Niger

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Nigeria

Cameroon

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Introduction

Nigeria, once well respected for its role in restoring stability in some conflict-torn states in West Africa, is now in need of the international community's assistance to guarantee peace and security in her own territory. The growing campaign of violence led by the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awatiwal Jihad (People committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and jihad), otherwise known as Boko Haram, not only poses a serious threat to internal security in Nigeria, but may threaten regional stability in West Africa as a whole.[1]

Since July 2009 when Boko Haram engaged Nigerian security forces in a short-lived anti-government uprising, the group has grown to become a serious national, regional, and international concern. The group attracted the first major international attention in August 2011 when it bombed the United Nations building in Abuja, killing 23 people. It has sustained its insurgency in Nigeria since then and has even increased its violent attacks and activities in the North Eastern states of Nigeria in the course of 2014. In April 2014 for instance, the group drew unprecedented international attention when it kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in the village of Chibok, triggering off the international campaign 'Bring Back Our Girls'. The Nigerian security forces, with the assistance of the international community, have struggled to locate the abducted girls. Meanwhile, the group has continued killings, pillages, abductions, and bombings of different locations such as religious sites, schools and popular public places, mainly in towns in North Eastern Nigeria.

As is to be expected, the activities of Boko Haram have drawn a growing attention in national and international media as well as among academics from all over the world. Most writings about the group address its deleterious consequences from a political and social perspective. However, these reports often fail to highlight that, besides

the tragic loss of lives and property, the activities of Boko Haram constitute a major threat to regional security. This study therefore points out that, although Boko Haram has emerged as a home-grown group with local grievances, the dynamics of its activities now pose a serious threat to peace and security in the West African region. It assesses the regional security implications of the existence and operations of Boko Haram on four broad levels, namely: the group's resourcing and acquisitions including recruitment, training, equipment, and funding; the mounting of cross-border attacks; the consequences of its operations; and a potential erosion of Nigeria's role as the leader of ECOWAS.

It concludes that for the foreseeable future, Boko Haram will remain a key threat to national and regional security unless concerted efforts are made by the Nigerian government and both regional as well as international actors to erode the appeal of Boko Haram's insidious ideology, inhibit its opportunities for recruitment and radicalisation, and cut off its financial lifeline.

Understanding the threat posed by Boko Haram

In order to understand how the Boko Haram insurgency threatens security, it is pertinent to provide a background of its evolution. It is not clear when Boko Haram was created. A common account of the group's origin traces it back to 2002, when Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic preacher, became its leader. To Nigeria's intelligence community, however, its true historical roots go back to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan established the Ahlulsunnawal' jama'ahhijra or Shabaab group (Muslim Youth Organization) in Maiduguri, Borno state. The group flourished as a non-violent movement until 2002 when Yusuf assumed leadership. It has existed over time under various names, such as the Muhajirun, Hijrah, Ahlis Sunnah wal Jama'a, Yusufiyyah, and Nigerian Taliban.

Boko Haram's ideology is based on extreme Islamic teaching which rejects most Western ideas and institutions as un-Islamic. This rejection earned the group its popular name: Boko Haram literally means "Western education is forbidden." However, the group prefers to be

1. For more details about the group, see F.C.Onuoha (2014), "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), pp. 158 - 191.3.

called by its original name, Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awatiwal Jihad, meaning "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad." Its core objective is to replace the secular Nigerian state with a regime that adheresto strict Islamic Sharia law, applicable throughout the entire country.

Boko Haram recruits its members mainly amongst disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children, mostly from but not limited to northern Nigeria. Its membership also includes some wealthy, educated, and influential people. The group is known to sustain its operations through diverse sources of funding, including membership dues, donations from politicians, financial assistance from foreign terrorist groups, raiding of banks, and ransom from kidnapping. It also extorts money, food items and property from residents of areas it controls, as well as from wealthy persons whom they have intimidated into paying protection fees to avoid being attacked by them.

Its history of violence dates back to December 24, 2003, when it attacked police stations and public buildings in the towns of Geiam and Kanamma in Yobe state. The activities of the group however became even more worrisome in 2004 when students, mainly from tertiary institutions in Borno and Yobe states, withdrew from school, tore up their certificates, and joined the group. The group continued with intermittent hit-and-run attacks on security posts in some parts of Borno and Yobe until the July 2009 anti-government uprising in Nigeria.

The remote cause of the July 2009 revolt is often traced back to the fatal shootings of June 11, 2009, during which 13 sect members were shot by security forces involved in Operation Flush. This shooting was triggered by a clash with sect members riding motorbikes during a funeral procession for not wearing crash helmets. In retaliation, the members attacked and destroyed the DutsenTanshi police station on July 26. That attack sparked off a wave of unrest which swept through Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina, and Yobe states. The revolt ended on July 30, 2009, when Mohammed Yusuf was captured at his residence in Maiduguri. After a few hours in police custody, the police killed Yusuf extra-judicially; police officials claimed that he tried to escape. Over 800 people, mainly sect members, were killed during the revolt, and hundreds more were arrested.

The methods used by Nigerian authoritiesin repressing the 2009 revolt proved to be fatal,thus leading to the escalation of Boko Haram's violent attacks. The group went underground and later adopted Yusuf's hard-line top deputy, Abubakar Shekau, as the sect's new spiritual leader. Progressively, the sect has evolved into a more dynamic and decentralised organisation capable of changing and combining tactics as well as expanding or reordering target selection. It subsequently adopted new violent tactics such as bombings, targeted assassinations, ambush, drive-by shootings, and slitting of victims' throats. Using these diverse tactics, the group has attacked a variety of targets including security agents, Christians, traditional rulers, politicians, school children and teachers, Islamic scholars, public servants, traders and lately all non-members of the group. Most of the attacks occurred in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State. In addition, the group has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Niger, Plateau, and Yobe states, as well as in Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

In January 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in 15 Local Governments Areas across four states in the North, where the sect largely operated. By July 2012 when the state of emergency ceased, the security crisis had still not been addressed. In May 2013, President Jonathan again declared a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, the states which are and continue to be the worst affected by the insurgency. Aggressive military campaign following the declaration of state of emergency in May 2013 led to a reduction of the geographical scope of Boko Haram attacks, of the frequency of suicide bombings and of targeted armed attacks on police stations, military barracks and detention centres. However, the group shifted its focus to soft civilian targets, launching attacks on vulnerable and isolated

towns, villages and schools, with weak or non-existent security presence.[2] In May 2014, the President again extended the state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states.

There is no exact figure on the death toll caused by Boko Haram attacks, however, President Goodluck Jonathan in May 2014 claimed that since 2009, the group has killed over 12,000 Nigerians and injured over 8,000.[3]

From Lull to Deadly Violent Escalation

In order to degrade the operational capability of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government has adopted diverse counter-insurgency measures, which include legislative, prosecutorial, security, bilateral and multilateral initiatives. However, attempts by the military to contain the attacks and crush the sect's violent activities led to the escalation of attacks within its stronghold in the northeast and to the expansion of violence outside of the North-eastern region, including detonating bombs in the capital Abuja.

Most of the attacks in the first few months of 2014 were concentrated in the group's remote north-eastern stronghold – Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States – which have been under a renewed state of emergency since May 2014. In the first four months of 2014, for instance, over 2,596 people were killed in terror-related attacks in Nigeria.

Again, the group brought its violent campaign very close to Nigeria's seat of power on April 14, 2014, when it detonated a bomb-laden vehicle at a crowded bus park in Nyanya, a suburb of Abuja. The explosion killed over 71 people, injured over 24 others and destroyed more than 40 vehicles. On the same day, in an attempt to broker a prisoner exchange, members of the sect stormed a

government boarding school in Chibok, Borno State, along the border with Cameroon, and kidnapped over 200 female students. In a video message released on May 5,2014, Abubakar Shekau claimed that the girls were abducted by members of his group and threatened to sell them. The abduction attracted serious local and international outcry, compelling countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China and Israel to offer technical, equipment and advisory support to Nigeria in a bid to rescue the abducted girls and bolster the country's weak counter-terrorism capacity.

Boko Haram and Regional Security

The foregoing demonstrates that Boko Haram has grown to become the biggest security challenge facing Nigeria. Yet, how its activities impact regional security has been rarely explored. The implications of Boko Haram insurgency on regional security can be assessed from at least four dimensions, namely: the group's expansion in the form of recruitment, training, equipment and funding; its targeted violent cross-border attacks; transnational consequences of its operations; and a potential erosion of Nigeria's role as the de-facto leader of ECOWAS.

Resources and Recruitment

An evidence of Boko Haram's reach beyond the national borders of Nigeria is its expanding international network, which enables it to recruit and train members from countries of the Sahara-Sahel region. In the aftermath of the July 2009 revolt, many members of Boko Haram were alleged to have fled to North Africa to train with Al- Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI). In 2013, it was reported that a large contingent of Boko Haram fighters joined an AQMI training centre in Timbuktu, Mali, to learn how to fix Kalashnikovs and launch shoulder-fired weapons. During training with AQMI, Boko Haram members also mastered the skill of bomb making. Boko Haram's unrelenting bombing campaigns and recent deployment of sophisticated weapons such as shoulder-fired weapons[4] confirm the enhanced external supports it has received in the last few years.

Boko Haram also dispatched some other members to faraway Somalia to join Al Shabaab-run training camps, where members were taught how to construct and

2. R. Cummings (2014), "The Abuja Bus Station Bombing: A Sign of Boko Haram's Rise or Fall?,Think Africa Press, 18 April 2014.
3. I. Wakiliand T. Igidi (2014), "Boko Haram has killed over 12,000 Nigerians – Jonathan", Sunday Trust, 18 May 2014, http://sundaytrust.com.ng/index.php/news/16983-boko-haram-has-killed-over-12-000-nigerians-jonathan.
4. H.I. Pindiga (2013), "Boko Haram training camps found in Mali – Over 200 Nigerians trained for 10 months in Timbuktu", Daily Trust, 6 February 2013, p.1.

detonate improvised explosive devices, as well as how to use suicide bombers.[5] In a statement released on June 15,2011, Boko Haram revealed its ties with the Somali-based terror group, Al-Shabaab, boasting that Nigeria's security agencies were unable to match the training they acquired in Somalia. Suicide bombings which occurred after this statement, including the bombing which took place at the Police Headquarters in Abuja shortly afterwards on June 16, 2011 proved that members of the group benefited from a training on the employment of suicide bombings. After a lull in 2013, the group is now increasingly resorting to suicide bombings. Nigeria has recorded at least 48 suicide attacks between June 11th 2011 and July 28th 2014, resulting in the death of at least 678 people (see table 1).[6]

networks in Africa has trivialised its threat to Nigeria and the entire West African region. Recently, President Jonathan acknowledged that Nigeria gleaned intelligence which indicated that Boko Haram runs an international network of recruitment, training and indoctrination camps such as in the Gao and Kidal areas in Mali, the Diffa, Maradi and Maina Soro areas in Niger Republic, Maroua and Garoua areas in the Republic of Cameroon, the Zango and Ridina quarters in Ndjamena, Chad, the Ranky Kotsy area in Sudan and also some cells in the Central African Republic.[7]

Beyond recruiting, training and radicalising members in different camps or centres across the region, the group also receives limited funding from other terrorist or jihadi

Table 1: Incidents of Suicide Bombings in Nigeria, 11 June 2011 – 28 July 2014

S/No.	Year	Death Toll by Months												Death Toll	Total No. of Incidents
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec		
1	2011						7		25			2	46	80	7
2	2012	180	6	10	41		92	5	3		9	50	2	398	22
3	2013			22										22	1
4	2014	30		77		47	14	90						258	18
	Total													678	48

Source: Compiled from author's diary

Prior to resorting to suicide bombing in June 2011, the international connections knitted by the group over the years had drawn very little attention and awareness. It is likely that a collective lack of awareness on the ideological links between Boko Haram and other Salafi Jihadist

groups in the Sahelto sustain its existence and operations. Boko Haram is known to have received funds from an Islamic group, MusilimiYaa'maa, based in Algeria. It has also been reported that disputes over 40 million naira (US$250,000) which was received by Boko Haram as share of an AQMI ransom in early 2011 partly contributed to the breaking away of Ansaru from Boko Haram. Thus, the operations of various recruitment, training and radicali-sation centres across countries reveal how deep the group has planted its seeds in foreign soils, especially in West and Central African countries. Yet, while Boko Haram does not seem to be centrally controlled from outside Nigeria and its

5.   S. Connell, "To be or not to be: Is Boko Haram a foreign terrorist organisation?"Global Security Studies Vol. 3, No. 3 (2012), p.89.
6.   Author keeps track of reported suicide attacks by the sect; however, the statistics should be taken as a conservative estimate given that the author may have missed some incidents.
7.   President Goodluck Jonathan (2014), "The World Must Unite to Fight Boko Haram", Newswatch, June 2014, p.18.

operations appear independent, links with other terror organisations can be observed on an ad-hoc basis. However, given the lack of efficient and democratic governance in West African states, Boko Haram might over time evolve or merge into an enduring terror group in neighbouring countries.

Cross-border Attacks

Another dimension is the expanding threat Boko Haram poses to several bordering countries in the region, notably Cameroon, Chad and Niger, by organising direct attacks on their soil. Cameroon has hitherto been the main stage for planning cross-border attacks which increased at a time of growing counter-activities by the Cameroonian

violent incidents in May 2014 between Nigerian forces and suspected Boko Haram insurgents, with at least a dozen Boko Haram members being arrested and few numbers killed. On May 5th, 2014 for instance, at least three members of Boko Haram were arrested in Niger after they attacked an army patrol in the eastern region of Diffa. These cross-border attacks reveal a web of an originally Nigeria-based insurgency and how it is becoming a vector of insecurity in neighbouring countries. This disturbing trend therefore requires an effective strategy and a swift implementation to contain the transnational reach of Boko Haram. Evidently, Boko Haram has spread its insurgency beyond Nigerian borders as it grows into a regional threat.

Table 2: Some Cross-border Raids in Cameroon blamed on the Boko Haram

Date	Incident	Remarks
19 February 2013	Kidnap of seven members of the Tanguy Moulin - Fournier family in Dabanga, northern Cameroon.	Freed in April 18, 2013 in Nigeria, reportedly in exchange for a $3.15 million ransom and the release of 16 Boko Haram prisoners held in Cameroon.
4 April 2014	Kidnap of two Italian priests and a Canadian nun from the small parish of Tchere, in north Cameroon.	Cameroonian security forces swiftly blamed Boko Haram. Kidnapped persons released nearly two months later.
17 May 2014	Boko Haram members killed a Cameroonian soldier and abducted 10 Chinese workers from the town of Waza, Cameroon.	Ten vehicles belonging to the Chinese construction company were also taken in the attack.

Source: Compiled by the author

government. These recent operations carried out by Boko Haram in Cameroon reveal a regional dimension to its threat. As summarised in table 2 below, a string of foreigners have been kidnapped in Cameroon's north over the last year by suspected Boko Haram members. Among them was a French family as well as two Italian priests and a Canadian nun, who were taken into Nigeria before their eventual release. In May 2014, suspected Boko Haram militants attacked a Chinese work site in northwest Cameroon, killing at least one soldier and abducting 10 Chinese workers whose fate is still unclear.

Chad and Niger are also facing the threat of instability and insecurity deriving from attacks by Boko Haram militants. In Niger's eastern Diffa region, there was a number of

Transnational Consequences of Violence

Another layer of Boko Haram's regional security implications manifests in the transnational consequences of the growing violence for humanitarian, economic and diplomatic stability in the countries. On the top of the list is the dire humanitarian situation it has created. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), no fewer than six million residents of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states have been directly affected by Boko Haram attacks. Increasing violence perpetrated by Boko Haram has created a huge number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, a number that is growing with each passing attack. According to the UNOCHA, nearly 300,000 people

in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states – 70 percent of them women and children – have fled their homes since early 2013. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) puts the figure of IDPs in Nigeria at more than 650,000, with a majority of them staying with families in other parts of Nigeria.[8] The victims are predominantly the most vulnerable of the society – children and women - many of whom have been orphaned and widowed as a result of the activities of the insurgents.

These numbers exclude those who have fled as refugees across Nigeria's borders, to proximate villages in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The UNHCR estimates that over 60,000 Nigerians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries since May 2013. For instance, there are about 40,000 Nigerian refugees in Niger Republic and about 28,000 in Cameroon with majority coming from bordering communities. Many of the refugees fled without any food or water, thereby intensifying the strain on scarce resources and social services of the host communities.

Furthermore, Boko Haram violence has led to the destruction of health facilities in the North Eastern states of Nigeria, forcing health workers to either flee or shut down clinics. This in turn has compelled residents to seek medical attention in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, thereby adding to the pressure on limited health facilities in the host communities.

Added to this is the problem of worsening food insecurity caused by the destruction of livelihoods and social support systems, bombing of infrastructures (bridges), displace-ment of farmers and pillaging of livestock and foodstuff. A big majority of farmers in the north had been displaced by Boko Haram's violence just before the start of the 2014 planting season. Owing to worsening insecurity, farmers are no longer able to cultivate their lands or harvest their

productsfor fear of being attacked by Boko Haram members. Also, cattle herders and households have lost their livestock to Boko Haram pillaging, further compounding the situation of severe food insecurity.

Yet, insecurity also adds to the cost of transportation. Noteworthy is the unverified claim that Boko Haram has taken possession of some missing Libyan shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles known as Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), for possible use against commercial jets flying into Niger, Chad and perhaps into Nigeria.[9] Alarmed by this revelation, many foreign companies have imposed 20 to 25 per cent additional charges on aircraft lease rentals paid by Nigerian airline operators. Consequently, this additional cost increases the cost of doing business – services, products and food prices – in the region. Furthermore, cross-border abductions by Boko Haram, for instance, have scared off potential tourists in the far North region of Cameroon, leading to a sharp drop in customs revenues for the Central African country. Overall, the violence has severely impacted the local economy, with devastating consequences for the wider economy of the region, as well as for the wellbeing of the economies of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Benin amongst other countries, which are tied to the Nigerian economy.

These negative impacts on the economy add to the diplomatic unease in the Nigerian-Cameroonian relations. Nigerian authorities have criticised Cameroon for not doing enough to secure its borders, noting that Boko Haram has been using Cameroonian territory as a transit route for weapons and as a base to launch attacks in North East Nigeria. Cameroonian officials have rejected such accusations. However recently, as part of their efforts to tackle the armed group, Cameroon deployed some 700 soldiers to the borderin early March 2014 to combat Boko Haram and improve the relations with Nigeria.

A potential erosion of Nigeria's role as the de-facto leader of ECOWAS

Another implication concerns Nigeria's ability to continue to play the vital role of a regional stabiliser in West Africa, including sustaining her contributions to peace support operations worldwide. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria's diplomatic and military

8. Human Rights Watch, 14 March, 2014, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/14/nigeria-boko-haram-attacks-cause-humanitarian-crisis
9. D. Ignatius, "Libyan missiles on the loose", The Washington Post, 9 May 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/libyan-missiles-on-the-loose/2012/05/08/gIQA1FCUBU_story.html?goback=.gde_2325252_member_113834499.

leadership has helped to resolve major political and security crises in West Africa – from the Liberian and Sierra Leonean crises in the 1990s to the more recent political instability in Guinea, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali.[10] In fact, Nigeria deployed about 12,000 troops within the framework of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group's (ECOMOG) missions and spent well over $10 billion. Nigeria also committed about $34 million to the deployment of troops and logistics support to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and pledged an additional $5 million in further assistance for the stabilisation of Mali.

Whilst Nigeria deploys more human (military) and material resources to address the Boko Haram insurgency, her capacity to contribute to regional and international security as well as stability is gradually being eroded. For example, Nigeria which had consistently ranked as the fourth largest contributor to UN peace operations behind India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and also as the largest contributor among African countries, has since December 2011 lost that position to Ethiopia due to the imperative of addressing internal security challenges. Moreover, pressing demand for troops at home to help combat the Boko Haram insurgency and other internal security challenges contributed to Nigeria's withdrawal of some of her troops in July 2013 from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).[11] These developments reveal how the insurgency is gradually diminishing the contributions Nigeria makes to regional security, therefore supporting the conclusion of Sherman that "Nigeria cannot fully achieve its potential as a stable regional leader until Nigeria successfully overcomes the challenge of Boko Haram".[12] This poses a serious dilemma for ECOWAS. The worst case scenario will be a situation where Boko Haram's growing attacks exploit Nigeria's sensitive cleavages (religious, ethnic and geographic) to plunge the country into anarchy or possible implosion. As the world's seventhmostpopulous country, Nigeria's implosion would lead to a regional destabilisation as the wave of refugee flows would sweep across the neighbouring countries. More so, ECOWAS will suffer the absence of a regional security stabiliser in the event of eruption of political crisis in any of its member states.

Regional and International Responses to the Boko Haram Insurgency

The threat to regional peace, security and development posed by Boko Haram is becoming increasingly clear to Nigeria, her neighbouring countries, ECOWAS and indeed to the international community. To this end, efforts are made at the international, regional and national levels, both unilaterally by the countries directly affected or collectively by involving countries within and outside the region, to contain the expanding insurgency.

Aware of the threat that Boko Haram poses to French interests in West and Central Africa – evidenced by Boko Haram kidnapping of a French family in northern Cameroon–the French President spearheaded a summit for security with some African leaders in Paris in May 2014 (The Paris Summit). The event brought together the Presidents of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, as well as representatives from the US, UK and the European Union, in order to discuss strategies to deal with the security threat posed by Boko Haram and other groups in West and Central Africa. The Paris summit decided on a set of bilateral and multi-lateral measures, such as a plan to enable them to share intelligence, coordinate actions and monitor borders, as well as assembling a team to fashion how to implement the agreed action plan. They also agreed on a number of initiatives to curtail the excesses of the insurgents as well as mobilise funds in support of women and girls in affected areas.

Consistent with the Paris objective, the UK and US have stepped up cooperation with Nigeria to gather intelligence on Boko Haramin order to help Nigeria quell the insurgency. As part of the agreement which was reached

10.   W. Sherman (2013), Remarks by US Under-Secretary at the United States-Nigeria Binational Commission Regional Security Cooperation Working Group Opening Session", 15 August 2013, http://nigeria.usembassy.gov/bnc-speeches_08152013.html.

11.   It is pertinent to note, however, that many observers believe the withdrawal of Nigerian troops was a protest against the UN for naming a Rwandan army general, Jean-Bosco Kazura, as the MINUSMA's Force Commander instead of Nige-ria's Major General Shehu Abdulkadir, who was the Force Commander of AFISMA. This was the first time Nigeria would unilaterally recall its troops from any United Nationspeace support operation.

12.   W. Sherman, op. cit.

at the Paris summit on terrorism, the US, UK, France, Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic set up an External Intelligence Response Unit (EIRU) on Terrorism in June 2014. The new structure will serve the purpose of building up comprehensive records of information and pooling together the intelligence gathered by the different countries in a system of easy sharing for the various countries. The objective of this intelligence centre is to enable the different parties involved in the EIRU to come up with an effective security response to the threat.

Concerned by the threat of terrorist groups such as the one Boko Haram poses to regional security, ECOWASadopted a Political Declaration and Common Position against Terrorism in 2013, which provides for a regional Counter Terrorism Strategy and an Implementation Plan to help member states combat terrorism. The strategy is meant to facilitate the implementation of regional, continental and international measures in combating terrorism and to provide a common operational framework for community-wide actions to prevent and eradicate terrorism and related acts. The strategy is intended to enhance coordination among member states; strengthen national and regional capacities to detect, deter, intercept and prevent terrorism; promote criminal justice approach; prevent and combat violent religious extremism; harmonise responses and promote regional and international cooperation on terrorism. However, it lacks a soft approach which would put an emphasis on the provision of state services, humanitarian aid and the protection of citizens as measures to prevent further appeal of the insurgents.

Yet, ECOWAS faces several limitations in contributing to the suppression of the Boko Haram threat. Tactically and operationally, there is very little the ECOWAS can do, since it is only as strong as its member states. It lacks both intelligence architecture and an operational standby forceit coulduse in counter-terrorism operations. Its programmes and activities are largely influenced by donor funding and priorities, further limiting what it can do regarding combating Boko Haram. In addition, it cannot effectively

"ring fence" Nigeria for the purposes of curtailing Boko Haram's transnational operations, given that Nigeria's neighbours such as Chad and Cameroon do not belong to the regional organisation. At the same time, ECOWAS could play a crucial role in an outreach for humanitarian aid and facilitate negotiations with the insurgentsif accepted by the Nigerian government.

In addition, Nigeria has signed bilateral agreements on security with her neighbouring countries and engaged in joint operations with Benin, Chad and Niger, focusing on efforts to restore security along the borders by employing the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MJTF) on Lake Chad Basin. The MJTF was established in July 1988 as a joint operation made up of soldiers from Chad, Niger, and Nigeria to ensure security within their common borders and engender international cooperation. It commenced operation in September 1988 after a tripartite agreement was reached by the Heads of State of the three countries but went almost moribund afterwards. It was however resuscitated in April 2012, and its mandate expanded to include the fight against the activities of Boko Haram. Since then, the MJTF has been battling the insurgents, especially in the Lake Chad area.

Recently in July 2014, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria agreed to speed up the creation of a 2,800-strong regional force to tackle the Boko Haram Islamic sect, to which each will contribute 700 troops. The initiative is in line with the action plan defined at the Paris Summit and the follow-up meeting on June 12 in London aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Nigeria's neighbours have taken unilateral measures to shore up security against Boko Haram's infiltration and operations in their territory, while collaborating with Nigeria in some areas. So far, Niger's strategy has been to stop Boko Haram from crossing into its territory rather than to confront them openly. It has also carried out limited raids in some communities in Diffa region which are believed to harbour some Boko Haram militants. For example, Niger's

security forces raided a house in the Dubai neighbourhood of Diffa in December 2013 where three Boko Haram suspects were based. The militants fled but were arrested the next morning when they were cornered by security forces.[13]

In recent times, Cameroon has moved from quiet containment to active confrontation with Boko Haram, especially since the May 2014 Paris Summit. In late May, as a response to incursions of Boko Haram fighters into Cameroon and to the criticism made by the Nigerian government over her weak response to the threat, Cameroon deployed about 1000 soldiers from its elite Rapid Intervention Battalion, to the far north, especially to border towns believed to be particularly at risk, such as Fotokol, Dabanga and Amchide. In reaction, Boko Haram has also increased cross-border attacks on northern Cameroon.

Chad has also stepped up efforts to combat Boko Haram's transnational activities. In addition to participating in MJTF, Chad has assisted by offering its territory for major reconnaissance operations led by the US and French military. Their jets and soldiers have been stationed there as part of the growing global efforts to free the abducted girls. In mid-August 2014, Chad's troops carried out a military operation against the sect to rescue some of the 100 people kidnapped by the Boko Haram sect on August 10 in DoronBaga in the Kukawa area near the border with Chad. Some of the insurgents were killed as they attempted to cross the Chadian border, and their captiveswere rescued.[14] Further, Chad is reportedly facilitating the ongoing negotiations between alleged members of the insurgency group and the Nigerian government which include talks on the release of the Chibok girls and a possible ceasefire.

Efforts at the international, multilateral and national levels are meant to weaken the group but often focus purely on security measures. Further, several challenges stand in the way of success. At the national level for instance, Nigeria's search for an end to the Boko Haram threat has been seriously hampered by divisive tendencies amongst the political class (especially between the ruling and opposition parties), mutual suspicion among members of the two major religions in the country, and animosity between vulnerable residents and military forces over accusations of human rights violations by the latter. Ineffective intelligence architecture and widespread corruption have equally limited the room for success. Bilateral and multilateral interventions have also suffered from intrigues of power, suspicions, pursuit of vested national interests, and desire to maintain national pride.

Overcoming the challenges to effective national, bilateral and regional counter-terrorism efforts will be the key to achievingsustainable security in the region. Misguided responses would lead to disastrous consequences and outright failure. On the one hand, if multinational response fails to defeat Boko Haram, there is a chance that the group will take out retribution on the collaborating countries, following the East African experience where Al-Shabaab in Somalia mounted transnational attacks. As a result, anoriginally localised, home-grown insurgency would become highly internationalised with serious repercussions for regional peace, stability and develop-ment. On the other hand, if the group is allowed to continue to grow in strength, sophistication and reach to the point of overwhelming the Nigerian state, the risk of Nigeria's implosion would increase as a result of growing ethno-religious and political animosities in the country. The political, economic and security repercussions for the region would be disastrous.

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13. The Soufan Group (2014), "Niger's Security Strategy in Boko Haram's Badlands", IntelBrief, 12 February 2014,http://soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-nigers-security-strategy-in-boko-harams-badlands/
14. B. Akinloye (2014), "Chadian soldiers free Boko Haram captives", The Punch, 17 August 2014, http://www.punchng.com/news/soldiers-free-boko-haram-captives/.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Boko Haram's insurgency has become a dangerous, multifaceted problem. Although it initially emerged as a localised Nigerian problem, it has overtime transformed into a regional threat. The situation therefore demands the political will and the articulation of a comprehensive strategy to address its root causes and dangerous dynamics, focusing on a soft approach that could erode the appeal of Boko Haram's insidious ideology, inhibit opportunities for recruitment and radicalisation, and choke its financial windpipe. To this end, the following actionable recommendations will be critical to defusing the threat:

Create job opportunities for young people: Whether in Nigeria where the Boko Haram group originated or in neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger where it has found a recruitment pool, limited opportunities for legitimate livelihood have made young people more vulnerable and hence more intrigued in joining insurgent groups. Thus, robust and targeted interventions to create jobs in Nigeria, particularly in the North, and amongst the border communities of neighbouring countries at large, should form a key priority of the states. This will put more youths in employment and help dry up Boko Haram's recruiting base. Achieving this will require clamping down on corruption to free up enough resources for the interventions that are desperately needed in this area.´

Protecting and strengthening human security: The Nigerian military has too often taken civilian casualties too easy into account. By killing citizens in the North, the population's frustration against the military increases, thereby increasing Boko Haram's appeal as an alternative. The government should rather put its focus on the protection of civilians, witnesses and key peacemakers such as moderate Imams who preach against the insurgency. Therefore, the Nigerian military and militaries of neighbouring countries should shift their focus from retaliation attacks to improved defensive and intelligence measures. In addition, Nigeria needs to step up its governance capacity by improving traditional state services such as health, transport and social protection for its citizens. By increasing the legitimacy of the government, Boko Haram will lose their constituency in the long run.

Rollout counter-violent extremism programmes: Nigeria, in partnership with her neighbours and the international community should evolve and support a region-wide counter-violent extremism advocacy. Such ideological operation should be robustly framed in Arabic, Hausa, and Kanuri languages, and in the respect of cultures and traditions, to debunk Boko Haram ideology, narratives and messages, thereby making it difficult for the group to recruit from citizens in the region.

Improving human rights record of the security forces: There is urgent need for robust, targeted training as well as capacity building for military and security forces so as to improve their human rights record in counter-insurgency operations. It is crucial for the military to understand that human rights violations hamper the success of its efforts and increase the appeal of the Boko Haram insurgency. This recognition and improved training could boost public confidence in the Nigerian security forces, thus encouraging citizens to share information on the insurgents and their collaborators.

Drying up terrorist funding stream: Kidnapping for ransom (K4R) is a significant source of revenue for terrorist and criminal groups such as Boko Haram which are operating in the Sahara-Sahel region. These groups bolster the operational capabilities of other ones by assisting with funds generated from K4R. K4R has proven to be a lucrative source for the Boko Haram as well as for other terror networks in the Sahara-Sahel region and this stream needs to be dried off. This will require a stringent policy that de-emphasises the payment of ransom to free hostages or 'protection fees' by wealthy Nigerians.

Regional threat reporting platform: The affected countries need to partner with the international community to develop a regional threat-reporting platform via which citizens can provide vital tip-off or information, without necessarily revealing their identity.

Given the growing penetration of ICT tools such as internet and mobile phones in these countries, there is huge potential in using such platforms at both the national and regional levels to combat terrorism and organised crime. This will enable local communities or residents to support the security agencies in the practical efforts by gathering useful information and intelligence.

Operationalisation of the counter-terrorism strategy: ECOWAS needs to urgently continue the operationalisation of its new Counter-Terrorism Strategy, paying particular attention to the containment of trans-border illicit flow of arms, weapons, fighters and contrabands. This will also require the creation of a regional intelligence fusion centre (RIFC) at regional level and neighbourhood watch at national border communities level to assist in curtailing and combating transnational activities of Boko Haram and other organized criminal networks. Further, the ECOWAS strategy should include a soft approach of improving state services, strengthening of governance and humanitarian aid for those affected by terrorism.

Sustenance of regional collaboration: There is the need to deepen regional cooperation on security with neighbouring countries, leveraging on the MJTF and the EIRU as platforms for greater intelligence sharing, exchange of best practices and confidence building. Such platforms would also aid the pooling of resources – such as surveillance, airlift capability and patrol, and equipment – which would enhance the effectiveness of counter terrorism operations.

Emphasizing the humanitarian dimension of international aid: The international community currently focuses on collaborating with Nigeria's security establishment with regard to the provision of equipment, training and exchange of intelligence. In some cases, such as with the USA and France, technical advisors are on the ground to support the Nigerian and neighbouring militaries. In the long-term, this will only increase the appeal of Boko Haram as an anti-Western organisation which currently poses as an alternative to the internationally supported Nigerian government. International efforts should focus on humanitarian aid for those affected by terrorism, on facilitating intra-regional initiatives, on making sure that government aid reaches the population, and on supporting negotiations with those members of the insurgency who are not committed to the cause but are there due to lack of alternatives.

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About this study

This publication seeks to shed light on the transnational reach of Boko Haram and regional responses to the security threats emanating from this group. Attempts by the Nigerian security services have led to the escalation of attacks and an expansion of Boko Haram's activities from its stronghold in Nigeria's Northeast region even beyond its borders. The recruitment of fighters from neighbouring countries, the acquisition of military equipment of foreign origin, access to global communication networks, and the cross-border nature of their operations illustrate the necessity of an international and regional approach to contain Boko Haram. At the same time, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seems affected by its biggest and most influential member state, Nigeria, being oriented first and foremost towards resolving internal security challenges.

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