Boko Haram Internationalism & its Sub-Regional Security Implications

SAMUEL OSAGIE ODOBO
University of Ibadan-Nigeria
samuelodobo@gmail.com

Abstract

Boko Haram is a terrorist organization that sprung up from its Maiduguri base in Borno State, north-eastern Nigeria. Between 2011 and 2015 the group's attacks against the Nigerian State became increasingly virulent. Following its August 26, 2011 attack against the United Nations building in Abuja, Nigeria's Capital, the group evolved into a strong international terrorist organization finding support from terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and the Islamic State (ISIS) through its connections with Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram has attracted increased international attention not only for its notoriety within Nigeria, but because of its transnational operations across Lake Chad and the West African sub-region. Its international connections and attacks beyond Nigeria's borders is cause for significant concern; yet how these activities impact sub-regional security has been rarely explored. This paper contributes to the debate on Boko Haram internationalism and its sub-regional security implications. Its main conclusion is that Boko Haram remains not only a threat to Nigeria's security, its transnational activities constitutes a bigger threat to regional security.
Keywords: Boko Haram, Terrorism, Lake Chad, West Africa, Security.

Introduction

When Fukuyama wrote *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992 predicting the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the unrivalled and final form of governance which other civilizations had no option but to adopt under the leadership of the West, he did not foresee any other force challenging the new world order. For example, it failed to adequately take into account the strength of ethnicity and religious fundamentalism as counter-forces to the spread of western democratic ideology,

especially political Islam which is considered the most powerful of these forces. Samuel, P. Huntington wrote a 1993 essay "*The Clash of Civilizations*", a direct response to *The End of History,* which he later expanded into a book in 1996, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* In both write-ups, he argued that conflict between ideologies is being replaced by ancient conflicts between civilizations, and the primary axis of conflict would be along cultural and religious lines. He wrote:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (1993: 3).

Huntington specially singled out Islam which he described as having "bloody borders" and warned that radical Islam would pose serious threats to western civilization. The September 11, 2001 attacks (now widely referred to as 9/11 attacks) on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the United States by Islamic fundamentalists coordinated by Osama Bin Laden lent credence to Huntington's views and rekindled global consciousness on the threat of political Islam. Although Africa was not immediately seriously considered in the whole analysis of the threats of Islamic fundamentalism, over a decade after the 9/11 attacks, the continent is now littered with Islamist groups from Somalia to Algeria, Mali to Chad, including Niger, Nigeria and others. The international community led by the United States now devotes substantial resources in checkmating what had become known as political Islam or Islamic fundamentalism on the continent.

Nigeria especially has had its fair share of religion-related violence. In fact, in Nigeria, religion and violence interact in complex ways and one can hardly talk about Nigeria without reference to religion and its numerous negative contributions to national development. It has been a cause of some of the most virulent controversies and conflicts in the country to the extent that Danjibo noted:

> The Jihad, the civil war propaganda, the *Sharia* law controversy, the tensions provoked by the Nigerian accession to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the incessant religious crises that have engulfed the Northern part mainly indicate that religion cannot be ignored or wished away in the Nigerian political development (2009: 3).

Several religious conflicts have occurred in Nigeria. Some of them include the Maitatsine revolts between 1960 to 1980, the Zangon Kataf uprising (Kaduna State, 1992), the anti-Sharia violence episodes 1 and 2 (Kaduna State 2000), and the December 2015 Shiite-Army clash which resulted in the death of several members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria led by Ibrahim El-Zakzaky. Arguably, none of the previous experiences of sectarian violence in Nigeria have attracted greater attention like the Boko Haram insurgency. Since 2009 when the sect became openly violent against the state, its attacks have had far-reaching consequences leaving thousands of people dead and several other millions either as internally displaced persons or refugees (see ICG, 2016). What began as a local insurrection against the Nigerian state took an internationalized dimension on August 26, 2011 when Boko Haram attacked the United Nations building in Abuja, Nigeria's Capital City. Added to the socio-economic dislocation and security challenges it has created especially in north-eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has forayed into transnational terrorist activities in West Africa, the Lake Chad region and beyond, thus attracting global attention.

While the Nigerian military since late 2015 have largely contained the group's activities within Nigeria, its association with global terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State (ISIS), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Shabaab as well as its capacity to carry out terror activities beyond Nigeria represents a threat not only to its country of origin or the neighbouring countries, but across the African continent and beyond. This aspect of Boko Haram terrorism remains relatively unexplored especially taking into consideration its potential to impact security in West Africa and Lake Chad area – two regions with abundant socio-political, economic, and religious problems.

This study, therefore, is an attempt to assess Boko Haram's increasing internationalism and its implications for national and regional security. Its main conclusions are that Boko Haram remains one of the biggest local threats to Nigeria's security alongside others such as the farmer-herder conflicts. The group's internationalization represents an emerging and bigger threat to national and regional security which can only be contained through a combination of national, regional and global efforts targeted at not only armed confrontation but also eliminating the incentives that continue to feed its ideology, recruitment process, radicalization and funding.

Conceptualizing International Terrorism

There is no universal definition of international terrorism (or even terrorism). At best, scholars often attempt to analyze the features that are peculiar to the concept. For Pokhilko (2014), the main features of international terrorism usually reflect global demonstrations, severe and negative dynamics, as well as the need of immediate solution to the threats they pose. Gusher (cited in Pokhilko 2014) observed too that the activities of international terrorist organizations are most often characterized by lack of expressed state borders, connection and interaction with international terrorist centers and

organizations; fixed organizational structure that consists of management and operational level, intelligence and counter intelligence units, materials and logistic assistance, battle groups and cover; careful selection of staff; presence of agents in law enforcement and state authorities; good equipment competing, and sometimes surpassing equipment of government troops; presence of extensive network of secret hideouts, training facilities and landfills.

International terrorism possesses three main characteristics according to the FBI (www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism):

- Involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
- Appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
- Occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the US or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which the perpetrators operate or seek asylum.

International terrorism lies in the reach of its operations. That is, their ability to spread, and launch attacks across geographical boundaries. In this way, they somewhat operate like transnational corporations with various cells and activities in many countries. However, a U.S. Army TRADOC handbook (A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty Fist Century, 2007) attempted to distinguish between international terrorist organizations and those that could be said to be transnational in nature. According to the handbook, terrorist groups that are international in nature may conduct their activities in multiple countries,

but these nations usually share geographical proximity. In other words, international terrorist groups usually retain a geographical focus for their activities such that the objective naturally will be on regional impact of their activities. On the other hand, those that are transnational are usually more expansive in their realm of operations traversing multiple and less geographically close countries. Their operational and strategic reach as well as impact are also global in nature. For these groups, there is the unique capability to deploy the cyberspace on a global scale, access worldwide financial institutions, maintain satellite headquarters, and several clandestine cells in multiple locales across several continents (2007: 10).

A key feature of international terrorism is their sophistication in the use of the internet. As a matter of fact, the internet has become a crucial weapon in the hands of terrorist organizations mainly replacing print and other physical media. Hoffman (2013) in his study *Inside Terrorism* noted the increasing use of the internet by terrorist groups and the far-reaching implications it could have. He argues that,

> "terrorists are now able to bypass traditional print and broadcast media via the internet, through expensive but professionally produced and edited video tape and even with their own dedicated 24/7 television and radio news stations. The consequences of these developments [are] far-reaching as they are still poorly understood, having already transformed the ability of terrorists to communicate without censorship or other hindrance and thereby attract new sources of recruits, funding, and support that governments have found difficult, if not impossible, to counter" (Hoffman, 2013).

The use of the internet has allowed terrorists organizations to cheaply and effectively communicate their messages not just to the world but also their members everywhere. It has allowed them to easily recruit new members, coordinate local and global attacks as well as successfully evade global surveillance. The Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist group has

been a leading terrorist organization that has effectively harnessed the power of the internet and social media in its campaigns. ISIS's well-organized online media campaign has been very useful in its efforts to recruit thousands of foreign fighters. Its online messages calling for lone wolf attacks in Europe arguably have yielded significant results. It is common knowledge that many of converts were seen to have pledged allegiance to the group and waving the Islamic State flag before executing terrorist attacks in parts of Europe, America and Australia.

Furthermore, Boko Haram has repeatedly employed online media to release short video and audio messages directly addressing the Nigeria President, the Nigerian military, the United States and the international community. It has also used the medium to talk up its relationship with international terrorist organizations, first pledging allegiance to al Qaeda, and latter ISIS, as well as using it to address its followers to stay the course and continue to support its activities. This in some ways represents a paradox: Like ISIS, Boko Haram projects an ideology that is anti-western and yet relies heavily on western technology in carrying its operations across borders. In other words, the argument could be made that these terrorist organizations have mainly advanced their operations through westernization and not Islamization.

As a matter of fact, Boko Haram feeds on online propaganda which it successfully used in the past to display its successes in north eastern Nigeria. Generally, it is a primary task of terrorist organizations to use the internet to achieve wide coverage of their attacks, spread their extremist ideological messages and instill fear on government and the society. The impact of Boko Haram information war actually compelled the Nigerian government to develop its own strategy to push for a counter-narrative of Boko haram activities, and how government's efforts to defeat Boko Haram in Nigeria has successfully weakened the group.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram is a Salafist Islamic movement that is based in north-eastern Nigeria. It is believed that Boko Haram started in Maiduguri, Borno State and is primarily based in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe and Kano from where it spread to virtually all parts of northern Nigeria and advancing towards other parts of the country (US House Committee on Homeland Security, 2013: 7). The group's official name is *Jama"atu Ahlissunnah lidda"awati wal Jihad* which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". Boko Haram is literarily translated as the "Association of Sunnis for the propagation of Islam and Holy War" (Fayeye, 2013). Nevertheless, it is widely accepted among the local Hausa population that Boko Haram stands for "Western education is forbidden".

The exact date of Boko Haram's emergence remains controversial. Earliest report suggests that it was founded in 1995 as a religious study group by Abubakar Lawan, in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State and progressively metamorphosed into Boko Haram. What is however known is that Boko Haram did not begin to transform into the insurgent group it is today until Mohammed Yusuf assumed control of the group. From the early 2000 under Yusuf, the sect developed radical views about Islam that rejected westernization and modernization. Yusuf preached radical and provocative sermons against moderate Islamic clerics, and against political institutions. The group rejected all forms of western culture and influence and sought the imposition of Sharia law across the whole of Nigeria. The group draws its membership from among the poorest, unemployed, criminals, drug addicts, as well as the educated and the employed. They called themselves the "Nigerian Taliban" and adopted a modest lifestyle and established a camp in a remote area of northeast Nigeria, which the group dubbed "Afghanistan" (Sani, 2011).

Before 2009, Boko Haram was known not to be violent but only engaged in low level skirmishes with local police forces and some members of the community because of its brand of Islam which became worrisome to local residents. In 2009, following the refusal of the sect members to wear motorcycle helmet on their way for a funeral (Walker, 2012: 4), the police attempted a crackdown on the group. It backfired. In retaliation, the group attacked police stations and other government buildings in Yobe and Bauchi, killing several policemen. They also attacked mosques and churches. The fighting spread across five northern states: Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina, and Yobe. The Nigerian military responded, and five days of fighting left more than 800 dead, mostly Boko Haram members (Oftedal, 2013: 17). The fighting ended on July 30, 2009 when the sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf was captured by the military and later handed over to police authorities where he was killed in custody. The manner of his death which was videotaped and broadcast on television led many to conclude that he was murdered in an extrajudicial manner.

The death of Mohammed Yusuf was a watershed in the evolution of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The group's members who went underground (within and outside the country) after the fighting ended in 2009 reemerged in 2010 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau as a more radical and violent group determined to avenge the death of its leader and further the course of the sect. In 2010, the group orchestrated several brutal attacks against government targets in many northern states. Worthy of note in these attacks include the September 2010 prison break in Bauchi that resulted in the release of 700 prisoners, including Boko Haram members, and series of Christmas Eve bombings in Jos that left over 80 people dead (Oftedal, 2013: 17). The gruesome nature of Boko Haram attacks was further emphasized by Retired Major General Paul Tarfa who in an interview narrated how members of the sect invaded his village located in Garkida, Adamawa State killing nine members of his immediate family (Daily Trust Newspaper, February 10, 2018).

Since its reemergence, Boko Haram has remained unrelenting in its attacks which are largely focused against government security forces, Christians and Muslim critics, community, political and religious leaders and other targets that they consider as "enemies". The sect demonstrated a change in its tactics with the use of suicide bombings when on August 26 it instigated a suicide attack on the UN headquarters in Abuja, in which 23 people were killed and an additional 116 injured (Civil-Military Fusion Center2012: 5). Other notable attacks include the January 20, 2012 coordinated bombing in Kano which killed about 185 persons. In June 2012, Boko Haram carried out suicide attacks at three churches at Kaduna and Zaria, sparking reprisal violence by Christian mobs who burnt mosques and targeted their Muslim neighbours. More than 100 were killed in over a week of violence (IRIN, 2013).

Despite efforts by government to counter attacks by Boko Haram, the group continued to aim at high profile targets with greater casualties. Government declaration of a state of emergency and other systemic approaches to ending the violence appeared ineffective. Its efforts to establish dialogue with the sect members and the possibility of granting amnesty to the group has also not yielded the desired effect as key leaders of the group have turned down the offer of amnesty. In a video message, the leader of the sect, Shekau rejected government's proposed amnesty saying the group had done nothing wrong. Instead, he retorted that it was the government who needed pardon (Mudashir, 2013).

Several factors have been attributed for stoking the embers of Boko Haram violence and the perceived support it receives from the local population. Some of these factors include massive poverty and underdevelopment of the north compared to the more developed Christian dominated southern part of the country, massive corruption in the government and high-handedness and brutality meted on the local population by security forces. It is also believed by the sect that Nigeria's relation with the West is a corrupting influence on

the country and responsible for many of the woes in the country and failure of governance. Northern Nigeria has a high level of poverty and many of the residents live in abject poverty.

Ideology and Organization

It is not entirely clear what Boko Haram ideology is. On the one hand, it appears the group's objective is the creation of an Islamic state governed by Islamic laws. This is reflected in several statements and other media interviews released by the group though Johnson (2011) is of the view that there may be other objectives being pursued by the group since Sharia law is already being observed in 12 out of the 36 states of the Federation. Nevertheless, it is observed that from inception, the sect leader had preached against the brand of Islam being practiced in northern Nigeria. Mohammed Yusuf for instance was known for "his radical and provocative preaching against other Islamic scholars such as Jafar Adam, Abba Aji and Yahaya Jingir and against established political institutions" (Danjibo, 2009: 6).

On the other hand, Boko Haram had repeatedly made one crucial demand relating to good governance. It has publicly stated its aim to overthrow the government, abolish democracy, and create an Islamic state. This probably accounts for the reason why the sect at one time asked former President Jonathan to either convert to Islam or resign. In fact, many of Shekau's statements in the past directly addressed to President Jonathan often focused on the government's inability to govern the country, with Boko Haram accusing the regime of corruption and apostasy. Such political statements were indicative of a strong sense of injustice and bad governance. Furthermore, Boko Haram's aspirations also reflected a desire to broaden its Islamist agenda beyond Nigerian border. The emergence of a splinter group, Ansaru points to this. Supporting this was Abubakar Shakau

pledging allegiance to ISIS in a video released in March 2015. Hence, while it can be said that the group remains committed to the local agenda of creating an Islamist society in Nigeria, it has embraced international jihad and habours a broader objective of aligning with other international militant Islamist groups.

Little is known about the structure and composition of Boko Haram leadership because of the secretive nature of the group. However, Shekau is widely considered as the main leader of Boko Haram and works with a few select cell leaders who form his inner circle. Shekau has on several occasions, been reported to have been killed by the Nigerian military but keeps releasing videos that suggest he is alive. However, the announcement by ISIS of the appointment of a new leadership on August 3, 2016 shows the existence of division within the group. While Shekau claims to be the leader of Boko Haram, ISIS head, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced a change of leadership naming Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the new head of Boko Haram—the West African branch of the Islamic State.

Boko Haram Internationalism

Although Boko Haram had in the past openly indicated its aspirations as a globally minded Islamist group (see for example, *Vanguard*, August 14, 2012; Brock, 2012), the August 26, 2011 bombing of the United Nations building was its first major attack of international dimension. Though it occurred in Nigeria, its anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric did awaken global consciousness to Boko Haram internationalism. In May 2011, months before it attacked the UN building, two Europeans, a Briton and an Italian, were kidnapped by Boko Haram international wing Ansaru. Both were held captive for about a year before they were killed by the sect during a failed joint rescue operation by Nigerian and British forces in northern state of Sokoto. More specifically, Boko Haram internationalism lies

mainly in its transnational attacks, recruitment process, as well as its international linkages and support system.

Boko Haram transnational attacks have largely remained regionally focused covering Nigeria and its neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The porosity of borders and multiple ungoverned spaces across these countries have allowed the group to thrive in its attacks. Apart from Nigeria where Boko Haram activities have been more pronounced, the group has carried out direct attacks on these foreign soils. The case of Cameroon is special considering the fact that Mohammed Marwa, the leader of Boko Haram's predecessor— Maitatsine originally came from the northern Cameroonian town of Maroua. Marwa had successfully planted the seed of rebellion in the area and his effortless ingress and egress across the Nigerian-Cameroon borders allowed it to successfully nurture and grow the seed of violence which Boko Haram arguably took advantage of and successfully established formidable bases and staging areas in Cameroon from where it launched attacks both in Cameroon and Nigeria.

On October 20, 2012, the mayor of a Cameroonian border town was assassinated by Boko Haram while visiting Nigeria. Boko Haram also kidnapped seven Europeans, all from the same Tanguy Moulin-Fournier family in Dabanga, Cameroon in February 2013 for which a ransom of 3million Dollars was paid for their release. The group had noted that the abduction was a reaction to French anti-Islamist engagement in Mali (US House Committee on Homeland Security, 2013). One of the most high-profile Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon occurred on July 27, 2014 where the wife of Cameroon's Vice Prime Minister (Francoise Agnes Moukouri), the Lamido of Kolofata (Seini Lamine), and some foreigners were kidnapped in Kolofata, a northern Cameroonian town. Two months before, the sect had killed a Cameroonian soldier and abducted 10 Chinese workers from the town of

Waza, Cameroon. It is reported that more than forty Cameroonian soldiers lost their lives to Boko Haram insurgency in 2014 alone (BBC, December 29, 2014).

Besides Cameroon, Boko Haram had also launched attacks in Chad and Niger partly as a response to both countries' involvement in local and regional efforts to rein in the sect's activities. Boko Haram attacked Chad's capital city, N'Djamena in June 2015 killing about 23 people with over a hundred others wounded (Daily Sun, June 16, 2015). The same report noted that a series of attacks targeted at Chadian security forces as well as security operations against the group had left more than seventy Chadian soldiers dead. In Niger's eastern town of Diffa, Boko Haram attacked using suicide bombers in response to the country's counterterrorism operation against the group. The May 2014 clashes between the Nigerien forces and Boko Haram members left some of the insurgents dead and several others arrested. Unlike in Nigeria where ethno-religious, socio-economic and political factors have been crucial to the emergence of Boko Haram, the military involvement by Cameroon, Chad and Niger could be adduced as inciting greater Boko Haram attacks against those countries. Nevertheless, the cross-border activities of the sect show its capacity to constitute serious regional threats which requires greater cooperation among the countries to effectively contain the sect's activities.

Furthermore, Boko Haram has successfully targeted unemployed and uneducated youths as members particularly in the north-eastern parts of Nigeria. However, its recruitment and radicalization particularly of young Muslims also transcend Nigerian territory. Boko Haram has successfully indoctrinated and recruited not just the poor and illiterate but also very well-educated youths in Nigeria and other countries in West Africa and the Lake Chad region. Boko Haram operated training camps in northern Cameroon where it is reported that it successfully recruited and trained thousands of fighters who were later deployed into conflict theatres in Cameroon, Nigeria and elsewhere. Abdullahi (2015: 137) noted

that over 1000 of such fighters had attacked five villages including Amchide, seizing the Achigachia military base and hoisting its flag.

The Cameroonian military repelled the attacks, regaining control of the Achigachia military base in an operation that led to the death of 41 Boko Haram insurgents and a Cameroonian soldier. Boko Haram incessant attacks in Cameroon triggered massive counter offensive by the country's military including deployment of Cameroon's elite forces. An operation in one of Boko Haram training bases left at least 34 insurgents killed. The soldiers rescued about 84 children who were undergoing training in the camp while the camp was dismantled (Abdullahi, 2015: 138).

The impressive transnational network that Boko Haram created for recruiting, radicalizing and training of members was recognized by former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2014 when he noted that intelligence reports suggested that Boko Haram runs advanced international training bases in places like Kidal and Gao in Mali, Maradi, Maina Soro and Diffa regions in Niger, Garoua and Maroua in Camerron, Ridina and Zango areas of N'Djamena, Chad, Ranky Kotsy area of Sudan, as well as other clandestine bases in Central African Republic (Newswatch, June 2014: 18).

Additionally, Boko Haram external linkages have provided some form of support system to the group in executing its terrorist activities. Besides copy-catting techniques used by other Foreign terrorists Orgaanisations (FTOs) such as suicide bombings, beheading of victims, martyrdom videos in Arabic, kidnapping foreigners and demanding for ransom, and the dream of establishing an Islamic caliphate, its connections to foreign terrorist groups have aided not only its recruitment process but also the level of training as well as sophistication of operations. Beginning from 2009, Boko Haram members were noted to have trained in AQIM bases in West and North Africa where they learnt bomb making, and

the use of advanced weapons and ammunitions including shoulder-fired weapons and surface to air missiles. Boko Haram members had also trained in faraway Somalia with al-Shabaab where they learnt how to make and detonate improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombings, propaganda and intelligence operations strategies which are useful for sustaining the insurgency.

Boko Haram's foot soldiers were believed to have fought alongside Islamists in northern Mali against the UN backed French-led operations to dislodge the Islamist militants in 2012. It is believed that about 200 Boko Haram members joined AQIM to fight in Timbuktu and Gao (Hinshaw, 2013). It was during the same period that Ansaru attacked a detachment of Nigerian security forces along Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria who were on their way to Mali on a peacekeeping mission. It is also known that foreigners have fought alongside Boko Haram members in Nigeria thus showing some form of back and forth support between the group and other external actors.

Beyond training and indoctrination support, Boko Haram has also received international assistance in the form of funding, weapons supplies and foreign fighters. The group is known to have got funding from MusilimiYaa'ma, an Islamic organization based in Algeria. Also, the Nigerian military had on several occasions noted the use of advanced and more sophisticated weapons and ammunition by Boko Haram members and some of these weapons were not known to the Nigerian army thus indicating support from external sources. Local eyewitness report claimed that helicopters allegedly from Chad were seen dropping arms and food items for Boko Haram insurgents in their camps around Chikungudu and Kwalaram villages between Monguno and Marte. In 2014 when Mahamat Bichara Gnoti, a political associate of the Chadian President Idris Deby was arrested along Chad-Cameroon border with a cache of arms including surface-to-air missiles, he claimed the weapons were bought from Sudan and meant for Boko Haram insurgents operating in

north eastern Nigeria. According to Abdullahi (2015: 58), it was alleged that President Idris Deby provided the funds for the weapons and gave the associate a presidential pass allowing him to freely transport the weapons to its destination.

These dimensions of Boko Haram internationalism show the extent to which the group entrenched itself as a transnational terrorist organization particularly in the West African and Lake Chad region. Though it cannot be said that an alliance exists between the group and other FTOs, there is a relationship between Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations. ISIS, al Qaeda and the Taliban have proved that their grand objective is not only to deepen their roots in the Arab world, but also to develop subsidiaries around the world. The 2016 declaration of Boko Haram as ISIS West Africa Province (ISWAP) by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi suggests that Boko Haram might evolve into an enduring terror group with greater capacity to cause monumental damages.

A clear indication of the transnational threat posed by Boko Haram can be gleaned from the scale of international response to the group's activities. The four major countries most directly affected by Boko Haram activities (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger) were compelled to take unilateral and regional actions against the insurgency. At the regional level, the four countries supported by Republic of Benin formed the multilateral joint task force (MJTF) to cooperate on intelligence sharing and other areas including joint/coordinated military operations to prevent cross-border attacks by the sect. Furthermore, the US on June 21, 2012 announced Shekau, along with two others (Abubakar Adam Kambar, and Khalid al Barnawi), as *Specially Designated Global Terrorist* (SDGT). In 2013 also, the US government placed a seven-million-dollar bounty on Shekau's capture, the highest of all African terror leaders. Additionally, it supported the MJTF with funding of $5billion to aid the MJTF military operation against Boko Haram insurgency.

Concerned about the threats posed by Boko Haram, the French government organized the 2014 Paris security summit. The Presidents of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger were present at the summit. Representatives of the European Union, the US, Britain and others were equally in attendance to discuss strategies to be adopted to contain Boko Haram security threats. The summit encouraged the setting up of bilateral and multinational frameworks especially on intelligence sharing and coordination of operations, effective border management as well as dealing with issues of refugees induced by the insurgency.

Given the above, scholars and security experts still have argued that Boko Haram cannot be classified as an international radicalized movement but a Nigerian-based group that relies on local and foreign support to pursue what it primarily a local agenda (Walker, 2012; Cook, 2013). Marc-Antoine Perouse (2014) has argued that international response to Boko Haram terrorism particularly by the US and other world powers is largely symbolic rather than a confirmation of the sect's internationalized threats. Symbolic or not, being able to compel such significant responses from major powers such as the US and France suggests a recognition of the group's capability to cause serious damages of greater international proportion which rightly should not be taken lightly. As the former commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), General Carter Ham puts it "Boko Haram leadership aspires to broader activities across the region, certainly to Europe, and I think again as their name implies, anything that is western is a legitimate target in their eyes" (cited in US House Committee on Homeland Security Report, 2013: 10).

Implications for Sub-Regional Security

Boko Haram insurgency has resulted in deteriorating humanitarian and security situations particularly in the Lake Chad region. Incessant attacks and suicide bombings have

devastated vital infrastructures across the affected areas reducing access to essential services while causing widespread trauma, poverty and hardship. Refugee crises in the area have worsened forcing Nigeria and her immediate neighbours further down the underdevelopment path. Around 21 million people live in the affected area across the four Lake Chad countries. Over a hundred thousand Nigerian refugees and more than 2.5million IDPs induced by the insurgency have destabilized the poor and unprepared neighbours. More than 40,000 refugees have fled to Niger, with several other thousands in Cameroon and Chad. Most of the refugees and displaced people are sheltered by families and communities that themselves are victims of the crisis and count amongst the world's poorest and most vulnerable. This has put further strains on food supplies, limited medical and health facilities and other social infrastructures in these countries.

The conflict has exacerbated food insecurity and malnutrition in the affected area. An Oxfam report (2016) noted that at least 6.3million people (500,000 of which are children) have faced acute food insecurity. Of these figures, about 4million are in Nigeria, while more than 2million are in Chad, Niger and Cameroon. A report by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA 2016) on the north eastern part of Nigeria stated that up to 2.1million people fled their home at the height of the conflict with about 1.8million displaced due to Boko Haram insurgency. Almost 7million people more than 50% of whom are children are in need of humanitarian assistance in the three most affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. The displaced people are in dire need of protection, water, food, sanitation, education, shelter, and healthcare. The conflicts have resulted in the death of more than 20,000 people and countless number of women and children who have been abducted and drafted as suicide bombers.

Furthermore, much of the literatures have focused on Islamic radicalization in the West with little emphasis particularly on Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region. Field reports

suggested that some of the Chibok girls kidnapped in April 2014 along with others also abducted by Boko Haram were dispersed across the region. This has serious security implications. A number of those abducted having been radicalized by the group were deployed as suicide bombers across the region. For example, an estimated 38 children were reported to have been used by the group to carryout suicide bombings in the Lake Chad region in 2016 bringing the total number of children used by the sect as suicide bombers to about 86 since 2014. The sect also used an estimated number of 15 women, 40 men and 20 other unknown attackers as suicide bombers in 2016 (UNICEF, 2016). The sect leaders have repeatedly boasted that a number of the captured Chibok girls and others had been married off and dispersed across the region and beyond as soldiers for the propagation of its mission. These radicalized "recruits' are a threat to stability and security of the region.

Furthermore, there was the added diplomatic row between Nigeria and Cameroon over cross-border attacks against Nigeria. Cameroon had initially showed willingness to support Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram but appeared to have tacitly withdrawn such support following Boko Haram's "warning" attacks against the country because of her cooperating with Nigeria. These attacks seemed to have forced Cameroon to reduce its tough stance against the sect including withholding intelligence on Boko Haram from the Nigerian government. It was also alleged that part of negotiations to prevent further Boko Haram attacks against Cameroon included a commitment by the government to release four Boko Haram commanders in Cameroonian jails as well as supply of a considerable number of weapons and ammunitions to the group. This enabled Boko Haram to strengthen its bases in Cameroon and successfully launch attacks from such bases against Nigerian villages and communities in the north east.

Consequently, the Nigeria government accused Cameroon of doing little to secure its borders and curtail such attacks. It also accused the country of allowing the group to use Cameroon as a haven when fleeing from the advancing Nigerian security forces. The Cameroonian government however rejected the accusations. As a sign of improved relations with Nigeria, its security forces attacked several Boko Haram bases in Cameroon killing several of its members and arresting others. It has also cooperated with Nigeria in other areas such as intelligence sharing, prevention of illicit movement of arms and terrorists across shared borders as well as joint border patrols as part of the regional coalition to counter Boko Haram insurgency.

Besides Cameroon, there was also the suspicion that burgeoned in Nigeria against Chad over its alleged support for Boko Haram. There were reports that the Chadian government was the biggest supplier of arms to Boko Haram and that several illicit Boko Haram weapons and funds were traced to the country. The relationship between President Idris Deby, Ali Modu Sherif— a former governor of Borno State and Boko Haram leadership came under serious investigation by the Nigeria government in 2014 to determine if there were possible links between Chad and Boko Haram. These suspicions affected diplomatic relations between both countries. Thus, one of the first countries visited by the President Muhammadu Buhari on assumption of office in May 2015 was Chad ostensibly to seek reassurances that Chad and Nigeria were on the same page regarding Nigeria's counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram.

Furthermore, Nigeria's demonstrated capacity for peacekeeping operations globally was largely due to its comparative advantage in terms of population size, economic and military strength, and more importantly, the relative stability in enjoyed domestically. It has in the past committed over $10bilion dollars to peacekeeping and stabilization missions especially through the Economic Community of West Africa's peacekeeping force

commonly known as ECOMOG. Beyond regional commitments, Nigeria also ranked among the world's top troop contributors to international peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the United Nations. However, due to the demand to commit more troops and resources to prosecute its internal security operations against Boko Haram, it lost its status as highest ranked African troop contributing country to UN peace operations to Ethiopia in 2011. In 2016, the country contributed a meager 2,170 peacekeeping personnel to UN peacekeeping operations ranking number eight in Africa behind Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal and Tanzania. The war against Boko Haram insurgency also reduced its capacity to play the leader-motivator through the ECOWAS in the peace support and stabilization mission in Mali in 2013.

What this shows speculatively, is that an unsettled Nigeria is a threat to the security and stability of the ECOWAS sub-region. Boko Haram has already demonstrated its ability to exploited Nigeria's ethno-religious and geopolitical differences to fuel instability and threaten the unity of the country. Its attacks on worship centres in the past fueled existing religious tensions and in some instances sparked deadly reprisal attacks by Christians against Muslim civilians. Therefore, Boko Haram has the potential to further inflame sectarian tensions which could result to a religious civil war in the country. The impact of a Nigerian implosion would be massive, not just in terms the neighbourhood effects of instability and dislocation (massive refugee movement), but also that West Africa, a conflict-prone sub-region, would miss the country's stabilizing role.

Boko Haram became an ISIS-aligned jihadist organization when it pledged its loyalty to the former. This has led ISIS to encourage its foreign fighters to fight in West Africa if they could not join others in Iraq and Syria. This has serious security implications. Because the sect has been considerably weakened by the Nigerian security forces and international coalition, it could quickly transform (itself in the short term) as a recruitment centre or a

subsidiary for ISIS (or other FTOs) and deployed against local and foreign targets within the region. On the other hand, Boko Haram can also leverage on the support of ISIS and others to acquire the necessary funding, training, weapons, ammunitions and other equipment to greatly enhance its capacity to continue its terrorist activities beyond Nigeria's borders.

Creating an Islamic caliphate governed solely by strict interpretation and implementation of Sharia law has been a key objective of Boko Haram. Though achieving this objective is highly unlikely at the moment, it would be a mistake to dismiss the threat. Boko Haram has already killed thousands of people including Muslim critics and has demonstrated its resilience in withstanding sustained attacks by the Nigerian security forces in the past. While Nigeria's military offensive codenamed *Operation Lafiya Dolë* has achieved a measure of success in reducing the group's terrorist activities both in intensity and spread, it is still beset with a number of challenges such as operational inexperience in dealing with unconventional warfare, mismanagement of counter-terrorism funds and weak regional cooperation on counterterrorism. It therefore calls for improvement in counterterrorism measures against the sect's activities.

From a broader security perspective, the threat that Boko Haram internationalism poses to the sub-region can be best understood by examining the interest of its associates especially ISIS and AQIM. As observed by Ekhomu (cited in the Guardian Newspaper, 28 November 2015), ISIS has a strategic initiative to dominate global terrorism and is finding partners across various regions. Al-Qaeda too has an interest in sub-Saharan Africa – which is to create an Islamic state in the region. These international terrorist organizations intend to create a haven for Islamist terrorist organizations to operate and perpetuate their attacks against sub-regional and western targets. In recent times, ISIS and AQIM have penetrated further south into West Africa and has contacts/affiliates in countries such as

Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau; and has also successfully linked with Boko Haram in northern Nigeria (Le Sage, 2011; Ekhomu, 2015). If this burgeoning relationship between the various affiliates is allowed to fester and al-Qaeda or ISIS is able to provide them with sophisticated operational training, the consequence is that there would be more deadly attacks against sub-regional and western targets.

Conclusion

Debate still exists on whether Boko Haram is nothing more than a radical Islamist sect with local aspirations or one whose ambitions transcend national boundaries. It is the author's view that Boko Haram is a jihadist group with sub-regional reach. At present however, the group may not be considered to be of the same ilk as other notorious extremist groups such as ISIS, AQIM or al-Shabaab. Nevertheless, its continued linkages with these terrorist groups should be a cause for concern not only for Nigeria, her neighbours and other members of the international community. The reason is, though security threats in West Africa and the Lake Chad region have existed for decades and from several sources, religious resurgence and the rise of political Islam is altering and leading to a re-examination of the nature of security threats in these affected areas. Therefore, not paying adequate attention to Boko Haram terrorism including its growing relationship with notorious foreign FTOs poses a greater risk of instability for the region and beyond.

True enough, Boko Haram attacks have been largely restricted to the northeast corner of Nigeria due to sustained government military operations. However, the sect's capacity to regenerate itself should also not be under-estimated given the experience of 2009. Besides, well established FTOs such as AQIM, al-Shabab, AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) and others had similar formative years as localized radical anti-government movements and were overlooked by the respective

authorities as posing no serious threat to peace and stability. This appeared to be grave misjudgment of the groups considering their current status and the level of threat they pose to international peace and security today.

References

Abdullahi, D. 2015. *The Boko Haram Phenomenon and Terrorism in Nigeria.* Abuja: Hiit Plc.

BBC News, 2012. "Profile of Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau", June 22, 2012. Available at: *http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18020349*.

BBC. 2014. *http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30623199*. Accessed December 29, 2014.

Brock, Joe 2012. "Special Report: Boko Haram-between rebellion and jihad", Available at: *http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/31/us-nigeria-bokoharamidUSTRE80U0LR20120131*.

Civil-Military Fusion Centre 2012. "Security Threats in the Sahel and Beyond: AQIM, Boko Haram and al Shabaab", available at: *http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_3818.pdf*. Accessed December 21, 2016.

Cook, D. 2013. Seminar note on "Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: from Local to Global Jihad". Obtainable at: *http://www.rsis.edu.sg/cens/PDF/Seminar%20note_030613.pdf*

Daily Sun 2015. "23 Killed as Boko Haram Suicide Bombings Target Chadian Police". Tuesday, June 16, 2015, P. 16.

Danjibo, N. D. 2009. "Islamic Fundamentalism and Sectarian Violence: The 'Maitatsine' and 'Boko Haram' Crises in Northern Nigeria", available at: *http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/N-_D-_DANJIBO_-_Islamic_Fundamentalism_and_Sectarian_Violence_The_Maitatsine_and_Boko_Haram_Crises_in_Northern_Nigeria.pdf*.

Duarte, F. P. 2011. "Maghrebian Militant Maneuvers: AQIM as a Strategic Challenge", Available at: *http://csis.org/publication/maghrebian-militant-maneuvers-aqim-strategic-challenge.*

Fayeye, J. O. 2013. "The Boko Haram Phenomenon and the Other Side of the Coin in the Nigerian Experience", in *African Journal of Peace and Security, Vol. 1, Number 1*

Fukuyama, F. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man,* London: Penguin

Hinshaw, D. 2013. "Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists' Reach". *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013

Hoffman B. 2013. *Inside Terrorism.* Columbia University Press.

HRW 2012. *Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria*, October 11, 2012.

Huntington, S. P. 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

Huntington, S. P. 1996 *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* New York: Simon & Schuster.

IRIN 2013. *http://www.irinnews.org/report/93909/nigeria-timeline-of-boko-haram-activity.*

Johnson, T. 2011. "Boko Haram", *Council on Foreign Relations,* available at: *http://www.crf.org/africa/boko-haram/p25739.*

Kalu, U. 2011. "How Nur, Shekau run Boko Haram," *Vanguard,* September 3, Available at: *http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/09/how-nur-shekau-run-boko-haram/.*

Le Sage, A. 2011. "The Evolving Threat of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb". Available at: *http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-268.pdf.* Accessed December 21, 2016.

Marc-Antoine P. 2014. "Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency? Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis". Available at: *https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20140901BokoHaramPerousedeMontclos_0.pdf.* Accessed December 21, 2016.

Mudashir, I. 2013. "No Cause for Alarm over Rejection of Amnesty by Boko Haram- JNI" available at: *http://weeklytrust.com.ng/index.php/new-news/12262-no-cause-for-alarm-over-rejection-of-amnesty-by-boko-haram-jni*. Accessed October 30, 2013.

Newswatch 2014. "President Jonathan- the World Must Unite to Fight Boko Haram". June 2014: 18.

Oftedal, E. 2013. "Boko Haram – An Overview" *Forsvarets forsknings institutt, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment.* Available at: *http://www.ffi.no/no/rapporter/13-01680.pdf.* Accessed December 21, 2016.

Onuoha, F. C. 2012. "Boko Haram: Nigeria's Extremist Islamic Sect", Aljazeera Centre for Studies, available at: *http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2012/2/29/2012229113341793734BOKO%20HARAM%20NIGERIAS%20EXTREMIST%20ISLAMIC%20SECT.pdf* .

Oxfam 2016. "Lake Chad's Unseen Crisis". Available at: *https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/lake-chads-unseen-crisis*. Accessed December 22, 2016.

Ploch, L. 2013. "Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy", *Congressional Research Service.* Available at: *http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33964.pdf*. Accessed November 22, 2013.

Pokhilko, A. 2014. "International Terrorism: Definition, Essence, Main Features". Available at: *www.youngscientistusa.com/archive/1/141/*. December 20, 2016.

Punch Newspaper, 2013. "Boko Haram offensive drives 40,000 refugees into Niger – UN", 14 November, 2013, P. 18.

Sani, S. 2011. "Boko Haram: History, ideas, and revolt", *Vanguard*, July 7, 2011. Available at: *http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/07/boko-haram-history-ideas-and-revolt-5/.*

The Guardian Newspaper 2015. "Take ISIS threat seriously, Ekhomu tells government", 28 November, 2015.

UNICEF 2016. Children on the Move, Children Left Behind: Uprooted or trapped by Boko Haram". Available at: *https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Children_on_the_Move_Children _Left_Behind.pdf*. Accessed December 22, 2016.

UNOCHA 2016. "About the Crisis". Available at: *www.unocha.org/nigeria/about-ocha-nigeria/about-crisis*. Accessed December 22, 2016.

US Army Training and Doctrine Command 2007. "Terrorist Motivations and behaviours" in *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty First Century*". US Army Training and Doctrine Command, DCSINT Handbook No. Available at: www.au.af.mil/au/awcgate/army/guidterr/. December 20, 2016.

US House Committee on Homeland Security 2013. "Boko Haram, Growing Threat to the U.S. Homeland". Available at: https://homeland.house.gov/boko-haram-growing-threat-us-homeland/. Accessed December 22, 2016.

Wakili, H. 2005. "Religious Conflict and Democratization in Nigeria's North-West Zone". In Yakubu, A. M.; Adegboye, R. T.; C. N. Ubah; and Dogo, B. eds. *Crisis and Conflict Management in Nigeria Since 1980, Volume Two, Governance and Conflict Management,* Kaduna: Baraka Press and Publishers Ltd.

Walker, A. 2012. "What is Boko Haram?" *United States Institute of Peace*, 2301 Constitution Avenue, Washington DC.