram fuel dump was discovered in Maiduguri itself. "Another Boko Haram Fuel Dump Discovered in Maiduguri," PRNigeria, October 1, 2015.

604 Boko Haram has conducted raids for supplies such as ammonium nitrate fertilizer, C4, and dynamite in order to construct explosive devices. Construction companies in particular have been targeted, such as the looting of 125 kilograms of dynamite from Ric Rock in Yobe in July 2013 ("Suspected Islamists Steal 125 kg of dynamite in North Nigeria," Reuters, July 31, 2013), Mother Cat Company in Bauchi state in April 2014 (Ahmed Mohammed, "Gunmen Attack Construction Company in Bauchi," *Daily Trust*, April 15, 2014), and Ashaka Cement Company in Gombe state in November 2014 ("Boko Haram Members Left Ashaka with Eight Hilux Loaded of Dynamite – Residents," Channels Television, November 5, 2014).

605 Arms caches suspected to be destined for Boko Haram were discovered in March and June 2014 in northern Cameroon and in N'Djamena in June 2015. Peter Kum, "Une Cache D'armes De Boko Haram Découverte Dans Le Logon Et Chari," Cameroon-Info.net, March 28, 2014; Moki Edwin Kindzeka, "Cameroon's Military Seizes War Weapons," VOA Hausa, June 18, 2014; Madjiasra Nako and Moumine Ngarmbassa, "Suicide Blast in Chad Capital Kills 11 During Police Raid," Reuters, June 29, 2015. The regional arms trade likely takes a back seat to sub-regional access. However, the sect's involvement has been noted through the arrest of a suspected Boko Haram arms dealer in Burkina Faso in 2013 ("Terrorist Financing in West Africa," p. 24) and the detention of a purported associate of Chadian President Deby, Mahamat Bichara Gnoti, on the Sudanese border in November 2014 with 19 SAM2 missiles destined for Boko Haram. "Chad's President's Friend Buy 19 Missiles for Boko Haram," *Leadership*, November 23, 2014. In addition, the U.S. military announced in April 2016 that an arms convoy originating from Islamic State actors in Libya and destined for Lake Chad was intercepted at the Chad-Libya border on April 7, 2016, the first concrete example of material support flowing to Boko Haram militants. Helene Cooper, "Boko Haram and ISIS are Collaborating More, U.S. Military Says," *New York Times*, April 20, 2016.

mained important.<sup>606</sup> Furthermore, IEDs used in October 2015 were traced back to the sale of Beluga bombs from France to Nigeria in the 1980s, which showed additional evidence of Boko Haram's ability to source materials locally by pilfering from barracks or buying on the black market.<sup>607</sup>

Boko Haram continued to receive funding from kidnapping foreign nationals through 2014, while the introduction of territorial control from mid-2014 onward opened up new avenues, such as taxes and checkpoints, raiding banks, and exchanging captives (both foreigners and Nigerian or Cameroonian nationals) for cash.<sup>608</sup> Boko Haram also reportedly became involved in legitimate trades, such as fish from Lake Chad and pepper in Niger, while the group often sold stolen cattle, demonstrating its ability to source revenue within the sub-region.<sup>609</sup>

Boko Haram's ties to militants in northern Mali likely declined after 2013, especially after the French intervention severed networks between Boko Haram and AQIM.<sup>610</sup> Boko Haram's orientation toward the Islamic State, however, shifted the direction of international linkages. The newfound relationship meant less in terms of material support or funding, but redirected Boko Haram's narrative to be fully part of a global jihadi struggle, which inspired young fighters on the remote battlefields of northeastern Nigeria, as well as the several dozen to several hundred Boko Haram members (and independent

606 The display of captured weaponry has continued as a common feature in al-Barnawi messaging following the split. Nigerian Director of Defense Information Major-General Chris Olukolade admitted in September 2014 that "we agree and are aware Boko Haram has stolen [our] arms," while arms left behind during Boko Haram attacks in Malam Fatori in April 2015 reportedly carried Nigerian Army logos. Celia Lebur, "Nigeria's Malam Fatori: A Liberated Ghost Town," AFP, April 5, 2015. For example, a T-72 tank was taken during an attack in Gudunbali, Borno State, in November 2015. Nicholas Ibekwe, "Exclusive: At least 105 Nigerian Soldiers Missing After Fierce Gun Battle with Boko Haram," *Premium Times*, November 19, 2015. A Vickers MK.3 Eagle Tank with Boko Haram flag on it was recaptured in February 2015, "Pictured: A Vickers MK.3 Eagle Tank Recaptured From Boko Haram in Maiduguri," Laila's Blog, February 3, 2015. The Nigerian Army reported the capture of an APC with Boko Haram insignia in Michika in February 2015 ("NOA\_Nigeria," Twitter, February 19, 2015), and an APC stolen from Gwoza with words 'PMF Training College' was sighted during a February 2015 battle in Cameroon, evidence of Boko Haram's ability to deploy the stolen vehicles across borders. Bate Felix, "Blood-Soaked Truck Symbolises Boko Haram's War Without Borders," Reuters, February 18, 2015.

607 Nicolas Champeaux and Olivier Fort, "Info RFI: Des Bombes Françaises Refont Surface Aux Mains De Boko Haram," RFI, October 13, 2015.

608 Three high-profile incidents of foreign nationals kidnapped in northern Cameroon generated substantial income during this period, including a reported \$12.5 million for a French priest abducted in November 2013 (Yuh Timchia, "Boko Haram 'Was Paid' \$12.5 Million to Release French Priest," *Africa Review*, January 7, 2015) and undisclosed but likely ransom payments for two Italian priests and a Canadian nun abducted in April 2014 and 10 Chinese construction workers abducted near Waza in May 2014. A trader traveling through Gwoza paid \$40 to go through checkpoints. "A Nation Divided," *Economist*, October 25, 2014; Siobhan O'Grady, "Boko Haram Turns Robin Hood Strategy on its Head," *Foreign Policy*, March 3, 2015. During their takeover of Mubi, Boko Haram fighters raided the Diamond Bank branch there and walked off with N100 million (approximately \$600,000), in addition to robberies of other banks. "How 30 Boko Haram Insurgents Overran 1,000 Troops in Mubi," *This Day*, December 29, 2014; Ogala Emmanuel and Ibang Isine, "Special Report: Inside Boko Haram's Routes of Death, Destruction and Humanitarian Crises," *Premium Times*, October 24, 2015; Kareem Haruna, "Boko Haram Rules Bama with Force, Jail Residents, Collect Fees for Bail – Escapees," *Leadership*, October 22, 2014; Julia Payne, "Nigeria's Boko Haram In Disarray as Government Forces Advance," Reuters, May 5, 2015; "Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter, and Kill," Amnesty International, 2015, p. 65.

609 "Niger: Le Poisson Fumé, Source D'importants Revenus Pour Boko Haram," RFI, February 25, 2015; "Niger Troops Bomb Fish Farmers Financing Boko Haram," *PM News*, February 25, 2015; Pierre Pinto, "Niger: Les Habitants De Diffa Souffrent Des Restrictions," RFI, July 13, 2015. Boko Haram has been accused of stealing cattle and selling it throughout the region. "Tchad: Boko Haram Accusé De Vol De Bétail," RFI, September 9, 2014; "Nigerian Troops Clear Terrorists From Aulari in Sambisa," PRNigeria, December 14, 2015. In northern Cameroon, 7,000 cattle and sheep were stolen by February 2013. "Human Rights Under Fire: Attacks And Violations In Cameroon's Struggle With Boko Haram," Amnesty International, 2015, p. 23. Borno State herders in January 2016 claimed to have lost a combined total of 200,000 livestock because of Boko Haram, although not all appear to have been stolen. Ibrahim Sawab, "Herders Lose 1,637 Members, 200,773 Livestock to Boko Haram," *Daily Trust*, January 28, 2016. A recent estimate puts Boko Haram stolen cattle in northern Cameroon at 12,000 heads, worth \$3.4 million. "Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram," p. 17.

610 French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius stated in October 2013 that documents found in northern Mali indicated Boko Haram members had trained in the Ifoghas Mountains, but little concrete evidence to link Boko Haram militants to northern Mali had emerged since then. Paul Schemm, "France Says Nigerian Militants Trained in Mali," Associated Press, November 14, 2013.

Nigerians), who traveled to Libya to fight or train with the Islamic State there.<sup>611</sup>

The August 2016 factional split between al-Barnawi and Shekau, however, in some ways demonstrates Shekau's rejection of external control over his decision-making process. It is important to note, however, that despite no longer enjoying the support of the Islamic State and returning his faction of Boko Haram to pre-pledge dynamics in terms of violence and messaging, Shekau has yet to officially renounce his loyalty to al-Baghdadi. This leaves open the possibility of some sort of relationship or association in the future.

### *Assessment of Phase III*

Phase III saw the most dramatic shifts in Boko Haram's history, with actions and support both moving beyond Nigeria's borders. For the first time, messaging contained specific references and threats to other countries in the sub-region, while Boko Haram's media showed significant coordination with international jihadi networks.

Strategy also underwent significant changes, with frequent Boko Haram operations in Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. External influence may have also played a role in the push for territorial control, which was a significant departure from previous tactics. Nonetheless, territorial control was restricted to areas within Nigeria's borders, while attacks in Niger and Chad declined by early 2016.

Membership demographics also underwent significant changes in Phase III, with Boko Haram increasing its recruitment throughout the sub-region. Leadership also witnessed similar dynamics in terms of a greater sub-regional focus, continuing trends that began during Phase II.

Support networks reached a pinnacle with Shekau's pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi, which was Boko Haram's first official affiliation to an external jihadi organization. While this ultimately split the movement, external influence continues within the al-Barnawi faction, which has remained ISWAP, while Shekau has stopped short of completely abandoning his loyalty to al-Baghdadi. Despite these dynamics, material support largely remained domestic and sub-regional, perhaps precluding a reliance on external links.

The domestic Nigerian character of Boko Haram retained importance, as the locus of violence and operations still occurs within the country.<sup>612</sup> Nonetheless, Boko Haram transitioned into an exporter of terrorism to the sub-region and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in the region, such as Senegal. This departed from Phase II, where external linkages were primarily leveraged for the purposes of domestic activity.

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611 Aside from intelligence reports, the biggest piece of evidence to date on material links followed the aforementioned army convoy from Libya intercepted at the Chadian border in April 2016. An eyewitness reported a parade held in Sirte, Libya, in April 2015 on the occasion of the arrival of Boko Haram fighters from Nigeria. "Control and Crucifixions: Life in Libya Under IS," BBC, February 3, 2016. Up to 200 Boko Haram fighters may have been present in Sirte by August 2015. Zenn, "Wilayat West Africa Reboots for the Caliphate." In January 2016, Nigerian authorities disrupted four Islamic State-linked cells in central Nigeria, involving 18 individuals. Many were preparing to travel to Libya, while two Nigerians reportedly already operated there. One of the principal funders reportedly came from Sudan, while a Nigerian was also one of those arrested. On another level, Nigerians have also surfaced in messaging from Libya but have not necessarily overtly associated themselves with Boko Haram. "DSS Arrests ISIS Recruiter, Terrorists and Kidnappers Nationwide," PRNigeria, February 9, 2016. In February 2016, Islamic State militants also eulogized the death of a fighter from Nigeria in Libya, although a connection to Boko Haram was not specified. "Killed Nigerian IS Fighter in Libya Eulogized on Telegram," SITE Intelligence Group, February 15, 2016; Emma Farge, "Islamic State Fighters Head South in Libya, Threatening Sahel," Reuters, February 11, 2016.

612 For example, the majority of operations in Cameroon occur in border regions, and many involve militants coming from Nigeria, indicating the continued importance of safe havens there. The wife of a Boko Haram militant told Cameroon authorities in early February how female bombers trained at a house in Ngoshe, Nigeria, before crossing over into Cameroon to undertake their missions. Aziz Salatou "Boko Haram: Une Candidate au Suicide Parle," *Le Jour*, February 3, 2016.

PHASE III	DOMESTIC	SUB-REGIONAL	REGIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Messaging	.	.		.
Strategy	.	.		.
Membership	.	.	.	
Support Networks	.	.	.	.

PHASE III	DOMESTIC	SUB-REGIONAL	REGIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Messaging	<i>Continued threats and publication of events in Nigeria</i>	<i>Threats to sub-regional nations</i>		<i>Convergence with Islamic State media productions</i>
Strategy	<i>Majority of attacks and territorial push within Nigerian borders</i>	<i>Advent of violent operations in all sub-regional nations</i>		<i>External influence may have played role in shifting tactics toward territorial control</i>
Membership	<i>Forced recruitment ensures Nigerian membership</i>	<i>Increased recruitment in all sub-regional nations; continued emergence of non-Nigerian leaders</i>	<i>Regional membership small but becoming more prominent</i>	
Support Networks	<i>Funding, arms, and supply networks largely domestic</i>	<i>Some logistic networks extending through sub-region</i>	<i>Connections to Islamic State militants in Libya grew</i>	<i>Officially member of international jihadi network after pledge; split also a rejection of too much external control</i>

**Conclusion**

Boko Haram has undergone a number of shifts throughout its history, but a key theme has been the deepening of sub-regional, regional, and international activity. The focus of the group’s actions, both in terms of messaging and attacks, is now beyond Nigeria, while support for membership and support networks reflects a similar balance. At the same time, however, sub-regional, regional, and international elements have been present at various levels since Boko Haram’s founding, and the current center of gravity remains linked to northeast Nigeria, clouding simplistic depictions of Boko Haram as a domestic movement that has become international.

*Final Summary Chart*

	<b>PHASE I</b>	<b>PHASE II</b>	<b>PHASE III</b>
Messaging	<i>Domestic International</i>	<i>Domestic International</i>	<i>Domestic Sub-regional International</i>
Strategy	<i>Domestic International</i>	<i>Domestic International</i>	<i>Domestic Sub-regional International</i>
Membership	<i>Domestic Sub-regional</i>	<i>Domestic Sub-regional</i>	<i>Domestic Sub-regional Regional</i>
Support Networks	<i>Domestic International</i>	<i>Domestic Sub-regional Regional</i>	<i>Domestic Sub-regional Regional International</i>

The intensity of geographic involvement varies also depending on factor, and must be considered in determining overall frame. For example, messaging content has primarily been domestically focused, but included external influence since the days of Muhammad Yusuf. Strategy has been confined to Nigeria with a recent expansion sub-regionally, but also likely derives from external influence in terms of the emphasis on territorial control. Membership largely originates in the sub-region, but has been accelerated by forced recruitment dynamics and growing regional partnerships. Support networks typify the paradox: the ability to source goods locally demonstrates a level of internal self-reliance, while Boko Haram's inclusion as part of the Islamic State's global jihadi network places the movement on the world stage, with the prospect of further linkages with Islamic State affiliates elsewhere. In this sense, the inter-linkages between Boko Haram's various geographic frames within each factor are also important in determining the group's overall influence and trajectory.

Considering that the framing of the movement based on its potential to be or become a threat is largely tied to geographic orientation, in turn influencing responses, this framework suggests that intervention strategies may be more appropriate if revolving around a specific factor or set of factors, rather than targeting all aspects group as a whole. For example, at times it may make more sense for international actors to target support networks given the international linkages and thus threat, rather than focus on a group strategy that has been predominately domestic.

At any rate, the history of Boko Haram clearly demonstrates that its continuum from domestic threat to one beyond has varied heavily over time. Nonetheless, another key lesson is that an inappropriate framing of the movement (e.g., viewing it purely as a Nigerian problem) can have devastating results, requiring more substantial resources to stem its advance down the road.

## CHAPTER 6: Boko Haram's Fluctuating Affiliations: Future Prospects for Realignment with al-Qa`ida

*By Jacob Zenn*

### Introduction

The group commonly known as “Boko Haram”<sup>613</sup> has gained international notoriety in recent years. First, it claimed to have ‘enslaved’ more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria, in May 2014, which led to an international outcry and the founding of a global social media movement calling for the girls’ release, #BringBackOurGirls. The movement finally pressured the Nigerian government to negotiate for the release of more than 100 of the girls in 2016 and 2017.

While Boko Haram was holding these girls captive, it also merged with the Islamic State in March 2015. The Islamic State’s acceptance of Boko Haram leader Abu Bakr Shekau’s pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi led to the renaming of Boko Haram from its former official title, *Jama`at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da`wa wa-l-Jihad*,<sup>614</sup> to Islamic State in West Africa Province (*al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya*), or ISWAP, as well as the Islamic State’s upgrading of the new ISWAP’s media operations.<sup>615</sup>

Despite that the Islamic State has also “commanded the world’s attention” in recent years, including for its merger with Boko Haram, out of the media glare al-Qa`ida has, according to terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman, “been quietly rebuilding and fortifying its various branches.”<sup>616</sup> Indeed, prior to 2015, the nature and extent of Boko Haram’s relationship with al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was also kept secret and was not well understood.<sup>617</sup> Boko Haram’s relationship to AQIM, for example, was described as “marginal” and “not serious” by Thurston, “speculative” by Pérouse de Montclos, and “good propaganda” by Higazi.<sup>618</sup> Yet, primary source materials from AQIM and Boko Haram that AQIM’s al-Andalus media agency released from its archives on the Telegram messaging service in April 2017 show evidence to the contrary.<sup>619</sup> These materials shed new light on the nature of AQIM’s relationship with Boko Haram in the years prior to Boko Haram’s merger with the Islamic State. (The materials have since been made available for the general public on the blog [jihadology.net](http://jihadology.net).)

This article examines the reasons why al-Qa`ida’s relationship with Boko Haram collapsed and the prospects for al-Qa`ida or one of its affiliates to reenter Nigeria and rebuild its ties with Boko Haram through an evaluation of primary sources, including five archived letters from among primary source materials that AQIM released in April 2017. The letters are from southern commander Abu Zeid to AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel on August 24, 2009; Droukdel to Shekau on September 21, 2009;

613 Boko can refer to “book” or, more broadly, “Western education,” in northern Nigeria’s *lingua franca* of Hausa. Haram is an Arabic term also used in Hausa meaning “blasphemous.”

614 This name in Arabic literally means the “[Sunni Muslim] Group for Preaching and Jihad.”

615 “Al-Furqan Media Presents a New Audio Message from the Islamic State’s Shaykh Abu Muhammad Al ‘Adnani Al-Shami: ‘So They Kill and Are Killed,’” *Jihadology*, March 12, 2015; “Al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqa Foundation Presents a New Audio Message From Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da’wah wa-l-Jihad’s (Boko Haram) Abu Bakr Shekau: ‘Bay’ah Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da’wah wa-l-Jihad to the Caliph of the Muslims Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,’” *Jihadology*, March 7, 2015.

616 Bruce Hoffman, “Al-Qaeda’s Resurrection,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 6, 2018.

617 Shaykh Abu Al-Hasan Rashid, “Documents of Advice and Sharia Instruction to the Fighters in Nigeria,” *Jihadology*, released in April 2017 but dated to before bin Ladin’s death in May 2011.

618 Rashid.

619 Ibid.; Adam Higazi, “Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria,” in Michel Cahen, Marie Emmanuelle Pommerolle, and Kadya Tall eds., *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015); Alexander Thurston, “The disease is unbelief: Boko Haram’s religious and political worldview,” *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper No. 22*, January 2016; Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Introduction,” *Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria* (Ibadan: French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA)—Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014); “Quick Items: Boko Haram and al Shabab,” *Sahelblog*, October 22, 2010.

Droukdel to Abu Zeid on July 5, 2010; Shekau to Abu Zeid on October 7, 2010; and Khalid al-Barnawi and eight members of his shura to a kidnapping specialist in Abu Zeid's brigade, Abdullah al-Shinqiti, a correspondence that al-Barnawi requested be forwarded to Mokhtar Belmokhtar in early 2011. The original version of at least two of the five letters were found in Usama bin Ladin's compound during the U.S. Special Forces raid that killed him in Pakistan in 2011, which means that AQIM forwarded them to bin Ladin.<sup>620</sup> This further establishes their credibility, which has not been questioned by researchers of the region.<sup>621</sup>

Among other revelations, the letters that AQIM released in April 2017 add to preexisting evidence that AQIM funding, weapons, and training contributed toward Boko Haram's first attack on Bauchi prison in 2010 and first suicide bombings in 2011.<sup>622</sup> They also show that while AQIM offered Boko Haram support in publishing its propaganda and Droukdel declared publicly his support to Boko Haram in 2010, much of the nature of the material relationship—funding, weapons, and training—was covert. Rather than the groups overhyping what was not a significant relationship, they actually kept what was a significant relationship largely under wraps. Indeed, the extent of the relationship, or even that a relationship existed, had been unknown to much of the research community until the release of these letters.

In the case of the above letters, the fact that they were initially intended for *internal consumption* between jihadis makes them more credible than primary sources that are originally intended as propaganda for an outside audience, including biographies of fighters and histories in AQIM magazines. Terrorist groups, such as AQIM and Boko Haram, often release propaganda materials and make attack claims that in and of themselves do not establish the accuracy of what they say. Similarly, government officials may claim AQIM or Boko Haram conducted an attack, but that in and of itself does not mean they actually carried it out.

Therefore, in the case of Nigeria, when a major attack takes place, it is important to corroborate any claims from either Boko Haram or the government about the attack's provenance with other evidence, such as whether Boko Haram fighters were in the vicinity of the attack site or regularly operate there; (an attack in Kwara State is less likely to be Boko Haram than one in Bauchi State, for example); reports about the attackers from eyewitnesses; evidence that officials working at the scene of the attack say they obtained or especially show to the public; the capabilities of Boko Haram compared to other groups or individuals to carry out the attack (a double-suicide bombing more certain to be Boko Haram while an arson perhaps not); the attack target (a media house more likely to be Boko Haram after the group threatens the media in a statement, for example); or the evidence Boko Haram provides in its claim (photos or a video of the attack, for example). This is the methodology used in this report to assess Boko Haram's responsibility for attacks attributed to it.

One of the advantages of the aforementioned is that they letters provide a window into the motivations and justifications of fighters, such as a Nigerian commander of AQIM's Tariq ibn Ziyad brigade, Khalid al-Barnawi, who broke away from Shekau to form a new group, *Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan* (Ansaru),<sup>623</sup> after consulting with AQIM in 2011.<sup>624</sup> Other AQIM-trained Boko Haram members, such as Mamman Nur, were ideologically and operationally aligned with Khalid al-Barnawi and Ansaru but still formally part of Boko Haram under Shekau's leadership, probably for fear that Shekau

620 "November 2017 Release of Abbottabad Compound Material," cia.gov.

621 See, for example, Thurston's treatment of the documents in Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," Princeton University Press, January 2018, p. 175.

622 Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," Princeton University Press, January 2018, p. 179.

623 This is an Arabic name meaning "Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands."

624 "A Message from Nigeria," Al-Risalah, January 2017.

would kill Nur and his loyalists if they defected.<sup>625</sup> Despite Nur's remaining formally with Boko Haram and Khalid al-Barnawi's formal split from Shekau in 2011, two years later, in 2013, both of them had shifted course and reintegrated with or operated alongside Shekau.<sup>626</sup> Therefore, as of 2013, Boko Haram was more unified than it had been in years, which helped the group to begin to conquer territory that year.<sup>627</sup>

While the above-mentioned letters, among other evidence, assist scholars to explain Boko Haram's early trajectory from 2009 to 2011, a new trend that emerged by 2013 was that AQIM became estranged from the jihadi scene in Nigeria after the French-led military intervention in Mali in February dispersed AQIM fighters northward to Libya and Tunisia and led to the deaths of its key couriers to Boko Haram.<sup>628</sup> Formerly al-Qa`ida-trained Mamman Nur then supported Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi in March 2015, but in August 2016, Nur worked to depose Shekau from ISWAP and repeated many of the accusations of "transgressions" that Khalid al-Barnawi had leveled at Shekau in 2011 when al-Barnawi formed Ansaru. (Al-Barnawi returned to Ansaru by 2016 and did not join ISWAP.)<sup>629</sup> Nur and Abu Musab al-Barnawi (no relation to Khalid al-Barnawi) then took control of ISWAP in August 2016, and Shekau was forced to revert to leading Boko Haram despite announcing his continued loyalty to al-Baghdadi.<sup>630</sup>

Now, in 2018, five years since the French-led military intervention in Mali, AQIM has resurged in Mali and the borderlands of neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso and Niger, through a coalition of AQIM-allied jihadi groups called *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM),<sup>631</sup> which formed in March 2017. JNIM has been endorsed by Abdelmalek Droukdel and al-Qa`ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. It includes in its coalition Katiba Macina, which is led by Hamadou Kouffa, is mostly ethnically Fulani, and operates in Central Mali; Ansar al-Din, which is led by Ag Ghaly, is mostly Tuareg, and operates in northern Mali; AQIM's Sahara Branch, which is led by North Africans (mostly Arabs but also some Berbers); and al-Murabitun, which is led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar (although it is unclear if he is alive or not) and other Arab North Africans. In addition, the Burkina Faso-based Fulani jihadi group, Ansaroul Islam, was formed as a branch of Katiba Macina, although it has not become formally part of JNIM and is suspected of having divided loyalties between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State. JNIM is also reportedly working on winning back Abu Adnan Walid al-Sahrawi, who in 2015 declared loyalty to the Islamic State and in 2018 claimed the attack that killed four U.S. Special Forces soldiers in Tongo Tongo, Niger, in October 2017.<sup>632</sup> JNIM has been highly active since its formation, with up to some 70 claimed attacks in Mali in 2017 and about as many attacks unclaimed.<sup>633</sup>

Against this landscape of regional jihadi activity, this article analyzes new primary sources, including, among others, the materials released by AQIM in April 2017, to evaluate the prospects for a future AQIM/JNIM alliance with the three active Nigerian jihadi groups—ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansa-

625 Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate: How Al-Qaeda Helped Islamic State Acquire Territory," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2018.

626 Ibid.; "Taking the hostage road," *Africa Confidential*, March 16, 2013; Adam Nossiter, "New Threat in Nigeria as Militants Split Off," *New York Times*, April 26, 2013.

627 Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

628 Remi Caravol, "Belmokhtar, the Sahelistan Godfather," *Jeune Afrique*, January 15-31, 2015; "Judge's Absence Stalls Trial of Mali-based Boko Haram Suspect," *Premium Times*, May 8, 2013; "Algerian court sentences Belmokhtar aide to eight years in prison," *Ennahar el-Jadid Online*, December 30, 2014; "Mali: un Béninois à la tête d'une unité combattante, une katiba, dans le Nord," *Radio France Internationale*, December 28, 2012.

629 Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

630 Man Chari and Abubakr Shekau, "Message from the Soldiers," August 7, 2016.

631 This is an Arabic name meaning "Group of Supporters of Islam and the Muslims."

632 For more details on Ansaroul Islam, see "Islamic State affiliate claims deadly attack on U.S. troops in Niger," *Reuters*, January 13, 2018.

633 Caleb Weiss, "JNIM: Over 100 Al Qaeda-linked attacks in West Africa so far in 2017," *FDD's Long War Journal*, May 25, 2017.

ru. The article carries out this evaluation by tracing phases of the evolution of al-Qa`ida's and AQIM's relationship with Boko Haram, from the group's founding in 2002 through Boko Haram's splits with Ansaru and ISWAP in 2011 and 2016, which occurred primarily because of external organizational influences on Boko Haram from al-Qa`ida (in the case of the formation of Ansaru) and the Islamic State (in the case of the formation of ISWAP). The article then explores what the past reveals about the possible future loyalties of ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansaru and what the consequences of a merger or other forms of cooperation between AQIM/JNIM and any of these three groups would be for security in Nigeria.

## Phases of AQIM-Boko Haram Relations

### *Start-Up Phase*

Although the literature on Boko Haram has previously regarded it as an originally "peaceful" group, new research has shown that it was founded with violent jihadi objectives and its early leaders coordinated with al-Qa`ida and AQIM's predecessor, the Salafi Group for Preaching Combat (GSPC), which formally became AQIM in 2007.<sup>634</sup> The group, which was then commonly known as the Nigerian Taliban, was founded in 2002 when it set up a camp called Afghanistan<sup>635</sup> near Nigeria's border with Niger. According to one set of scholarly sources and news articles from 2004, a key funding stream for the group came from a Saudi-funded charity, al-Muntada al-Islami, which had funded several dozen mosques in northern Nigeria and whose clerics sent some followers to the Afghanistan camp.<sup>636</sup> The charity's Sudanese director in Nigeria admitted he provided funding to a cleric in Boko Haram in 2003, but said he was only repaying a loan.<sup>637</sup> Although Nigeria suspended the charity and the United Kingdom later considered an investigation of its alleged funding of Boko Haram, charges were never formally filed.

In an article in January 2017, the head of Ansaru offered an additional explanation for Boko Haram's founding in 2002. He wrote that initial funding to found Boko Haram came from "members of al-Qa`ida residing in the Arabian Peninsula" after 9/11.<sup>638</sup> If true, this would likely refer to bin Ladin's Yemeni envoy to northwest Africa, who was invited to Nigeria in 2002 by a member of the GSPC. However, according to the Ansaru leader, much of this funding was stolen by the recipient of the funds in Boko Haram.<sup>639</sup>

The members of Boko Haram at the Afghanistan camp were commonly described in reports by eye-witnesses and officials as "undergraduates, ex-military personnel, and other professionals" who "quit their jobs, retreated to the desert, soaked up the Qur'an and then swore to oust the corrupt Nigerian system and western education that they saw as antithetical to true sharia and regarded as infideli-

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634 Jean Herskovits, "In Nigeria, Boko Haram Is Not the Problem," *New York Times*, January 2, 2012; Hilary Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Women Witness* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2018).

635 The training camp is also alleged to have been called "Kandahar," not "Afghanistan." Other Nigerian Taliban members have referred to their stay there simply as *tafiya*, or 'journey,' in Hausa language. The camp was also called the "al-Muntada camp" in 2002 by Sufi groups familiar with—and concerned about—the camp, in reference to the Saudi charity that they and other ex-camp members alleged funded the camp.

636 Andrea Brigaglia, "A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa: The Career and the Murder of Shaykh JaDfar Mahmoud Adam (Daura, ca. 1961/1962-Kano 2007)," *Islamic Africa* 3:1 (2012); Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 37; James M. Dorsey, "Creating Frankenstein: Saudi Arabia's Ultra-conservative Footprint in Africa," Annotated remarks at Terrorism in Africa seminar, Singapore, January 18, 2017.

637 "Head of Islamic Charity Denies Funding Islamist Rebellion," AFP, February 25, 2004.

638 Al-Risalah 4, January 2017, available at Jihadology.

639 Ibid.

ty.”<sup>640</sup> Their leader, Muhammed Ali, had studied under scholars of bin Ladin’s in Sudan and received a promise of funding from bin Ladin to start a jihadi movement in Nigeria in the mid-1990s.<sup>641</sup> He also fought in Afghanistan before returning to Nigeria to found Boko Haram in 2002.<sup>642</sup> Muhammed Ali, therefore, was both the camp leader and a member of the al-Qa`ida network and a key funder for the group he founded.

Several observers, such as civil society activist Shehu Sani and scholar Muhammed Kabir Isa, note that Boko Haram trained young men in militancy and amassed weapons at the Afghanistan camp.<sup>643</sup> The scholar Andrea Brigaglia argues that Boko Haram had the tacit support of leading Nigerian salafi clerics who were funded by al-Muntada al-Islami, such as the most prominent cleric in the salafi network called *Ahlas-Sunna*, Shaykh Jafaar Mahmoud Adam.<sup>644</sup> Shaykh Jafaar and the deputies around him were rhetorically supportive of bin Ladin and al-Qa`ida’s jihads in Iraq and Afghanistan until as late as 2006.<sup>645</sup> According to Brigaglia, they would have supported the training at the Afghanistan camp for Nigerians to fight in jihads with al-Qa`ida in Iraq or Afghanistan but showed no signs of supporting jihad in Nigeria, which could have led to a government backlash that would harm Muslims and undermine the ascendant salafi mission in the country.<sup>646</sup> Thus, according to Brigaglia, Shaykh Jafaar supported or at least tolerated the Afghanistan camp so long as its militant objectives were not aimed at Nigeria.

Court trial transcripts from the Eastern District of New York that became public in March 2017 also support the argument that the Afghanistan camp was a training camp supported by al-Qa`ida, as Brigaglia suspected.<sup>647</sup> According to the transcripts, al-Qa`ida’s Pakistan-based leadership sent a Saudi-born national of Niger, Ibrahim Harun, to meet with Boko Haram and the GSPC in Nigeria.<sup>648</sup> Harun coordinated with one of Muhammed Ali’s deputies, who was a Saudi-born Nigerian, and another Boko Haram member, Muhammed Ashafa, to send Boko Haram members to Niger for trainings with the GSPC. Harun also sent Ashafa to train with al-Qa`ida so that he could develop the skills to support Harun to scout and bomb the U.S. embassy or other U.S. and Israeli interests in Nigeria.<sup>649</sup> However, after Ashafa was arrested in Pakistan, plans to send other Boko Haram members to Pakistan for this training were halted. After a period of moving back and forth between Nigeria and Niger and communicating with al-Qa`ida leaders in Pakistan about what to do next, Harun fled to Libya, where he was arrested in 2005. In 2011, he was put on a migrant boat by the Libyan government and then arrested in Italy and extradited to the United States for his role in killing two U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, which was evidenced by his fingerprints found on a Qur’an left at the scene of the battle.<sup>650</sup> He was finally convicted in the Eastern District of New York in March 2017, which is when his court

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640 Kamal Tayo Oropo, “How Talibans Recruit, Operate Nationwide,” *Guardian*, January 18, 2004; “Taliban Riots in Yobe,” *Guardian*, January 28, 2004.

641 “Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency,” International Crisis Group Africa Report # 216, April 3, 2014.

642 Ibid.

643 Andrea Brigaglia, “The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology, the War on Terror and the Genesis of Boko Haram,” *Diritto e Questioni Pubbliche* 15:2 (2015).

644 Ibid.

645 “Security Agents Arrest Suspected Leader of ‘Taliban’ Group in Borno,” AFP, July 7, 2006.

646 Ibid.

647 “United States of America against Ibrahim Suleiman Adnan Adam Harun,” Case 1:12-cr-00134-BMC-MDG, August 4, 2016; “Al Qaeda Operative Convicted Of Multiple Terrorism Offenses Targeting Americans Overseas,” Department of Justice U.S. Attorney’s Office Eastern District of New York, March 16, 2017.

648 Ibid.

649 Ibid.

650 “Boko Haram Member Has Al Qaeda Links, Says SSS Official,” NigerianVoice, April 5, 2012; Ikechukwu Nnochiri, “Danger Alert: Al Qaeda boss in West Africa lives in Kano,” Odili.net, April 8, 2012; “Country Reports on Terrorism,” United States Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2007.

transcripts became public.

Although there is a gap in the literature on why the Nigerian security forces ordered the raid on the Afghanistan camp in late 2003, it was likely the result of a combination of factors. Brigaglia hypothesizes that Shaykh Jafaar became aware that the Afghanistan camp was being used for training for a jihad in Nigeria and consented to a government crackdown on the camp.<sup>651</sup> Brigaglia did not have access to Ibrahim Harun's case at the time of making this hypothesis, but that case shows that Shaykh Jafaar would have been correct if he believed members of the Afghanistan camp were training with al-Qa`ida for jihad in Nigeria.<sup>652</sup>

Another explanation for the raid is that the local government in Yobe State, where the Afghanistan camp was located, believed it could benefit from federal funding for solving the "security crisis" by raiding the camp.<sup>653</sup> This may be why Shaykh Jafaar and the local government were both aligned in deciding to destroy the camp, albeit for separate reasons. Other researchers have argued that the reason for the raid was a fishing dispute between Afghanistan camp members and local villagers.<sup>654</sup> It is possible that although a fishing dispute did take place, it was only a pretext for the government to destroy the camp and there were macro-level reasons behind the government's actions. The several days of violence between Boko Haram and the security forces during the destruction of the camp suggest the fishing rights dispute may have been a tipping point but that the camp members had already prepared for the eventuality of a clash. Indeed, Muhammed Ali's successor as leader after 2003, Muhammed Yusuf, who was a mentee of Shaykh Jafaar and a liaison between *Ahl as-Sunna*, the camp leaders, such as Muhammed Ali, and the local government, later claimed his students were at the camp and that he had urged Muhammed Ali's followers to delay a jihad until they had more popular support.<sup>655</sup>

The result of the raid was that Muhammed Ali and his deputy and dozens of other members of the Afghanistan camp were killed, al-Muntada al-Islami was disbanded in Nigeria, and its representative in Nigeria was deported back to Sudan (although the charity maintained a presence in northeastern Nigeria).<sup>656</sup> Boko Haram was finished—or so Nigeria thought.

### *Preaching and Training Phase*

After the destruction of the Afghanistan camp, some of its members shifted to GSPC camps in the Sahel. This was made possible because of prior GSPC support to the Afghanistan camp. Among the most prominent Boko Haram members to shift to GSPC camps was Adam Kamar, who was the son of a Maiduguri businessman and later became a U.S.-designated terrorist in 2012 and intermediary with contacts to Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>657</sup> The Nigerian authorities attempted to convict Kamar when he was put on trial in 2007 (the year that the GSPC became AQIM), but groups such as the Supreme

651 Brigaglia, "The Volatility of Salafi Political Theology."

652 Brigaglia, "A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa."

653 This federal funding, also called the "security vote," in Nigeria refers to funding given from the federal government to states to resolve crises. This funding can, however, be an incentive for state governments to allow crises to fester so that the state's officials can pocket money once a crisis emerges. The clashes at the "Afghanistan" camp may have benefitted the Yobe State government in this way.

654 Caroline Varin, "Boko Haram and the War on Terror," *Praeger*, August 15, 2016.

655 Anonymous, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42:2 (2012), p. 118. For a further discussion of Boko Haram in the two years prior to 2009, see Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement" and the contribution of Abdulbasit Kassim in this report.

656 "Nigeria: Investigating Wahhabi Insurrection and Saudi Funds," IRIN News, January 25, 2004; "Nigeria: Security Services Investigate Suspected Islamic Terror Camp Training," *Lagos Insider*, July 26, 2004, pp. 39-40.

657 Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," p. 183; "Five Nigerians on Terror Charges," BBC, November 27, 2009.

Council for Sharia in Nigeria lobbied for Kamar and others suspected of training with AQIM to be released to the custody of northern Nigerian imams in a “de-radicalization program.”<sup>658</sup> Kamar and a future accomplice in the suicide bombing of the U.N. building in Abuja in 2011, which killed 23 people, Babagana Ismail Kwaljima, who also had been accused of training with AQIM, were therefore both released from custody. The Boko Haram members who joined AQIM in the Sahel, such as Kamar and Kwaljima, reportedly transferred their *bay`a* from Muhammed Ali to Muhammed Yusuf.<sup>659</sup>

Muhammed Yusuf, meanwhile, had spent around one year in exile in Saudi Arabia after the destruction of the Afghanistan camp. Shaykh Jafaar and leading Borno politicians, however, negotiated his return to Nigeria, where he initially preached in the Indimi Mosque in Maiduguri, where Shaykh Jafaar also preached on visits to the city. Shaykh Jafaar’s followers, however, soon expelled Yusuf from the mosque due to contradictions between Shaykh Jafaar’s teachings and Yusuf’s, especially the latter’s teachings that “boko” was “haram,” meaning “Western educational is sinful,” and that service in the “un-Islamic” Nigerian government was also “haram.”<sup>660</sup> At that point, according to an “insider” on the group, Yusuf used money he received from Saudi funders he had met in Saudi Arabia to develop his own Ibn Taymiyya mosque in Maiduguri and to support micro-finance programs for his followers.<sup>661</sup> While Yusuf may not have ordered Shaykh Jafaar’s assassination in 2007, the suspicions that some of his followers may have been involved are also not completely unfounded.<sup>662</sup> In Shaykh Jafaar’s final sermon, he warned that he would disclose the “undercover support” that Yusuf was receiving. According to Brigaglia, Shaykh Jafaar may have been planning to announce that he believed the funders of Yusuf had been infiltrated by the CIA or Saudi intelligence services and that Yusuf was therefore an agent intending to harm and divide the Muslims in Nigeria, although Brigaglia ultimately attributed the assassination to networks associated in some way to al-Muntada al-Islami.<sup>663</sup>

Not long after Shaykh Jafaar’s assassination, Yusuf and his followers entrenched themselves in their main headquarters in northeastern Nigeria, while Yusuf began to call for a jihad against Nigeria. This led to another crackdown on Boko Haram in July 2009 that was similar to, but larger-in-scale than, the clashes in late 2003. Muhammed Yusuf, was killed in these clashes along with around 800 of his followers. However, unlike in 2003, by 2009 Boko Haram was prepared to fight the jihad it had not been prepared for when Muhammed Ali died.<sup>664</sup> The relationships that Boko Haram members had developed with GSPC/AQIM from 2003 to 2009 enabled Yusuf’s deputy and successor, Abubakar Shekau, to receive needed support from AQIM for waging a jihad, which is detailed in the documents that AQIM released in April 2017 and discussed in the introduction and next sub-section of this article.

### *Jihad Phase*

As is evidenced in the archived letters that AQIM released in April 2017, Shekau sent three militants

658 *Daily Trust*, November 21, 2007 (online commenter); This Day, December 10, 2007 (online commenter); “Nigeria: Security Services Investigate Suspected Islamic Terror Camp Training;” “Faltering al-Qaeda Turns to Boko Haram,” *Magharebia*, January 27, 2012; “Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram Commander Abubakar Shekau, Khalid al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kamar,” U.S. Department of State, June 21, 2012; “Boko Haram: Jonathan Moves to End Secret Deal Between SSS and Northern Traditional Leaders,” *Nigerian Voice*, September 11, 2011; “Taking the Hostage Road!”

659 Author’s interview, Fulan Nasrallah, Abuja, Nigeria, March 2017.

660 Anonymous, “The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Counter-Radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram.”

661 Author’s anonymous interview in Abuja, Nigeria, March 2017.

662 Boko Haram subsequently disclaimed the assassination in messages sent between the group and the Islamic State’s Africa Media Agency in 2015. Africa Media, “Communiqués to Africa Media,” November 18, 2014-February 9, 2015.

663 Brigaglia, “A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da’wa in West Africa.”

664 These clashes in 2009 were ostensibly the result Yusuf’s followers being attacked by the security forces for refusing to wear motorcycle helmets, which they believed were an affront to God. However, in the weeks and months before the clashes, Yusuf had announced to his followers that they would soon launch a jihad, and according to this perspective, the military crackdown was to preempt Yusuf’s jihad.

in August 2009, including longtime Nigerian GSPC/AQIM operative, Khalid al-Barnawi, who was a commander in the AQIM Tariq bin Ziyad brigade, to meet with AQIM's overall commander in the Sahel, Abu Zeid, "to consult on waging jihad in Nigeria."<sup>665</sup> Abu Zeid would later report to AQIM's overall leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel, that "they have lived with us previously and we know them well" and relay to Droukdel that Shekau wanted "communications via internet and phone;" that Shekau had a "big problem with weapons and money;" and that Khalid al-Barnawi requested trainings in intervals of "200 brothers."<sup>666</sup> Abu Zeid also reported to Droukdel after the meeting that he agreed on the setting up of communications with Shekau, which "happens all the time;" on the establishment of an intermediary based in Niger, which "should be easy to manage;" and providing to Boko Haram "practical training" as opposed to "theoretical training," the latter of which is "less beneficial."<sup>667</sup> Abu Zeid asked the three militants whether they wanted to "join an organization." They replied that Shekau, who was recovering from wounds from the July 2009 clashes, wanted to speak directly on that matter. AQIM would later relay a letter from Shekau asking to speak to "bin Ladin's representative" about joining al-Qa`ida, which was found in bin Ladin's compound in 2011.<sup>668</sup>

Droukdel responded to Shekau in September 2010 that he would provide Shekau with monetary support "to the extent we have it." This came in the form of 200,000 euros that Droukdel ordered Abu Zeid to give to Shekau in a separate letter to Abu Zeid in 2010. Droukdel also promised Shekau "weaponry support," which was "not a problem because of its abundance," and trainings of "waves of Nigerian brothers."<sup>669</sup> Droukdel told Shekau, however, to "keep complete secrecy in communication both in content and in the manner of delivery" about the "ties between [AQIM and Shekau]."<sup>670</sup>

Droukdel also issued a public statement on August 20, 2009, through AQIM's al-Andalus media agency. It said the killing of Yusuf was "proof" that a "Crusader war is being waged in Nigeria by a Christian minority against the 80-million Muslim majority" and that the clashes were part of a "global Crusade against Islam."<sup>671</sup> He must have issued this message almost immediately after receiving the letter from Abu Zeid about the meeting with the three emissaries from Shekau in August 2009. In February 2010, Droukdel also followed with a statement calling on Nigerian Muslims to fight "the Crusaders" in the same way that al-Shabaab was fighting Ethiopian troops in Somalia and promised to provide the "Nigerian mujahideen" with "men, arms and ammunition" to "defend" Nigerian Muslims against the "Christian minority," which is similar to what he promised Shekau privately.<sup>672</sup> In addition, al-Shabaab and al-Qa`ida in Iraq (a predecessor to the Islamic State, and under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), offered condolences to the "Nigerian mujahideen" at the one-year anniversary of Yusuf's death in July 2010 through messages and videos posted on jihadi web forums.<sup>673</sup>

AQIM's operational support contributed to Boko Haram's first attack after the July 2009 clashes, which took place on September 7, 2010.<sup>674</sup> In that attack 50 militants broke into Bauchi prison during

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665 Abubakar Shekau, "Praise be to God the Lord of all worlds," Bin Laden's Bookshelf: Office of the Director of National Intelligence (released in August 2016 but dated to before bin Ladin's death in May 2011).

666 Rashid.

667 "Abdallah Abu Zayd 'Abd-al-Hamid to 'our Shaykh and Emir, Abu Mus'ab 'Abd-al-Wadud' Subject: A letter from the Emir of the Nigeria group," Bin Laden's Bookshelf: Office of the Director of National Intelligence (released in January 2017 but dated to August 2009).

668 Shekau, "Praise be to God the Lord of all worlds."

669 Rashid.

670 Ibid.

671 Shumukh al-Islam 47788; Al-Fallujah 80045.

672 "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Condolence, Support and Comfort for our Brothers and People in Nigeria 20/08/09;" "North Africa Qaeda Offers to Help Nigerian Muslims," Reuters, February 1, 2010; "Periodical Review July 2010 – No. 2," ICT's Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, August 2010; "'Knights of Martyrdom 8' Video Dedicated to Nigerian Muslims," al-Furqan Foundation, September 22, 2011.

673 "Al Kataib Media People of Tawheed in Nigeria 2.mp4," YouTube, March 12, 2012.

674 Abdulbasit Kassim, "The Initial Source of Boko Haram Funding Explained," Medium, May 16, 2017.

Eid al-Fitr prayers and freed 750 prisoners, including around 150 members who were arrested during the July 2009 clashes.<sup>675</sup> One month after this operation, Shekau wrote a letter of thanks to Abu Zeid “for the training and financial generosity.”<sup>676</sup> One of al-Qa`ida’s highest-level commanders, Abu Yahya al-Libya, later claimed in 2011 that AQIM extended the jihad to Nigeria and enabled Boko Haram to carry out large-scale attacks, such as the prison break in Bauchi and another large-scale urban attack in Damatru, Yobe State, in November 2011.<sup>677</sup>

### *Split and Merger Phase*

Despite the successful launch of insurgency from September 2010 into 2011, Boko Haram began to split by 2011. As narrated by AQIM’s Abdullah Abu al-Hasan al-Shinqiti in the documents that AQIM released in April 2017, Shekau began to “take the possessions of Muslims under the rationale that they lived under the rule of unbelievers by choice” instead of joining Boko Haram.<sup>678</sup> Khalid al-Barnawi and eight members of his *shura*, including Abu Muhammed who was one of the emissaries to have visited Abu Zeid with al-Barnawi in August 2009, wrote to AQIM that “Shekau spends his time proclaiming takfir,” which “led the Nigerian people to criticize the religion and jihad, causing general fitna (chaos).”<sup>679</sup> According to al-Barnawi, Shekau was similar to Antar Zouabri of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), from which the GSPC split during the Algerian civil war in the 1990s because of Zouabri’s declaring *takfir* against the entire Algerian population that did not join his group.<sup>680</sup> After Shekau stopped responding to AQIM’s entreaties for him to stop this behavior, AQIM consulted with al-Barnawi on splitting from Shekau, which led to al-Barnawi forming Ansaru in 2011.

After Ansaru split from Shekau, the political violence in Nigeria showed two distinct trends. Attacks increased in the main area of operations of Boko Haram under Shekau’s leadership in northeastern Nigeria from 12 in 2010 (starting from the September 7 Bauchi prison attack), to 69 in 2011, to 319 in 2012.<sup>681</sup> Most of these attacks were assassinations, bank robberies, bombings of mosques or churches, or shootings of government officials. In contrast, in northwestern Nigeria and the Middle Belt<sup>682</sup> there were attacks at a much lower rate, but with higher impact and sophistication.<sup>683</sup> There were, for example, only a handful of attacks in the Middle Belt in 2010 but then nine in 2011 and 89 in 2012.<sup>684</sup> What was distinct about the attacks in this region was that they demonstrated AQIM “fingerprints,” including the simultaneous bombings on Christmas Day in Jos in 2010, which killed 41 people, and the first

675 Sani Muhd Sani, “Attack On Bauchi Prison - Boko Haram Frees 721 Inmates,” *Leadership*, September 8, 2010.

676 Rashid.

677 The statement was posted on Al-Minbar forum #16019 in October 2011.

678 Ibid.

679 Ibid.

680 Ibid. It appears AQIM released these documents publicly to its followers for two reasons: first, one of the documents is the original version of one released by the U.S. Directorate of National Intelligence in January 2017, so AQIM may be seeking to contextualize a now public document; and, second, AQIM may be seeking to explain to its followership that it is not responsible—and even advised against—Shekau’s *takfirism* and the misguided paths that Shekau and his commanders have taken.

681 This is based on the author’s data and is available on request.

682 Nigeria’s “Middle Belt,” which for the purposes of this article includes Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Gombe, Niger State, Kogi, and Abuja, is a region of central Nigeria populated by diverse ethnic groups. For the purposes of this article, it does not include Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, which are referred to as “northeastern Nigeria.” Attacks in Kano—though relatively few compared to the northeastern Nigerian states—for the purposes of this article were divided 50%-50% between the “Middle Belt” and “northeastern Nigeria” since some were clearly the Shekau faction and others were clearly not. As such, in general, the data should be considered estimates but reflective of broader trends.

683 Jide Ajani, “Horror in Sokoto - Al-Qaeda-Funded Group Killed Hostages,” *Vanguard*, March 11, 2012; Yusuf Alli, “Kabiru Sokoto Names Boko Haram’s Leaders,” *Nation*, February 14, 2012; “Barnawi, Kambar: Qaeda-linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties,” *Agence France-Presse*, June 21, 2012; “How Nur, Shekau Run Boko Haram,” *Vanguard*, September 3, 2011; “Scott Stewart, “Untangling the Threads of Terrorism in Turkey,” *Stratfor*, March 22, 2016.

684 This is based on the author’s data and is available on request.

two suicide bombings in Nigeria's history at the Federal Police headquarters in June 2011, which killed three people, and the U.N. building in Abuja in August 2011, which killed 23, which were attributed to Mamman Nur and militants in direct contact with him.<sup>685</sup> There were also 20 vehicle-borne suicide attacks and nine person-borne suicide attacks in 2012, with 18 and six, respectively, carried out in the Middle Belt. In contrast, there were only two vehicle-borne and two person-borne suicide attacks, respectively, in northeastern Nigeria 2012. In addition, 11 of the 18 vehicle-borne suicide attacks in the Middle Belt in 2011-2012 targeted churches, including seven in Kaduna and three on Easter.<sup>686</sup> This was consistent with AQIM's desire for a "war against the Crusaders" in Nigeria.

The disproportionate number of AQIM "fingerprint" attacks in the Middle Belt, in particular suicide bombings, was an anomaly when contrasted with the vast majority of overall attacks in 2011-2012, which were in the area of operations of the Shekau faction in northeastern Nigeria. This is because suicide attacks were predominantly a tactic of the Nigerian militants who trained with AQIM and al-Shabaab from 2009 to 2011 and later either joined Ansaru or the faction of Boko Haram under Muhammed Yusuf's former third-in-command, Mamman Nur, who traveled Somalia to train with al-Shabaab after Muhammed Yusuf's death in July 2009.<sup>687</sup> Indeed, in Khalid al-Barnawi's letter to AQIM in 2011, he indicated that Shekau threatened to kill Boko Haram members who traveled to Algeria or Somalia without his permission, such as Nur.<sup>688</sup>

Alexander Thurston has argued that Boko Haram was an exception to the global trend in the spread of suicide bombings, where skills in this area tended to be passed from group to group (Hezbollah to al-Qa`ida to AQI to AQIM, for example).<sup>689</sup> Rather, Thurston has argued that Boko Haram was one of the only groups in the world to independently evolve the tactic of suicide bombings on its own.<sup>690</sup> However, sources showing that Boko Haram members under the lead of Mamman Nur trained in suicide bombing operations with AQIM and al-Shabaab before carrying out the first suicide attack in Nigeria and the datasets of suicide attacks in Nigeria suggest that Boko Haram's rapid surge in suicide attacks in the Middle Belt in 2011-2012, on the contrary, was the result of the group's training abroad with AQIM and al-Shabaab.<sup>691</sup> It was these suicide bombings primarily by the Nur faction of Boko Haram in 2011-2012 that also garnered international attention and furthered al-Qa`ida narratives in a way that the Shekau faction's attacks did not.<sup>692</sup> Even though the Shekau faction's attacks were more frequent than those of the Nur faction, they were also more remote (in northeastern Nigeria compared to the politically volatile Middle Belt), smaller in scale and did not target symbolic locations.<sup>693</sup>

Ansaru attacks in 2011-2012 also reflected its members' training in kidnappings with AQIM. Ansaru's first operation in Nigeria, which was under the name al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel, was masterminded by Khalid al-Barnawi in May 2011 and coordinated by his deputy Abu Muhammed

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685 Jide Ajani, "UN House Blast: Mastermind, Nur, Declared Wanted," *Vanguard*, September 1, 2011; UN House: Boko Haram Unveils Suicide Bomber," *This Day*, September 19, 2011; "Muslim group claims Nigeria blasts," *Al Jazeera*, December 28, 2010; Ben Charles Obi, "Kabiru Sokoto Phone Calls," *Insider Weekly* [Lagos], February 6, 2012.

686 This is based on the author's data and is available on request.

687 "Treasury Sanctions Senior Boko Haram Leaders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, December 1, 2015.

688 Rashid.

689 Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram and ISIS: Be Careful with Evidence," *Sahelblog*, May 27, 2015.

690 *Ibid.*

691 The full datasets are available on request to the author. Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," p. 14; Michael C. Horowitz, "Non-State Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism," *International Organization* 64:1 (2010): pp. 33-64; Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

692 "U.S. debates 'terrorist' sanctions for Nigerian militants," *Reuters*, May 26, 2012.

693 "Christian Militants In Southern Kaduna Threaten Fulani Herdsmen, Give Seven Days Evacuation Notice," *Sahara Reporters*, June 5, 2012; "Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan threatens Southern Kaduna Militant Group, Akhwat Akwop," *Desert Herald*, June 11, 2012.

whose base was in Kaduna State.<sup>694</sup> In the operation, a group of militants kidnapped an Italian and a British engineer from their apartment in Kebbi State and took them to a hideout in neighboring Sokoto State, where they were killed in March 2012 in a rescue attempt. The hostages' location was revealed during a raid on Abu Muhammed's cell in Kaduna in March 2012, which killed Abu Muhammed.<sup>695</sup>

The second kidnapping, in January 2012, was of a German engineer in Kano, and on the same day Ansaru announced its "public formation" in leaflets dropped in the city.<sup>696</sup> AQIM claimed the kidnapping through its al-Andalus media agency, although like the first kidnapping in Kebbi-Sokoto, it was coordinated from Abu Muhammed's base in Kaduna. AQIM also directly claimed the killing of the engineer in May 2012 after Nigerian security forces attempted to free him. Information about his location was also revealed during the raid that killed Abu Muhammed.<sup>697</sup>

Ansaru's third kidnapping, in Katsina State, was claimed by Ansaru in December 2012. The operation involved 30 militants who took captive a French engineer from a site in Katsina State. Ansaru continued al-Qa`ida's—and specifically, AQIM's—messaging when it said it would continue to kidnap French citizens until France ended its ban on the *niqab* and plans to intervene militarily in northern Mali.<sup>698</sup> The hostage later escaped from an Ansaru hideout in Kaduna State in November 2013.

Ansaru's fourth and final claim of a kidnapping was in February 2013 when it captured seven foreign engineers on a construction site in Bauchi State. Before Ansaru killed them several weeks later in Sambisa Forest in Borno State, it warned that any attempt to rescue the hostages would lead to the same result as in the Kebbi-Sokoto and Kano kidnappings (claimed by al-Qa`ida in the Lands Beyond the Sahel and AQIM but coordinated by Abu Muhammed). It said the kidnapping in Bauchi was in response to European "atrocities" in Afghanistan and Mali. In addition to these kidnappings, Ansaru also claimed an ambush on Nigerian troops preparing to deploy to Mali in January 2013 and a prison break in November 2012.<sup>699</sup>

Although Ansaru and the Nur faction of Boko Haram both resented Shekau, in 2013 members of both began reintegrating with Boko Haram under Shekau's leadership, including Khalid al-Barnawi and Ansaru's commander for suicide missions, Abu Fatima, and later Nur as well.<sup>700</sup> The motivations for this reintegration were that AQIM was unable to continue supporting Ansaru after the French-led military intervention in Mali in 2013; Shekau was ordering the killing of Ansaru members; and Nigerian counterterrorism operations had eliminated key Ansaru cells.<sup>701</sup> As a result of the reintegration, Boko Haram rapidly improved in four tactical areas in 2013: kidnappings-for-ransom in Borno State and of 22 foreigners in five operations in northern Cameroon, which netted Boko Haram millions of

694 Midat Joseph and Ruth Yanta, "Kidnappers – Why We Killed Briton, Italian Hostages," *Leadership*, March 13, 2012; "Boko Haram Looks to Mali," *Africa Confidential*, November 30, 2012.

695 Ibid.

696 "Boko Haram: Splinter Group, Ansaru Emerges," *Vanguard*, February 1, 2012.

697 "Al-Andalus Media Presents a New Statement from al-Qa'idah in the Islamic Maghrib: 'On the Killing of the German Prisoner in Nigeria,'" available at Jihadology.

698 "Islamist group gives reasons for kidnap of French national in Katsina," *Vanguard*, December 24, 2012.

699 "Jaji, Abuja Terror Attacks: Army, Police Arrest 22 Officers," *Punch NG*, December 1, 2012; Declared of Jama`atu Ansarul Muslimina Fibiladis Sudan Garki II Abuja," YouTube, November 30, 2012. The Arabic and English statements are available at Jihadology. "Islamists Ansaru Claim Attack on Mali-bound Nigeria Troops," Reuters, January 20, 2013; "French Man Kidnap: Possibly an Inside Job – Katsina CP," *Vanguard*, December 21, 2012.

700 An example of the transfer of militants from Ansaru and Nur's faction of Boko Haram to Shekau's faction of Boko Haram is Abu Fatima, who claimed the Federal Police Headquarters suicide bombing in Boko Haram's name in 2011 but became Ansaru's commander for suicide operations by 2012. An audio of Mamman Nur and Abu Fatima, which was made and leaked publicly in August 2016, confirmed that Abu Fatima and Mamman Nur both came to a reconciliation with Shekau sometime before March 2015.

701 Zenn, "Boko Haram's Conquest for the Caliphate."

dollars and became its biggest “war chest;”<sup>702</sup> suicide bombings, which rapidly increased in north-eastern Nigeria and became virtually extinct in the Middle Belt;<sup>703</sup> raids on military barracks, which led to the conquest of territory in northeastern Nigeria;<sup>704</sup> and media and narratives, which began to incorporate former Ansaru themes, such as praising 19th century Fulani jihadi, Usman dan Fodio, claiming to establish an Islamic state in *biladis Sudan* (Black Africa), which was part of Ansaru’s name, and offering anti-Boko Haram civilian vigilantes the opportunity to “repent” to be spared from being killed.<sup>705</sup> By 2014, Boko Haram became stronger than ever and extended its area of operations in northern Cameroon and southeastern Niger and around Lake Chad in Chad. Boko Haram also controlled large swathes of territory in Borno State as the Nigeria military steadily withdrew from bases in the countryside due to pressure from the group as well as inadequate resourcing from the government.<sup>706</sup>

### Loyalty Phase

Coinciding with Boko Haram’s occupation of territory, in June 2014 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a caliphate from a mosque in Mosul, Iraq. His group, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), was then rebranded as the “Islamic State” with aspirations for a global caliphate. Strategically, Boko Haram became an important asset for the Islamic State to legitimate its claim that it had global reach,

702 Ahmed Salkida, “What Does Boko Haram Want?” Storify, November 1, 2014; Guibai Guitama, “Cameroun – Libération du père Georges Vandenberghe: Le négociateur désigné de Boko Haram réclame son argent,” *L’Oeil du Sahel*, January 6, 2014; Ola Audu, “Boko Haram Threatens JTF Spokesperson, Demands Prisoners Exchange for French Nationals,” *Premium Times*, March 18, 2013; “Nigeria’s Boko Haram ‘Got \$3m Ransom’ to Free Hostages,” BBC, April 26, 2013; “Gunmen Kidnap Senior Lecturer in Maiduguri,” *Vanguard*, February 24, 2013; David Molomo, “Dead or Alive? Customs Officer, Wife, Five Kids, Cousin Missing for 22 Days,” *Sun News*, April 29, 2013; Kareem Ogori, “Gunmen Kidnap Ex-Borno LG Boss, Demand N50m,” *Blueprint*, April 8, 2013; Njadvara Musa, “Gunmen Kidnap Ex-Council Chairman, Reject N10m Ransom,” *Guardian* [Lagos], April 13, 2013; Maina Maina, “Gunmen Kidnap DPO in Bama, Set Town on Fire in Borno,” *Daily Post*, April 25, 2013; Yahaya Ibrahim, “Borno Water Board GM Kidnapped,” *Daily Trust*, April 29, 2013; “Kidnapped Policeman Killed by Abductors in Borno,” *Vanguard*, May 1, 2013; Ola Audu, “How Boko Haram Turned to Kidnapping to Raise Funds in Borno,” *Premium Times*, May 20, 2013; Yusuf Alli, “Boko Haram Kidnaps 92-yr-old ex-Minister Ali Monguno,” *Nation*, May 4, 2013.

703 Boko Haram Militants Shows Off Weapons ‘Captured’ From An Army Barracks,” Sahara TV, April 29, 2013; “Message from a Mujahid,” al-Urhwa al-Wutqha, January 29, 2015.

704 These ambushes and raids on military barracks began on March 14, 2013—one month after the French-led intervention ousted AQIM, MUJAO, and Ansar al-Din from northern Mali—with the attack on a military barracks in Monguno along Borno State’s border with Niger (a natural entry point for militants from Mali to reenter Nigeria). In the weeks after the Monguno raid in March 2013, raids continued in Baga, Marte and Maiha. Other raids on towns and barracks from April to October 2013 resulted in the deaths of 127 people in Damatru, 142 in Benisheikh, 55 in Bama, 44 in Konduga, 41 in Gujba, and 35 in Demba. In March 2014, Boko Haram also attacked the barracks in Borno State’s capital, Maiduguri; freed hundreds of prisoners; and showed the operation in a Shekau-claimed propaganda video. The timing, claims, and geography of these raids on barracks and towns immediately after the French-led military intervention suggested that Nigerian militants who were in Mali, such as those training or fighting with AQIM, MUJAO, or Ansar al-Din, returned home to Nigeria and participated in the raids. “Dozens of Boko Haram Help Mali’s Rebel Seize Gao,” *Agence France-Presse*, April 9, 2012; Baba Ahmed, “Leader of al-Qaida Unit in Mali Quits AQIM,” *Associated Press*, December 3, 2012; Lemine Ould M. Salem, “Portrait. On l’appelle ‘Barbe rousse,’” *Telquel*, January 17, 2013; Drew Hinshaw, “Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists’ Reach,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013; Lars Inge Staveland, “New Islamist Group May Be Affiliated With Al-Qa’ida,” *Aftenposten*, February 22, 2013; “Le Mujao revendique le double attentat et promet qu’il y en aura d’autres,” *Radio France Internationale*, May 24, 2013.

705 An example of the transfer of narratives from Ansaru to Boko Haram is the legacy of Usman dan Fodio. Boko Haram, unlike Ansaru, had never incorporated Fodio’s legacy into its own statements until Shekau’s video claiming the kidnapping of more than 250 schoolgirls in Chibok in May 2014. Another Boko Haram video in 2014 began with a scene of Fodio waging battle and concluded with an image of al-Baghdadi declaring the caliphate in Mosul. The end of that video claimed an Islamic state was established in “biladis Sudan,” thus adopting part of Ansaru’s name into Boko Haram’s own declared geographic range. “Boko Haram Leader Shekau Releases Video On Abduction Of Chibok Girls,” YouTube, May 5, 2014; “Boko Haram Militants Display Control Of Captured Towns In Northeastern Nigeria,” YouTube, November 10, 2014. “Gunmen Attack Police SARS Headquarters, Free 30 Suspects,” *Daily Independent*, November 27, 2012; “Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah,” *Ana al-Muslim Network*, December 1, 2012; Taiwo Adisa, “Shekau, Boko Haram Leader, Escapes Arrest in Kano – Wife Arrested – Security Operatives Probe 2 Top Politicians over Sect’s Funding,” *Nigerian Tribune*, March 5, 2012.

706 “Boko Haram kills 40 in Diffa, southeast Niger,” al-bawaba.com, June 19, 2015; “Boko Haram attacks prison in Niger, four killed,” Reuters, July 12, 2015; “Boko Haram suspected after suicide attacks in Chad, NE Nigeria,” AFP, July 11, 2015; “At Least 11 Dead in Twin Suicide Bombing In Cameroon,” AFP, July 13, 2015.

including into Africa, which had been home to several al-Qa`ida-aligned groups until then. Moreover, as al-Qa`ida became increasingly estranged from Boko Haram and reacted negatively to Boko Haram's Chibok kidnapping in April 2014, which the Islamic State admired and praised in its English-language magazine *Dabiq*, Boko Haram became a more viable acquisition for a merger with the Islamic State.<sup>707</sup> Shekau, for his part, showed interest in the Islamic State, as evidenced by his chanting of Islamic State slogans for the first time since his first claim of the Chibok kidnapping in May 2014, such as *dawla al-Islamiya qamat, dawla al-Islamiya baqiya* (Islamic State is established, Islamic State remains), and frequently thereafter.<sup>708</sup> On four occasions between May 2014 and October 2014, Shekau also announced that Boko Haram also established an "Islamic state" (*dawla islamiya* in Arabic and *daular musulunci* in Hausa) in northeastern Nigeria. Another Boko Haram video after the Chibok kidnapping featured a screengrab of al-Baghdadi's sermon from the mosque in Mosul where he had declared a caliphate and then showed Shekau in a mosque in Nigeria with hundreds of worshippers and Shekau gesturing and wearing clothes of an imam resembling al-Baghdadi.<sup>709</sup>

By late 2014, Boko Haram established a line of communication to North African former AQIM members who had defected to the Islamic State and ran a pro-Islamic State media agency in Tunisia called Africa Media (*Ifriqiya L'ilam*). Africa Media, in turn, set up an English-, French-, and Arabic-language Twitter account called al-Urwa al-Wutqha<sup>710</sup> for Boko Haram in January 2015.<sup>711</sup> The Twitter account's "official spokesman" was Abu Musab al-Barnawi, who was Muhammed Yusuf's son and was allied with Mamman Nur and not Shekau, even though they were all nominally together in a unified Boko Haram.<sup>712</sup> Shekau, despite being Boko Haram's overall leader, did not initially appear on the Twitter account because he had not yet agreed to pledge to the Islamic State by 2015 whereas Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Nur were ready to make the pledge.<sup>713</sup> Shekau agreed with them that al-Baghdadi was a true caliph, but he appeared reluctant to relinquish authority to the Islamic State.<sup>714</sup>

What compelled Shekau to make the pledge, however, was his concern that if he did not make the pledge, then Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur would split from him, just as Khalid al-Barnawi had done with Ansaru in 2011 and Nur nearly did with his own faction of Boko Haram in 2011-2012.<sup>715</sup> Contrary to prior analyses that assume the pledge was a result of Boko Haram's "weakness," primary sources from Boko Haram and the Islamic State show that Shekau agreed to make the pledge to keep the group unified.<sup>716</sup> Ansaru likely did not agree to join the Islamic State, however, which is why on February 9, 2015, Ansaru issued a video after a two-year hiatus of no video productions that

707 In the October 2014 edition of its official magazine *Dabiq*, the Islamic State cited Boko Haram's kidnapping in Chibok as precedent for its own sexual slavery of hundreds of non-Muslim Yazidi girls.

708 Shekau's first claim of the Chibok kidnapping on May 5, 2014, is available at "Boko Haram Leader Shekau Releases Video On Abduction of Chibok Girls," Sahara TV, YouTube, May 5, 2014.

709 See, for example, "Boko Haram Militants Display Control of Captured Towns in Northeastern Nigeria," Sahara TV, YouTube, November 10, 2014. Shekau says "Islamic State" at 12:20 in "Boko Haram Militants Display Control of Captured Towns in Northeastern Nigeria" and also says "Islamic State" in three other videos in August, October, and November 2014.

710 Al-Urwa al-Wutqha means "Indissoluble Link" in Arabic.

711 "Jumbled Words and Authentication for the Important Period Prior to Shaykh Al-Shekawi's Allegiance Which Made the Umma Rejoice," Abu Malik Shayba al-Hamad, March 27, 2015, formerly available on Twitter.

712 The Twitter account was a platform for showing Boko Haram videos with Islamic State choreography and production techniques and introducing Boko Haram and Borno State to the Islamic State's global followership. The account also featured live-tweets in French, Arabic, and English on Boko Haram attacks, particularly along the Nigeria-Cameroon border.

713 Shekau did not feature on the Twitter account until February 15, 2015, nearly one month after it opened. However, he was uncharacteristically calm and professional when he did appear, perhaps due to the demands of the controllers.

714 Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau," August 4, 2016, available at Sahara Reporters' SoundCloud account.

715 Ibid.

716 Adam Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria," in M. Cahen, M.-E. Pommerolle, K. Tall eds., *Collective Mobilisations in Africa: Contestation, Resistance, Revolt* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015); Thurston, "Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement," p. 183; Adam Chandler, "The Islamic State of Boko Haram?" *Atlantic*, March 9, 2015; "Five Nigerians on Terror Charges."

for the first time condemned Shekau by name and mocked his repeated crotch-scratching gesture in a video in which Shekau proudly claimed the bombing in November 2014 at Kano's Grand Mosque, but that Ansaru had condemned as "tragic."<sup>717</sup> Africa Media, for its part, was highly in favor of Shekau making the pledge and may not have accepted a pledge if a lesser-known militant, such as Abu Musab al-Barnawi or Nur, were to be the new ISWAP leader. Neither Abu Musab al-Barnawi nor Nur had shown their faces publicly since 2009. (Abu Musab al-Barnawi was veiled in his videos on the Twitter account.)<sup>718</sup>

Shekau finally appeared on the Twitter account in a video in late February 2015, after agreeing to make the pledge and then again in an audio clip on March 7, 2015, to make the pledge publicly.<sup>719</sup> The pledge was accepted by al-Baghdadi's spokesman and praised in 10 other Islamic State videos from Yemen, Algeria, Libya, Syria, and Iraq and in the Islamic State's English-language propaganda magazine *Dabiq*.<sup>720</sup> Shekau, in turn, was named ISWAP's *wali*, or governor.<sup>721</sup> ISWAP fully merged into the Islamic State's social media system, and the Africa Media members, such as Abu Malik Shaybah al-Hamad, who had promoted Boko Haram's Twitter account, encouraged foreign fighters to "migrate" to Libya and Nigeria.<sup>722</sup>

However, by late 2015, the Islamic State was coming under increasing pressure in Iraq and Syria, as well as Libya, while AQIM cracked down on factions that had pledged loyalty to al-Baghdadi in Algeria and the Sahel. Algerian forces also killed leaders of the Islamic State-loyal factions that split from AQIM in Algeria. Meanwhile, in Nigeria the government launched a state of emergency military offensive with contributions from Chadian, Nigerien, and Cameroonian forces as well as South African military contractors, starting in late January 2015 and continuing through the presidential election victory of retired military commander, Muhammed Buhari, in March 2015.<sup>723</sup> Within one year of Shekau's pledge, the Nigerian army retook a number of towns from ISWAP and eliminated much of its *tamkin* (authority) in northeastern Nigeria.

The longstanding differences between Mamman Nur and Shekau became more apparent as ISWAP came under pressure in 2016.<sup>724</sup> Shekau, for example, believed that even Muslims in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps were "infidels" because they were receiving support from the "infidel" Nigerian government and humanitarian organizations. ISWAP, in contrast, employed the theological tool of deferment (*irja'*) and took a neutral stance on whether "ordinary Muslims" who did not join ISWAP or received services from an "infidel" government or humanitarian organizations were themselves "infidels." Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Nur would only kill Muslims who were *actively opposing* the jihad while, like the Nur faction of Boko Haram in 2012, they said they would focus on targeting Christian "proselytizers" or the Nigerian government.<sup>725</sup> More practically, Abu Musab al-Barnawi

717 "Investigation of the Nigerian Army by Jam 'At Ansar Al-Muslimin Fi Bil D Al-Sudan," February 10, 2015, available at jihadology.net.

718 A translation of this letter will be available in Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (London: Hurst, forthcoming 2018).

719 "Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqa Foundation Presents a New Audio Message From Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-I-Da'wah wa-I-Jihad's (Boko Haram) Abu Bakr Shekau."

720 In the October 2014 edition of its official magazine *Dabiq*, the Islamic State cited Boko Haram's kidnapping in Chibok as precedent for its own sexual slavery of hundreds of non-Muslim Yazidi girls.

721 "Al-Furqan Media Presents a New Audio Message from the Islamic State's Shaykh Abu Muhammad Al 'Adnani Al-Shami: 'So They Kill and Are Killed,'" March 12, 2015, available at jihadology.net.

722 Screenshots of these tweets are available on request to the author.

723 "Boko Haram Fighters Fleeing NAF Aerial Bombardment in Sambisa Forest," Sahara Reporters, May 3, 2015.

724 One of the turning points was an attack by dozens of fighters in Shekau's faction, including several female suicide bombers, on an IDP camp outside of Maiduguri on January 30, 2016, which killed nearly 100 people. "Shekau no longer leads Boko Haram, says Chad's President," *Premium Times*, August 12, 2015; "Cameroun – Espionnage: Deux présumés Boko Haram arrêtés à Minawou," *Mutations*, August 15, 2014.

725 Al-Naba newsletter 41, August 2016.

believed attacks on civilians and Shekau's other acts of "extremism" (*ghalaw*) would cause ISWAP to lose the support of the population.<sup>726</sup>

In April 2016, ISWAP rebounded from government pressure and began to increase its attacks on military barracks and towns, especially in southeastern neighboring Niger, in a sign Abu Musab al-Barnawi-loyal fighters were gaining momentum and pilfering supplies. The Islamic State actively promoted these attacks on social media.<sup>727</sup> Several months later, in August 2016, the Islamic State used an interview with Abu Musab al-Barnawi in its Al-Naba newsletter to announce that al-Barnawi was the new *wali* of ISWAP, thus indicating that Shekau was dropped from the position.<sup>728</sup> Shekau responded within hours to what his military emir later described as this "sudden" news. Shekau then declared in a video on YouTube that although he still believed al-Baghdadi was a caliph, he was now reviving Boko Haram, which had ceased to exist after the formation of ISWAP, and was reverting to being its leader again.<sup>729</sup> Shekau, who was concerned that ISWAP members, such as Nur, were trying to track and kill him, remained in control of Boko Haram but he was also deeply suspicious of and opposed to the theology of ISWAP.<sup>730</sup>

These developments all took place in the context of al-Qa`ida and AQIM becoming increasingly disassociated from Nigeria. The last al-Qa`ida acknowledgement of Boko Haram appears to have been in July 2014, when the leader of AQIM's Tunisian "sub-affiliate," Abu Iyad al-Tunisi, sent a letter to al-Qa`ida leaders, including Shekau, arguing that Ayman al-Zawahiri should pledge loyalty to al-Baghdadi as a way of marginalizing Islamic State hardliners and ending jihadi infighting. (Al-Tunisi later retracted his opinion upon advice of other al-Qa`ida scholars and leaders).<sup>731</sup> Yet once al-Baghdadi declared the caliphate in June 2014 and Shekau claimed the Chibok kidnapping in May 2014, al-Qa`ida may have fully ended the relationship with Shekau. However, this does not mean al-Qa`ida will always be out of the picture in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

### Future al-Qa`ida Alignment in Nigeria

While ISWAP was undergoing its split in August 2016, JNIM—AQIM's Mali-based sub-group—was consolidating its foothold in Mali and increasingly in Burkina Faso and Niger. The southernmost member of JNIM, Katiba Macina, in 2017 was also making inroads mostly among Fulani communities in Mali which have cross-border networks throughout the region. This means JNIM's strength is in its potential geographic reach beyond Mali. It has been because of Fulani kinship ties as well as criminal highway banditry and herder networks that Katiba Macina has been able to extend its reach into Fulani communities beyond Mali and was able to spawn a new group in Burkina Faso, Ansaroul

726 Ibid. Nur's accusations against Shekau also included that he was hoarding supplies while children were dying of starvation; killing militants who disagreed with him without explanation and fighters and civilians whose only crime was holding a government ID card; and killing militants who defected to Nur's bases, including highly skilled bomb-makers whose absence weakened ISWAP's capabilities. Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau," August 4, 2016, available at Sahara Reporters' SoundCloud account.

727 "The Raid of Niger: Coverage of the Liberation of the Nigerien Military Training Camp in the Bosso Area – Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah," July 6, 2016, available at jihadology.net.

728 Al-Naba newsletter 41.

729 Man Chari and Abubakar Shekau, "Message from the Soldiers," August 7, 2016, available at jihadology.net.

730 Abubakar Shekau, "Response to Mamman Nur's Open Letter," December 18, 2016.

731 The letter was sent to several jihad leaders, including Abd-al-Wadud, the late Al-Qa`idah in Yemen leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi; the late Somali al-Shabaab leader Mukhtar Abu-al-Zubayr; Shaykh Abu-al-Fadl Iyad Ghali (aka Iyad Agh Ghali), the leader of the northern Mali-based Islamist militant group Ansar al-Din; and Abubakar Shekau. Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Tunisia leader says gains in Iraq should be cause for jihadist reconciliation," FDD's Long War Journal, June 14, 2014.

Islam, even though that group has not been fully incorporated into JNIM.<sup>732</sup>

Fulani kinship networks are robust and intertwined across West Africa, and the Fulani people have some of the strongest cultural and socioeconomic linkages between northern Nigeria and northern Mali. Therefore, many of the same dynamics that allowed JNIM to extend its reach into Burkina Faso and Niger could apply to Nigeria. There is a possibility of JNIM taking advantage of inter-communal conflicts involving Fulani herders in Nigeria to recruit or to support Fulani co-religionists in Nigeria while also reorienting them toward jihadi narratives (claiming attacks in the name of Islam, for example) and aims (imposing some form of sharia law). In 2018, there were newfound reports of some former Boko Haram members involved in leading vigilante groups to defend Muslim communities against Fulani herders while other former ISWAP and Boko Haram members have left both groups to engage in cattle-rustling with herders in the Middle Belt.<sup>733</sup> If these members acted as part of, rather than independent of, either ISWAP or Boko Haram, it could strengthen either faction.

There remains a possibility for JNIM to be the vehicle to revive an al-Qa`ida presence in Nigeria through these Fulani herder or vigilante groups in Nigeria. Moreover, despite Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Shekau both being loyal to al-Baghdadi (but only the former officially part of the Islamic State) and Ansaru being in operational dormancy, AQIM has a long institutional memory in Nigeria, which dates to Boko Haram's founding in 2002 but extends to as early as 1994 when the first joint al-Qa`ida-GIA recruitment in Nigeria began in Nigeria.<sup>734</sup> AQIM's institutional memory is mostly in the Middle Belt, where in 2011-2012 AQIM-trained Nigerians carried out the suicide bombing campaign previously described, and Ansaru carried out its series of four kidnappings of foreigners. This means AQIM/JNIM would be more suited to reenter Nigeria not through ISWAP and Boko Haram's main bases in northeastern Nigeria, but through operatives in the Middle Belt. In addition, JNIM's main bases in Mali are much closer to northwestern Nigeria than to Borno, which means it would be easier to infiltrate Fulani populations in the Middle Belt than Borno.

A potential accelerant to an AQIM/JNIM revival in Nigeria would be the death of al-Baghdadi. The key draw to the Islamic State for ISWAP and Shekau has been ideological: they believe al-Baghdadi is a true caliph. Pledges are made to an individual, not to a group, which is a vulnerability for the Islamic State. If al-Baghdadi were to be killed, would ISWAP find his successor to be as legitimate as al-Baghdadi himself? If not, then ISWAP might revert to being organizationally independent but still ideologically aligned with other jihadi groups at large, just as Shekau has been since he reverted to leading Boko Haram in August 2016. Beyond ideological attraction to al-Baghdadi, there may be little that the Islamic State could offer to continue to attract ISWAP, especially if it has fewer opportunities for making money without a hold on a large amount of territory in Syria and Iraq. The primary sources discussed in this article, such as correspondence between Boko Haram and the Islamic State, do not reveal high levels of transfers from the Islamic State to ISWAP of finances, weapons, or arms, as had been the case of AQIM support to Boko Haram after 2009. Therefore, if al-Baghdadi were eliminated, some ISWAP and Boko Haram members who had been loyal to al-Baghdadi might seek to leave either faction and re-connect with AQIM.

It is unlikely that AQIM would accept any realignment with Shekau after the experience of dealing with him from 2009 to 2011, but it is possible that AQIM would accept realignment with Abu Musab al-Barnawi for ideological reasons. In his *Al-Naba* magazine interview with the Islamic State in August 2016, Abu Musab al-Barnawi even recognized AQIM's contributions to Boko Haram, noting that his

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732 Menastream, "#Egypt: Recently created AQ-linked channel 'Huras al-Sharia Misr al-Kinana' celebrates El-Wahat attack," Twitter, October 21, 2017. Heni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss, "Ansarul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso," *CTC Sentinel* 11:3 (2018).

733 "The Nigerian Killing Field," Salkida.com, January 18, 2018.

734 Rashid.

slain father's followers found haven with AQIM in 2009.<sup>735</sup> In addition, as the "official spokesperson" of Boko Haram and then ISWAP before becoming *wali* of ISWAP in August 2016, he avoided anti-al-Qa`ida polemics, which differed from other Islamic State-loyal or -leaning groups around the world. In addition, Abu Musab al-Barnawi's theological positions, including his critiques of Shekau, have been roughly similar to al-Qa`ida's regarding not harming "ordinary" Muslims, but only those who actively oppose the jihadis.<sup>736</sup> This shows there is potential for AQIM/JNIM realignment with Abu Musab al-Barnawi since ideological differences would not be an insurmountable hurdle.

The question then arises: how would it benefit ISWAP and AQIM/JNIM to realign with each other? Both groups are self-sufficient in their ability to engage in warfare (unlike Boko Haram was in 2009), including tactics such as kidnappings-for-ransom, suicide bombings, and ambushes and raids on military barracks and conventional forces. However, both groups face challenges from professional armed forces, such as the Malian army and G5 comprising Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and France (against JNIM); and the Nigerian army and Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin (against ISWAP), respectively. In practical terms, a realignment could see AQIM/JNIM and ISWAP offer each other safe havens, or the resupply of arms. If ISWAP were to change loyalties, it would also add legitimacy to the al-Qa`ida brand and therefore strengthen JNIM's messaging and recruitment. ISWAP could win new recruits who see its loyalty to al-Qa`ida as a strength, including currently dormant Ansaru members who may seek to reactivate their militant activities under ISWAP. In addition, JNIM could deploy its Fulani members to recruit from among Nigeria's Fulani population and expand ISWAP's support base and geographic reach to areas beyond Yobe and Borno states, which neither ISWAP nor Boko Haram have attacked with regularity since 2012.

A renewed alliance between AQIM/JNIM and ISWAP would also give Ansaru opportunity for a revival. Even though Ansaru is no longer active, the group retains an online presence. The release of the article by Ansaru's leader in January 2017 in the al-Qa`ida publication al-Risalah, which was followed by AQIM's release in April 2017 of the primary source documents discussed in this article, shows al-Qa`ida still pays attention to Nigeria.<sup>737</sup> In the article and primary source documents, al-Qa`ida has attempted to explain to its audiences the history of involvement in Nigeria and the reasons why it is no longer active operationally in the country. The close timing of the release of the article and the primary sources and their similar message may also not have been coincidental. Rather, al-Qa`ida may have been attempting to reaffirm to its followers that it is not al-Qa`ida's fault that Boko Haram went on the *takfiri* path of Abubakr Shekau and then joined the Islamic State.<sup>738</sup>

Nonetheless, al-Qa`ida would likely exercise strategic patience in two ways before reentering Nigeria. First, it would wait for al-Baghdadi to be killed and for ISWAP—and the Islamic State global network more broadly—to face a crisis about whether or not to be loyal to the next caliph. One possible scenario is that some ISWAP members would not stay loyal to al-Baghdadi's successor, which would provide an opportunity for defections because primary sources show that Mamman Nur, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, and Shekau all agreed that al-Baghdadi's caliphacy is what made the Islamic State legitimate.<sup>739</sup> Second, al-Qa`ida may also wait for Shekau to be killed or to lose more support due to his ruthlessness. If Shekau were killed, his fighters would face a crisis because they are loyal to al-Baghdadi but not necessarily Abu Musab al-Barnawi. While their ideology may be too similar to Shekau's for a realignment with AQIM/JNIM, it is possible many of Shekau's fighters have only remained with him out of

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735 Al-Naba newsletter #41.

736 Ibid.

737 "A Message from Nigeria," Al-Risalah, January 2017; Rashid.

738 Ibid.

739 Mamman Nur, "An Open Letter to Abubakar Shekau."

fear that Shekau would kill them, as he has killed other commanders suspected of subordination.<sup>740</sup> The best-case scenario for AQIM/JNIM would be if Shekau's fighters rejoin ISWAP after Shekau's death and then ISWAP as a whole entity reoriented toward AQIM/JNIM after al-Baghdadi's death.

The impact of an al-Qa`ida revival in Nigeria would likely be different than the impact that the Islamic State has had on ISWAP since March 2015. The Islamic State's impact on ISWAP has been mostly evident in its media and branding even though there were also theological matters on which the Islamic State offered advice, such as expressing disagreement with Shekau's enslaving of Muslims, who could only be killed (but not "enslaved"), and on whether ISWAP could target markets where there were Muslims.<sup>741</sup> However, the impact of AQIM on Boko Haram after 2009 was much more significant operationally because it immediately led to increased tactical sophistication. AQIM also benefited from being geographically closer to Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2009 than the Islamic State in Libya or Syria and Iraq has been. With AQIM/JNIM's entrenchment in Mali, it will remain more proximate to ISWAP than the Islamic State in the future. This will be a long-term advantage for the prospects of AQIM/JNIM reviving an alliance with any of the groups in Nigeria.

If AQIM's expansion into southern Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso are any indication, then an al-Qa`ida revival in Nigeria would likely lead to similar outcomes in Nigeria. In less than a six-month period from November 2015 to March 2016, AQIM employed primarily Fulani attackers to target an international hotel in Bamako, a hotel and a café in Ouagadougou, and a resort outside Abidjan, killing dozens.<sup>742</sup> Those attacks were statements to the leadership and civilians of each country, if not also the rival Islamic State and the broader international community, that AQIM was capable of expanding its targets. Similarly, in Nigeria AQIM/JNIM would likely carry out a 'statement' attack in Lagos or Abuja to alert Nigeria and the international community that it too has returned. This could also lead to a potential outbidding scenario where militants who are still loyal to ISWAP seek to attack international targets to match AQIM/JNIM in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

This article traced Boko Haram's evolution and assessed whether al-Qa`ida, which was once active in Nigeria, will return to the country. This analysis is important because al-Qa`ida—specifically its subgroups in Mali—would have different targeting preferences if they operated in Nigeria compared to Boko Haram or ISWAP just as Ansaru had different targeting preferences compared to Boko Haram in previous years. Therefore, when embassies, corporations, NGOs, and militaries plan mid- to long-term contingencies in Nigeria, it is worth them considering whether, if they have offices in Abuja or Lagos, for example, al-Qa`ida will return to Nigeria and potentially impact their operations there just as al-Qa`ida has done in parts of southern Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire in recent years. If al-Qa`ida does not return to Nigeria and ISWAP and Boko Haram continue their current focus on holding territory in northeastern Nigeria, then organizations in Nigeria can remain vigilant but reduce their concern about attacks on their property or people in areas of the country outside of northeastern Nigeria.

This article found that al-Qa`ida's history with Boko Haram has largely been underappreciated or unexamined in much analysis and research on the group and its factions. One reason for this is that analysts have differed over how to evaluate the reliability of certain sources of data on this issue, in particular government statements, local media reports, public statements of support for each other by AQIM and Boko Haram, and datasets showing a sudden increase in Boko Haram attacks starting in 2010, including a suicide bombing campaign. While it is important to critically assess sources in this

740 Ibid.

741 Ibid.; Abu Malik al-Tamimi (Anas al-Nashwan), "The Nigerian Questions," al-Turath Media Foundation, March 1, 2018.

742 Jacob Zenn and Dario Cristiani, "AQIM's Resurgence: Responding to Islamic State," *Terrorism Monitor*, March 3, 2016.

field, it is this author's judgment that these sources are now complemented by other newly available primary sources, such as letters between AQIM and Boko Haram, which provide a deeper level of understanding of al-Qa`ida's and AQIM's ties to Boko Haram and attest to more experienced AQIM leaders supporting lesser experienced Boko Haram members in financing, weapons, training, and advising (the latter of which Shekau was too intransigent and impetuous to accept).

While it is important not to underestimate the loyalty of ISWAP to the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, it is important to recognize al-Qa`ida retains an interest in Nigeria. This article argues that an al-Qa`ida return to Nigeria is likely in the mid- to long-term future and will also have consequences for Boko Haram and its factions and the security of Nigeria and the region more broadly.

