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BOKO HARAM: A NEW ISLAMIC STATE IN NIGERIA

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Executive Summary¹

Currently the Nigerian state is undergoing a civil war, with the protagonist being the Salafi-jihadi group popularly called Boko Haram. During the years since 2011, Boko Haram has morphed from being a local Salafi-jihadi group into a major player in West African radicalism. Its tactics have ranged from standard guerilla pin-prick attacks against governmental, military, and Christian targets, to sophisticated suicide attacks and mass slayings of target populations. During the period since July 2014, Boko Haram has clearly set the establishment of a physical Islamic state in Nigeria as its goal and has fought the Nigerian military to a draw. While there is some support among the US foreign policy community for proactively combatting Boko Haram, the Nigerian civil war is not one that commands much interest among Americans as a whole. Nor is it clear the manner in which aid for fighting Boko Haram could be rendered or what exactly would be the acceptable scope of such a conflict for the United States. I argue that there are only extreme circumstances under which the United States should involve itself in the Nigerian civil war and that thus far this conflict does not coincide with those circumstances. No US interests are touched by this war, vicious and horrifying though it is. However, it is possible that with Boko Haram set upon the establishment of an Islamic state there could come a set of circumstances under which this reality could change. While as yet Boko Haram cannot approximate the technical and propagandistic capabilities of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), one should note that such is its goal and not underestimate the dangerous nature of this group.

Development of Boko Haram

Since its violent inception in 2009, the group known as Boko Haram, which originated in northeastern Nigeria (Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states), has changed from using low-level guerilla tactics to outright warfare. It is no longer correct to speak of the Boko Haram violence as being merely “an insurgency”; since the beginning of 2014 it has become—albeit unacknowledged by the Nigerian authorities—Nigeria’s second civil war.² Although outside

¹ The author would like to express his gratitude to Abdulbasit Kassim, who assisted in the review of this paper.

² The first civil war, the establishment of Biafra (southeastern Nigeria), lasted from 1967–70.

observers have started to take Boko Haram seriously, it is clear that the Nigerian government and military have yet to do so. Therefore, this new Baker Institute report on the growth of Boko Haram since 2011³ makes for grim reading, and it is difficult to say that there are positive notes to be found in the study of the group and its activities.

Boko Haram's origins are in a quietist Salafi movement led by the charismatic Muhammad Yusuf (d. 2009). The group took its name (or was accorded it) as a result of its strong opposition to any forms of secular education⁴ and through the early 2000s was characterized by withdrawal from society. In spite of a brief flare-up of violence in 2004, until the Nigerian police attacked Boko Haram on July 26, 2009, the worst one could say was that it was one of dozens of Salafi and other radical Muslim groups in northern Nigeria. With the well-publicized murder of Yusuf at the hands of the police, Boko Haram went underground, resurfacing about a year later under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, with the aid of Mamman Nur and Khalid al-Barnawi.⁵ Through 2010 and 2011 its activities were consistently violent, characterized by targeted assassinations of prominent politicians and clerics who opposed it, attacks on educational and medical institutions, and confrontations with the police. Starting in late 2010 Boko Haram began a grander scale of activity—focusing on the Christian minority of northern Nigeria (often ethnically Ibos from southeastern Nigeria)—with numerous attacks on churches and religious figures, having the stated goal of driving Christians out of the north entirely. The attacks of 2010–12 utilized suicide attackers, for a total of 11 operations.

At this point in its history, Boko Haram began to attract outside attention, especially with a series of suicide attacks against targets in the capital, Abuja (notably the August 26, 2011, bombing at the UN compound).⁶ During the period since 2011 a number of different theories have been

³ See David Cook, "Boko Haram: A Prognosis" (research paper, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, December 2011), <http://bakerinstitute.org/research/boko-haram-a-prognosis/>.

⁴ Its true name is: Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad, the Group of the People of the Sunna [the way of the Prophet Muhammad] for Missionization and Fighting.

⁵ Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram and the Kidnapping of the Chibok Schoolgirls," Combating Terrorism Center, May 29, 2014, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-haram-and-the-kidnapping-of-the-chibok-schoolgirls>. Zenn has made the claim that there are several Shekaus (or that BH's videos featuring Shekau are stage-managed with a figure who claims to be Shekau).

⁶ "Abuja attack: Car bomb hits Nigeria UN building," *BBC News*, August 26, 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14677957>.

advanced as to why Boko Haram appeared and to what factors one can attribute its success. These can be grouped into five major categories, which will be summarized here:

1. Poverty and underdevelopment of the Muslim north
2. Islamic radicalism
3. Kanuri tribal particularism
4. As a standard African guerilla movement
5. As a result of climate change or the desiccation of the Sahel

Far and away the most popular explanation for the rise of Boko Haram is the issue of poverty and underdevelopment.⁷ Both of these are certainly characteristic of northern and especially northeastern Nigeria. These regions of Nigeria at independence (1960) had been only loosely administered by the British colonial authorities and had not approximated the southern economic and educational development. Although subsequent Nigerian governments have frequently been dominated by northerners, usually in the form of military rule (ending in 1998), the north still lags considerably behind the south in development.⁸

Thus, while poverty has dropped somewhat in the south during the past years,⁹ it has remained frustratingly high in the north. Most probably, this fact, in addition to the south's educational advantage, is due to the location of Nigeria's natural resources, which are mostly in the southeast (Delta region). Within the north, the northeast, home of Boko Haram, is particularly laggard and traditionally has been ignored by the Nigerian political elite. The "poverty created Boko Haram" argument at its core states that in order to defeat the insurgency, one must develop the region and create economic opportunities.¹⁰ While this is a laudable goal, as an interpretative framework for the appearance of Boko Haram it suffers from some deficiencies. More specifically, it does not

⁷ See William Wallis, "Blighted economy in Nigeria's north fuels brutal insurgency," *Financial Times*, May 13, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/1fc5b242-daa7-11e3-a448-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3KUa3rTA7>.

⁸ See Martins Hile, "The Great North-South Divide in Nigeria," *Nigeria Development and Finance Forum*, November 2013, <http://www.nigeriadevelopmentandfinanceforum.org/PolicyDialogue/Dialogue.aspx?Edition=166>; and Okechukwu Effoduh, "The Economic Development of Nigeria from 1914 to 2014," http://www.academia.edu/4036100/The_Economic_Development_of_Nigeria_from_1914_to_2014.

⁹ "Nigeria's Poverty Level Drops By 2.1 Per Cent In Two Years – World Bank," *Leadership*, July 22, 2014, <http://leadership.ng/business/378645/nigerias-poverty-level-drops-2-1-per-cent-two-years-world-bank>.

¹⁰ See Daniel Agbiboa, "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 3 (2013): 144–57.

answer the question of why exactly Boko Haram in its numerous videos and statements does not stress economic issues (or even mention them at all), nor does it explain why given similar impoverished circumstances throughout Nigeria such a violent group would appear only in the northeast and not any other place. Broadly, many West African societies are impoverished and yet do not produce violent groups in order to channel their desperation. Why here specifically?

In order to understand the appearance of Boko Haram, the second interpretive framework of Islamic radicalism is sometimes adduced. Again, as with the poverty and underdevelopment interpretation, Islamic radicalism does fit some of the narrative. Northern Nigeria is largely the creation of the jihad of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (d. 1817), whose Fulani followers still dominate the religious and political aristocracy of the region 200 years after his death. Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, does adduce the example of Dan Fodio's purification jihad, which targeted syncretistic Muslims almost exclusively. Some of Boko Haram's fixations, such as the attacks on non-Muslim educational systems and medical practices or the periodic attacks on those selling bushmeat,¹¹ do conform to the norms established by Dan Fodio. And Boko Haram's many attacks on Christians and Christian establishments can be easily justified by Dan Fodio's writings, although during his time there were few non-Muslims who could be attacked in northern Nigeria.

Nigeria as a whole is riven by the Christian-Muslim divide, which although it exists in terms of the population, is by no means clear-cut on the map.¹² There are large Muslim communities in the south, especially among the Yoruba, who are not very sympathetic to their northern co-religionists, while there are equally large numbers of Christians in the north, especially in the cities. It is very possible in Nigerian families to find both Christians and Muslims represented, and intermarriage is not uncommon. While there is no doubt that Boko Haram seeks to establish *shari`a* as a normative law throughout Nigeria—a goal shared broadly by most Muslims, especially in the north—it is significant that the group has not attracted any serious Muslim scholars into its ranks. A striking number of its initial assassinations (targeted assassinations)

¹¹ Meat from wild animals, which by definition is non-*halal*, but frequently consumed by Africans on a popular level in order to supplement constricted diets and high *halal* meat prices.

¹² See Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), chapter 1.

were of Muslim scholars who opposed Yusuf's teachings, and even some of those killed were Salafis themselves. More than this, Boko Haram in its comparative lack of religious scholarly support stands out among Salafi-jihadi groups throughout the Muslim world. For example, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) both have major scholars who are known to support their activities and lend them Islamic legitimacy. Boko Haram has none of this scholarly support, nor has the worldwide Salafi-jihadi movement ever supported it with *fatwas* (legal opinions) justifying its tactics, despite its roots being in the Salafi community.¹³

In assessing the validity of the Islamic radical interpretation for Boko Haram, it is possible to state that the entirety of the Fulani-Hausa-dominated northern Muslim leadership has either rejected Boko Haram or at least has never stated any form of support for the group. This fact, however, could lead us to a third interpretation, which is that Boko Haram channels the frustrations of a particular people-group, the Kanuri people (dominant in Borno and northern Cameroon), and is in effect a revolt against the Fulani-Hausa domination of northern Islam. If this were to be accepted, then the appearance of Boko Haram in Borno and Yobe would be explained, because here resentment against traditional elites would be the deepest (the region successfully fought off Dan Fodio's fighters 200 years ago). This would also explain why the appeal of Boko Haram has not spread much beyond the borders of northeastern Nigeria. If we wanted to see Boko Haram as an expression of Kanuri localism, then that would explain the appeal the group has in Cameroon, where the Muslim population is also Kanuri.

However, against this interpretation, there is no evidence from traditional Kanuri practice or from the varieties of Islam known from the region that would explain the extreme violence associated with Boko Haram. Only the paradigm of Salafi-jihadism, with its use of *takfir*¹⁴ and mass casualty attacks against non-combatants, gives us a possible explanation for the level of violence now present. Turning our attention to other radical and revolutionary groups in Africa, however, gives us some parallels as a fourth possible interpretive framework. Such an interpretation would present Boko Haram as an originally religious group analogous to the

¹³ Note the absence of any such material on Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Tawhed website, a standard clearinghouse for such *fatwas*.

¹⁴ *Takfir* is the methodology of defining an apparent Muslim as a non-Muslim. It is characteristic of Salafism and enables Salafi-jihadis to indiscriminately target even Muslim populations under the belief that they are apostate and deserve death.

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, which having moved away from that original religious basis now simply seeks to do whatever it takes in order to survive. Tactics such as the recent mass kidnappings of women, young girls, and children for the purposes of fighting very strongly parallel the experiences of the LRA and the Seleka and its counterpart, the anti-balaka movement, in the Central African Republic (CAR) as well as other anti-governmental groups from the 1990s and early 2000s in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Although the statements of Shekau always emphasize the Islamic legitimacy of his tactics, one cannot help but notice that the trajectory followed by BH's recent operations is that of an African guerilla group.

Finally, we must note a fifth interpretation that does not receive much notice, which is the role of climate change. For the past two decades researchers have noted the virtual disappearance of Lake Chad, now only 5.4 percent of its size in 1963,¹⁵ which was the center of the Kanuri people traditionally. The region of the Sahel (effectively northern Nigeria), always marginal, has become much closer to desertification as a result of water diversion on the part of all of the neighboring countries.¹⁶ There is virtually no evidence that Shekau or other members of Boko Haram have noticed the drying of Lake Chad. As most of the drying-up occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, it is possible that they do not know or remember what the Lake Chad region was like 50 years ago. However, climate change, while perhaps not noticed in and of itself, could be a factor in the increase of desperation which has fueled the rise of Boko Haram.

Of course, these interpretive frameworks are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to explain the rise of Boko Haram using a number of them in tandem, or even all of them. For example, if one believes that poverty and underdevelopment is a primary driving force behind Boko Haram, then its utilization of the *takfiri* Salafi-jihadi ideology in order to drive out numbers of Christians and moderate Muslims still is valuable. Or if one sees the climate change in Borno leading to

¹⁵ "Disappearing Lake Chad," Institute Water for Africa, <http://www.water-for-africa.org/en/lake-chad/articles/disappearing-lake-chad.html>.

¹⁶ "Lake Chad: almost gone," *Vital Water Graphics*, <http://www.unep.org/dewa/vitalwater/article116.html>; Ahmad Salkida, "Africa's vanishing Lake Chad," *Africa Renewal Online*, April 2012, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2012/africa%E2%80%99s-vanishing-lake-chad>.

economic desperation, again it is possible that local politicians utilizing Boko Haram could have been manipulating its violence (at least in its initial stages) for their own benefit.

Tactics and Targets of Boko Haram

Boko Haram, like other successful Salafi-jihadi groups, has demonstrated the ability to master a wide range of tactics. Essentially, the group has two basic tactical methods: one is individual or small group and focuses on individualized terror (assassinations, drive-by shootings, local terror and suicide attacks), and the other is massive concerted attacks, usually highly mobile, utilizing motorcycles or trucks to attack a given smaller or comparatively less-defended target, and then massacring the target population (or in some recent cases taking them captive). During the period between 2010 and 2011, Boko Haram favored the first tactical method and even today still utilizes it. But especially since the beginning of 2014, Boko Haram has favored the massive attack method.

In 2011 Boko Haram began to use suicide attacks, especially against targets that were not located in its home-established territory (the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa). It is clear in retrospect that this development, which was accompanied by the appearance of a suicide attacker video in September 2011, was one that paralleled the trajectory of the Islamic State in Iraq (precursor of ISIS). It would be useful to understand that there appears to be a lag-time between when ISIS introduces a tactic or concept and the period when Boko Haram picks it up. This is apparent with the establishment of the caliphate by ISIS on June 29, 2014, and the concurrent establishment of a caliphate by Boko Haram on August 24, 2014.¹⁷ Other parallel developments will be noted below.

Although the targets focused upon by Boko Haram have shifted considerably during the last five years, it is possible to make some generalizations. During the first two years (2010–11), Boko Haram favored local targets that were closely associated with its doctrinal positions. These included attacks on educational and medical facilities; attacks on public-order offenses (from a

¹⁷ Jessica Chasmar, "Boko Haram leader declares Islamic caliphate in Nigeria," *The Washington Times*, August 24, 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/aug/24/boko-haram-leader-declares-caliphate-nigeria/>.

Muslim point of view), which included bars, gambling establishments, and marketplaces where non-*halal* meat was sold; and above all, the targeted assassinations of Muslim religious figures who had opposed the group. A second broad group of targets could be characterized as “vengeance for Muhammad Yusuf” targets and included security forces or military targets. During this period Boko Haram usually emphasized that it demanded justice for the murder of Yusuf, among other demands.

During the period 2011–13 Boko Haram shifted its targets considerably. While local terrorism of the type described above continued, the group projected its power into two areas: the Fulani-Hausa heartland around Kano and Zaria (northwest Nigeria) and the Middle Belt, most especially the flash-point city of Jos, where there are frequent clashes between Christians and Muslims; Kaduna, capital of the major Middle Belt state; and the federal capital of Abuja. These attacks were mostly spectacular in nature, and many of them were suicide attacks on very distinctive locations (churches, government buildings, army bases), obviously chosen for their symbolic value. Churches and Christian locations were often attacked on Sundays or at other key Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, again in order to maximize the casualties and symbolism. According to Jacob Zenn’s analysis, these attacks were directed by Mamman Nur and Khalid al-Barnawi, who were originally Muhammad Yusuf’s disciples¹⁸ and who both resented the Kanuri particularism of Shekau. It is quite remarkable that such high-profile attacks did not generate a civil war at that time.

Throughout 2011–12 a number of the Boko Haram bomb factories were found¹⁹ or blew up,²⁰ and it is striking how apparently these discoveries contributed to the temporary disappearance of suicide attacks from the group’s repertoire. With the exception of the Maiduguri bomb factory that blew up, all of the bomb factories were found outside of its core area of northeastern

¹⁸ Jacob Zenn, “Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, February 24, 2014, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/leadership-analysis-of-boko-haram-and-ansaru-in-nigeria>.

¹⁹ On September 7, 2011 (“Boko Haram bomb factory discovered in Nigeria,” *The Independent*, September 7, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/boko-haram-bomb-factory-discovered-in-nigeria-2350261.html>), April 1, 2012 (“Raid hits Nigeria Islamist sect Boko Haram ‘bomb factory’,” *BBC News*, April 1, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17580795>), and April 24, 2012 (Ibrahim Garba, “Nigerian forces raid suspected Boko Haram bomb factory,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 24, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2012/0424/Nigerian-forces-raid-suspected-Boko-Haram-bomb-factory>).

²⁰ On December 17, 2011 (“Three Die as Explosion Rocks Bomb Factory In Borno,” *Nairaland.com*, December 17, 2011, <http://www.nairaland.com/827452/three-die-explosion-rocks-bomb>).

Nigeria, indicating that Boko Haram sought to construct bombs as close as possible to targets.²¹ For whatever reason, the Nigerian military enjoyed a period of some success against Boko Haram during late 2012 until summer 2013. Boko Haram continued to carry out operations in northeastern Nigeria but was unable (or unwilling) to carry out operations elsewhere in Nigeria. This period of comparative containment ended on May 14, 2013, when President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the three northeastern states dominated by Boko Haram.

Operations conducted by Boko Haram during 2012–13 tended to revert back to low-technological means. There were a number of the mass attacks that would become so characteristic of the group in 2014, but during this period they tended to be carried out by small weapons—knives, machetes, and small guns—rather than the automatic weaponry currently favored. It is clear, once again, that the change occurred with the glut of weaponry that flooded West Africa in the wake of the fall of Mu`ammar Gaddafi at the end of 2011 and the appearance of large numbers of dislocated fighters in the region. At first these fighters and their weapons aided the rise of al-Qaeda in the Maghrib (AQIM),²² but with its defeat at the hands of the French in January 2013, a large number of fighters and weapons became available in both Nigeria, to Boko Haram, and in the CAR, aiding in the rise of Seleka in March 2013. Again, it is striking how there is a wave effect on radical organizations throughout the region—when one is defeated, those fleeing the defeat can cause a great deal of destruction to weaker states.

By the end of 2013 one can see a new phase in Boko Haram's tactics. The first manifestation of this change is the rise in large-scale massive attacks, usually on villages, with a heavy loss of life. At least 2,053 people were killed during the first half of 2014 by these mass attacks.²³ Starting in spring 2014 Boko Haram began a campaign of kidnappings, most famously the some 219 schoolgirls kidnapped on the night of April 14–15, 2014, from a boarding school at Chibok. Although some of the girls managed to escape, it is clear from video taken of them (May 12,

²¹ Of course it is possible that other bomb factories in Maiduguri were simply not located.

²² With a range of affiliates.

²³ "Nigeria: Boko Haram Kills 2,053 Civilians in 6 Months," Human Rights Watch, July 15, 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/15/nigeria-boko-haram-kills-2053-civilians-6-months>.

2014)²⁴ and from the statement of Shekau below that the vast majority of them are still under the control of Boko Haram and most probably, as Shekau stated, have either been married to the fighters or sold into slavery. Nor is this the only kidnapping of women and girls carried out by Boko Haram; a number of other raids were focused on this end through the summer of 2014. At the end of 2014, Boko Haram probably has around 10,000–15,000 soldiers, and perhaps as many as 50,000, so it is not surprising that women would be considered a spoil of war.

Another concurrent manifestation of the caliphate phase of Boko Haram has been the reintroduction of suicide attacks, which are reflected in the most recent mass-casualty attacks. One such paradigmatic mass-casualty attack was that on November 10, 2014, when a suicide attacker disguised as a student exploded himself at a male-boarding school in Potiskum (a major city in Yobe), killing some 50 students.²⁵ This attack followed in the wake of another major suicide attack on a school nearby, killing some 42 students, on July 6, 2014.²⁶ From these attacks and some 10–12 others since the beginning of 2014, it is clear that Boko Haram continues to view secular education and its institutions as a primary target. What is most interesting for the outside observer is that there does not appear to have been any serious security measures in place in any of these locations. For Boko Haram's attacks to be defeated, there needs to be a system of guarding and alarm for isolated schools. It is unclear, when Boko Haram has set educational facilities as a target, why the Nigerian government and military have not responded with setting up the appropriate security measures.

Female suicide-attackers have become more common since June 2014, with a string of at least six through June and July. While suicide attacks by Boko Haram went through a hiatus starting at the end of 2012, one of the defining characteristics of the recent attacks has been their reappearance. Although there is little information, it seems clear that Boko Haram has a

²⁴ “Missing Chibok Girls: Boko Haram Posts Purported Video Of Missing Girls,” YouTube video, 1:11, posted by “Channels Television,” May 12, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKDO3I5_wvM.

²⁵ Adam Nossiter, “Bomb at School in Nigeria Kills Nearly 50 Boys,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/world/africa/nigeria-suicide-bomber-boko-haram.html?_r=0; Matt Schiavenza, “Boko Haram's War on Nigeria's Students,” *The Atlantic*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/Suspected-Boko-Haram-Suicide-Bomber-Kills-50-Students-at-Government-Science-Technical-College-Potiskum/382595/>.

²⁶ John Hall, “Nigeria massacre: Boko Haram Islamists kill 42 at boarding school in Yobe state,” *The Independent*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/nigeria-massacre-boko-haram-islamists-kill-42-at-boarding-school-in-yobe-state-8695355.html>.

women's wing, which is apparently headed by Hafsat Bako,²⁷ who was arrested in July 2014.²⁸ Female suicide-attackers have the advantage, inside Nigeria's conservative Muslim environment, of being able to conceal explosives under their garments without attracting undue attention. I cannot agree with the analysis that the use of female suicide-attackers demonstrates some type of desperation on the part of Boko Haram (as stated by Martin Ewi of South Africa's Institute for Security Studies).²⁹ On the contrary, their use demonstrates that Boko Haram is adept at changing its tactics in order to keep the Nigerian military and intelligence services off-balance. The fact that there have been some 10 female-led suicide attacks since June 2014 demonstrates that this strategy is effective.

Boko Haram's tactics demonstrate some lessons learned from Iraq, as was evident in the attack of November 25, 2014, in the Maiduguri marketplace, where some 30 people were killed in a double suicide attack. One girl exploded herself in the midst of the shoppers and while onlookers rushed to help those injured another exploded herself. This type of a tactic, playing on the basic instincts of people to aid those in need, is one that derives from Iraq. It is clear from the accounts and bewilderment of the Nigerian military that it has no effective means by which to counter the threat of female suicide-attackers. What should be happening is some move toward security inside key locations and checks on people. From personal experience, one can note that women often are not checked thoroughly. This vulnerability is one that Boko Haram will continue to exploit until the Nigerian authorities learn to take precautions.

The most deadly attack during the recent past has been the suicide bombing of the Great Mosque of Kano on November 29, 2014. The backdrop to this attack appears to have been the activist attitude of the new emir of Kano, Lamido Sanusi, who has publicly called for Nigerians to fight back against Boko Haram. Although he was outside of Nigeria when the attack happened, it appears to have been Boko Haram's answer to his call. The methodology of the attack again

²⁷ See Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5 (2014), <http://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/jtr/article/view/828/707>.

²⁸ Sophie Jane Evans, "Nigerian authorities arrest three women accused of secretly working as recruitment agents for female wing of Islamist terror group Boko Haram," *Daily Mail*, July 5, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2681431/Nigerian-authorities-arrest-three-women-accused-secretly-working-recruitment-agents-female-wing-Islamist-terror-group-Boko-Haram.html>.

²⁹ Farouk Chothia, "Boko Haram crisis: Nigeria's female bombers strike," *BBC News*, August 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28657085>.

demonstrates an ISIS-like sophistication. After an initial suicide bomber drove a car right into the mosque in the midst of Friday prayers, gunmen outside attacked the worshippers, again exploiting the panic created by the initial bombing. The crowds beat all of these gunmen to death. What was unnoticed is the fact that there were a series of follow-up attacks, which were foiled, that included an audacious female suicide-attacker's attempt to explode herself inside the Murtala Muhammad Hospital among the victims of the initial attack.³⁰ Although the total number of dead is still being tallied, it appears to have reached 120, making it one of Boko Haram's most deadly attacks.

The track record of the Nigerian military in countering Boko Haram has been a miserable one. Remarkably, the state of emergency proclamation of May 2013 has coincided with a series of defeats for the Nigerian military and its inability to take proactive measures against Boko Haram. It is clear that elements of the military suffer from a siege mentality and are unwilling to carry out the type of anti-guerilla warfare measures perfected by a number of militaries during the 1960s and 1970s. These include proactively seeking out the guerilla bases, usually on foot; developing local intelligence sources; making certain that the villagers whose lives are threatened and destabilized by Boko Haram see the military as an ally rather than as an enemy; and, above all, denying the guerillas the mobility they need in order to survive.

There is little evidence that any of these measures have been taken. Since the announcement of the state of emergency, a program of paramilitary groups (vigilantes) called the Civilian Joint Task Force has been developed to fight Boko Haram. Although this program could be a positive sign, the reports concerning it are mixed: all too often the vigilantes are more interested in settling local scores rather than combatting the enemy and are too willing to apply violence rather than differentiate between friend and foe. But even so, the paramilitary organizations are probably the wave of the future, since several times during 2014 the Nigerian military has seemed to be near collapse. On May 14, 2014, there was a mutiny in Maiduguri, and although

³⁰ Kola Oyelere, Biola Azeez, and Seyi Sokoya, "Kano mosque bombing: Attack planned for 2 months —Sanusi," *Nigerian Tribune*, November 30, 2014, <http://www.tribune.com.ng/news/top-stories/item/22915-kano-mosque-bombing-attack-planned-for-2-months-sanusi>.

discipline has been applied³¹ to the troops, there are persistent reports of the army refusing to fight or fleeing upon the appearance of Boko Haram and deserting villagers to their fates. This type of behavior needs to be combatted in the strongest possible manner, because if the locals are not able to rely upon the army for protection, ultimately they will be compelled to either create local paramilitary organizations with unforeseen consequences or make some sort of an arrangement with Boko Haram. It is fortunate that thus far Boko Haram has lacked the political sense to be able to exploit the distrust between the Nigerian military and the local population. Were Boko Haram to be intent upon developing a state, rather than merely massacring large numbers of people, it could have easily intimidated village after village to submit to its rule because the Nigerian army has abdicated its responsibilities.

Tactics of Boko Haram as a Result of Its Ideology

It is worth asking whether one should see Boko Haram as essentially an ideological organization or an opportunistic one. The answer to this question has bearing upon how outside actors should react to Boko Haram and seek to counter it. If the organization is essentially a Salafi-jihadi one, then negotiations with it would be futile, and the only method by which it should be engaged is combat. If, however, the organization merely is using Salafi-jihadism as a screen for other purposes, then those other purposes could be interacted with and manipulated.

From its quietist Salafi beginnings, Shekau's public statements have emphasized a Salafi-jihadi doctrinal position, with the position of *takfir* being omnipresent. While many of these statements were of a threatening or a taunting nature, Shekau's proclamation of the caliphate (August 24, 2014) is worthy of close analysis:

We are grateful to Allah for the big victory he granted our members in Gwoza³² and made the town part of our Islamic Caliphate. Oh you people, here I am Abubakar Shekau, still standing on my feet. I am still the leader of Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lid Da'awati wal-

³¹ Including death sentences ("Nigerian soldiers charged with mutiny over Boko Haram," *BBC News*, October 16, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29651189>).

³² An August 20, 2014, attack on a police training college, which utilized five tanks: Clement Ejiofor, "Boko Haram Attack Gwoza Police Training College On Tanks," *Naij.com*, September 2014, <http://www.naij.com/279423-boko-haram-attack-mobile-police-training-college-in-gwoza.html>.

Jihad [Boko Haram] in that county called Nigeria; a name in which we do not believe, but are forced to address as such because it has no better name.

For us there is nothing like Nigeria, but the Islamic Caliphate; because God is the creator of the world and the earth on which we are all standing, He is the sole owner of the earth and no one else.³³ So we have no option but obey the owner of the sky above us, even as He is the owner of the earth. We Muslims obey our Creator.³⁴

Oh people of the world, Allah has granted us victory in the town of Gwoza, not because of our might but because we are committed to do His work. Oh people, I chose to deliver this message in order to refute the lies being spread by the government about the operations we carried out in recent times.

We warn the vigilantes, called Civilian JTF,³⁵ that they should back out; if not, there will be no place for them to hide. We have evidence of how you killed some of our brethren about whom you would ask if they are Boko Haram before you killed them; we know how you humiliated them by asking them if they had ever carried guns or killed someone... we know everything about the evil you committed against our brethren.

We still have the magnanimity of asking you to repent, because you will never succeed in this way by the grace of Allah; and I swear by Allah that we will never stop killing you, because Allah commanded us to kill people like you. If we pity you and spare you, one day you will become infidels; so, to us, having pity on you is an act of disbelief. You can continue to run or hide your identities in women's attire, but we will find you and remove the women's clothing off of you—then while you are shouting for mercy we will strike, smash your heads and kill you all.

Even if you don't do anything to us, we will kill you... We would do it even to avenge our brethren. You killed our brethren in large numbers. We do not joke with religion.

³³ See Qur'an 21:105.

³⁴ See Qur'an 51:56.

³⁵ Civilian Joint Task Force.

There is no hypocrisy in this religion. It is only the truth. Therefore, woe unto you, vigilantes! Woe unto you! It is Allah who torments you, and even tomorrow Allah will torment you. By Allah you will never achieve your aim. I swear by Allah.

To the Americans...What is America in the sight of Allah? What is America in the sight of Allah? What is "Israel" in the sight of Allah? What is France in the sight of Allah? It is only when we don't have firm belief. We don't fear you at all. We were the ones who carried out all these attacks. Not just Gwoza, all the attacks you see in Borno or any region of the country, we are the ones carrying them out. This is the life for us; it is our world and we are living it out. How can one fear these American people? If one is indeed a believer, he needs not to. How can one fear these people if one is indeed a believer? This is the speech I have to make, which is a warning for worse things to come. Better submit to Allah before it becomes too late.³⁶

One should note that this speech demonstrates the de-territorial emphasis of Salafi-jihadism, as Shekau refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of Nigeria as a country. One should look for some day in the near future when Boko Haram gives the territory a new name, and it will be interesting to see what name they will pick. Although Shekau's references to the rule of God are quite copious and he alludes several times to the Qur'an in this statement, it is striking that unlike mainstream Salafi-jihadis from ISIS, al-Shabab, or others, there are comparatively few direct citations. A standard ISIS statement will, for example, contain a Qur'anic citation almost in every paragraph, and at the very least every other paragraph. Shekau does not demonstrate that level of command of the Muslim sources.

While Shekau shows contempt for the government, it is clear from this statement that he is more apprehensive of the vigilante Civilian Joint Task Force. Most probably this is due to its comparative effectiveness and the fact that it is drawn from the local population and is known personally (in some cases) to the members of Boko Haram. The image that Shekau presents here is a heroic one: he is capable of facing down any and all opponents, he apparently does not

³⁶ "Text of the statement of Abubakar Shekau, Emir of Boko Haram," *KavkazCenter.com*, August 26, 2014, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2014/08/26/19490.shtml>; translation modified by author.

answer to anyone but God. When he emphasizes the number of his enemies, it is most probably to increase his own stature by virtue of the fact that he is able to stand up to these apparent powers. Concurrent with this theme is that of humiliation and cowardice on the part of Boko Haram's enemies—the vigilantes are described as “women,” whose female clothing must be ripped from them prior to their deaths.

There is no question after reading his statements that Shekau believes truly in the *takfiri* ideology—he speaks of the need for the vigilantes “to repent,” even though they are almost all Muslims. This idea is most apparent in his statement from November 10, 2014, in which he answers the idea that there would be a ceasefire and a return of the Chibok schoolgirls:

I am using this opportunity to send this message to the infidels in Nigeria and the rest of the infidels in the world in the Hausa vernacular, the tongue that many understand, and if the need should arise, I will explain in Fulani and Kanuri, but let us explain to you briefly. People should know that it is Allah that we are serving, the Prophet of Allah [Muhammad] SWT. This is what we put ahead of us; we are praying to die in this path [jihad] and see heaven, and begging Allah to grant us innermost part of heaven [sic], and may Allah shield us.

You followers of the constitution, have you forgotten what you said in your constitution when we were preaching in Maiduguri town? In your constitution, you cite section 8 verse 1, 2 to 3 in that your cursed document referred to as the constitution,³⁷ that it is a law and not reversible. You came out in your radio and newspapers and say we are fighting for Islamic Caliphate, it is that constitution which stops us from preaching in Maiduguri, so we moved out because of the exile Allah upon which tasked us to embark [sic].

³⁷ This reference is obscure and does not correspond to the Nigerian constitution: <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>.

Have you also forgotten? And you are now seating down [sic] and say you have reached ceasefire with us; with whom? That your infidel Danladi Ahmadu,³⁸ if he is [at] our hands today, he will not pass the day because we will slit his throat. When did we even know him? Who is Danladi in this world? Allah is the knower of everything.

Because of this, there is not any ceasefire or dialogue with anyone, instead it is a war with beating and killings, and guns for which we are hungry, like food with Maggi cubes.³⁹ We are on course; our focus and determination is to see that only the Qur'an is used in running the world, with Allah this is what we put ahead of us.

That President Idris Deby of Chad and the Ambassador of Nigeria, with [representatives of] Cameroon, who stated that we are willing to have a ceasefire, where did they see us? Your white man from Germany is with us presently⁴⁰; he is crying, and if we like, we will cut him into pieces or gun him down. We are not afraid of anyone except Allah; this is our job.

Who has freed girls from Chibok whom we abducted in their school? Those girls who Shekau abducted and took them to a place of his choice about six months ago today. Allah has surpassed infidels; Allah is ahead of America; Allah is ahead of a plane called a drone, nonsense; Allah is supreme ahead of everyone.

If the parents of the Chibok girls would know the condition of their children, they would not be worried; it is either their conversion to Islam or they will die with pains. You do not know that the over 200 Chibok girls have converted to Islam; they have memorized several sections of Qur'an; they have finished with [the Gospels of] John, Luke, and others; they have realized that Christians have filled the Old Testament with lies.

Small girls from Chibok are insisting that Islam is the true religion, [who are] just form [grade] six. We have married them off, and they are in the houses of their husbands. To

³⁸ The would-be go-between for the negotiations with the Nigerian government.

³⁹ A popular flavoring for rice and vegetable dishes.

⁴⁰ Unidentified.

hurt people is Shekau, they are saying Shekau is a throne (?); it is me, Shekau, whose father is Muhammadu; Shekau, the man that hurts infidels—staying in this world will be difficult for you, you are just misbehaving in the world.

Who created you? We have not made any ceasefire with anyone; we did not, we did not make a ceasefire with Chad, we did not do the same with Cameroon, and we did not do the same with Niger or Nigeria. We did not do the same with the Ambassador of Chad, and we did not do any dialogue with Africa. We did not do the same with Europe and Asia; we did not do this with America or the useless United Nations of nonsense.

We did not; what is dialogue? It is a lie; it is a lie, we will not do it, Allah said no to it. We are working with the Qur'an, and no infidel will threaten us. You lacked what to do; you want to please your leaders, and you are lying, the likes of Solomon Dalung, [Bawa] Abdullahi Wase, the likes of Senator [Ali] Ndume.⁴¹ The people are tired; whether you like it or not, we are working for others to convert Islam.

What is my business with you? Me, who left my parents in our house; I left my mother and father. I came out to team up with those who want to promote Islam; you are just deceiving people with the claims of a ceasefire.

It is with a single knife that I started, and today with me are more than 20 vehicles I seized from you, but they are saying Shekau is not a person, but a special name. I greet you who went to study in Israel, I greet you as a member of psychology [studies]; I greet you descendants of biology. I greet you fools who pledge to Nigeria.

You pledge to Nigeria, your country, while I, Shekau, pledge to Allah, my God. If you don't know, today you will know, I pledge to Allah to be faithful. This is my brief talk; this one is OK for you, and you should convert to Allah and follow the Qur'an. You will

⁴¹ Dalung is a politician from the Plateau; Wase is a security analyst and an associate at Nigeria for Justice; Senator Ali Ndume is a politician from Borno.

be unlucky to have missed out on the Qur'an or stopping those doing who are practicing it; it is a lie anyone who refuses will see. Thanks.⁴²

Although Shekau's style is tedious, it is valuable to listen to what he says. At every point in this video he emphasizes that there cannot be any dialogue or ceasefire with Nigerian or other African figures. Like all Salafis, he wants to contrast the universal and unchanging nature of the Qur'an with the changing and man-made nature of the constitution. His contempt for education is very evident, comparing those who are educated—specifically in psychology and biology—to being foreigners, even being associated with Israel. Shekau wants to present himself as a simple Muslim man of the people, who is not educated in the formal sense, but who started out with nothing and has achieved great things and is consistently practical rather than intellectual. The level of megalomania in these selections is extremely heavy; it is astonishing how many times Shekau refers to himself in the third person (Stalin had the same habit). There are no citations from the Qur'an in this selection, and while there are many references to fulfilling God's will, there is no evidence provided by Shekau to support his claims that he is fulfilling God's will.

Not surprisingly, the attitude of the Fulani-Hausa religious elite toward Boko Haram has been quite hostile, with a whole series of denunciations of the group's activities emanating from both Sokoto (seat of the caliphate) and Kano, and an assassination attempt on the late emir of Kano Ado Bayero on January 19, 2013. However, with the succession of Lamido Sanusi to the Emirate of Kano, there has been a considerable sharpening of the tone. On November 17, 2014, Sanusi actually called for Muslims to take up arms against Boko Haram, saying: "These terrorists slaughter our boys and abduct our girls to force them into slavery. ... People should not sit idle and say prayer is the only solution. People should be made aware of the importance of being in a state of preparedness and make sure they acquire what they need to protect themselves. We should be ready to give our lives."⁴³

⁴² "Full Video And Transcript Of Boko Haram Leader Shekau's Latest Video On Chibok Girls And Ceasefire Talks," *Sahara Reporters*, November 1, 2014, <http://saharareporters.com/2014/11/01/full-video-and-transcript-boko-haram-leader-shekaus-latest-video-chibok-girls-and>; translation modified by author.

⁴³ "Emir of Kano calls Nigerians to arms over Boko Haram," *BBC News*, November 17, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30080514>.

Although one cannot say that vigilantism of the type being described here is a laudable action, the inaction of the Nigerian military and police is extremely frustrating, and it may be that popular action will be necessary in order to goad them into action.

Boko Haram and Its African Neighbors

In 2011, I predicted that one of the signs that Boko Haram was going to be a globalist Salafi-jihadi group (as opposed to having local aspirations) would be that it would commence operations in countries neighboring Nigeria (Cameroon, Niger, Chad). For most of the period from 2011 to 2014 Boko Haram avoided major operations in Cameroon, while instead utilizing the country as a cash cow. When the group needed money, it used its organization in northern Cameroon to kidnap westerners, who would then be held for ransom. This was the pattern until July 27, 2014, when Boko Haram kidnapped the wife of the Cameroonian deputy prime minister, Amadou Ali.⁴⁴ One should note the timing, which was in the wake of the June 29, 2014, establishment of ISIS's caliphate. Attacks on Cameroon should be seen as one of the close parallels between ISIS and Boko Haram in methodology.

Indeed, throughout 2012–13 the major use for Cameroon, from the point of view of Boko Haram, was that of a hostage quarry. The primary hostages taken were foreigners: a French family, an Italian priest, and 10 Chinese engineers, apparently all coordinated by Boko Haram with the Ansaru.⁴⁵ For each of these kidnappings there was a substantial reward paid out, and the money no doubt financed the concurrent growth in Boko Haram's weaponry.

However, one should also recognize that Cameroon represents an opportunity for Boko Haram. Located as the group is in the Sambisa Forest, close to the Cameroonian border, it is possible for Boko Haram to move easily across and take refuge on either side when one side becomes too

⁴⁴ "Boko Haram' abducts Cameroon politician's wife," *BBC News*, July 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28509530>.

⁴⁵ See Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram Recruitment, Financing and Arms-Trafficking in the Lake Chad Region," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, October 31, 2014, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-haram-recruitment-financing-and-arms-trafficking-in-the-lake-chad-region>. For the relationship between Boko Haram and Ansaru, see International Crisis Group, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, April 3, 2014, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf), 26.

difficult. But northern Cameroon—mostly Muslim and for a long period disaffected from the central government in Yaounde—while tied ethnically to the Kanuris across the border in Nigeria, is ripe for attack. From the Cameroonian military operations during November 2014, it is clear that unlike the Nigerian government, the Cameroonians are taking the Boko Haram challenge quite seriously. Thus far Boko Haram has only been able to carry out operations close to the border, and no major Cameroonian cities are in serious danger from it. It is possible, however, that that situation might change. The Cameroonians are clearly worried about the loyalties of the Muslim population, which like that of Nigeria is divided into a northern, more historically Muslim population (whose history as Muslims goes back almost 1,000 years) and a southern, more recently converted Muslim population around the area of Fouban in western Cameroon. Like their counterparts among the southern Nigerian Muslim population, the southern Cameroonian Muslims have not demonstrated much sympathy for Boko Haram, but it is possible that given some level of success in the north, support could develop among radicalized youth.

The other possible source for Boko Haram recruitment is the much-traumatized Muslim population of CAR, which has fled (mostly) to Cameroon in the wake of the collapse of the Seleka regime.⁴⁶ This is a population of approximately 240,000, which has fled to either Cameroon or Chad during 2014.⁴⁷ Whether the Muslims of CAR were at all implicated in the slaughter of the Christian population of CAR during the period of Seleka rule is difficult to determine and is irrelevant now. What cannot be denied is that this is a displaced population that is Muslim and has a genuine grievance. Nor is it clear that CAR will be stable enough in the near future for them to return—even assuming that they will want to return after the horrors they have experienced. It is possible that Boko Haram or other Muslim radicals will utilize this refugee population for the purpose of recruitment. If this happens, then one should expect severe destabilization throughout Central and West Africa for years to come.

⁴⁶ James Verini, “Close Your Heart,” *Slate*, September 1, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2014/08/central_african_republic_how_a_once_peaceful_nation_descended_into_a_brutal.html.

⁴⁷ Thibaud Lesueur, “CAR: The Fate of Refugees in Southern Chad,” International Crisis Group, November 10, 2014, <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/2014/11/10/car-the-fate-of-refugees-in-southern-chad/>.

Is There a Relationship between Boko Haram and other Salafi-Jihadi Groups?

Boko Haram should be viewed largely as an orphan group within the larger field of Salafi-jihadism. Although there has been evidence of individual leaders of Boko Haram—such as Shekau, Mamman Nur (leader in Kano), and Khalid al-Barnawi—having personal connections with foreign jihadists, the evidence for Boko Haram as a group is weak as yet.⁴⁸ Nur is believed to be a Cameroonian (or a Chadian) and, of the three, has the most globalist jihadi perspective. It was he who apparently worked with the West African radicals (AQIM) and initiated the first suicide attacks in 2011–12. Not being Nigerian, he has never been closely associated with Shekau’s Kanuri-focused Boko Haram and operates from Kano. Al-Barnawi, whose primary activity has been the kidnappings of foreigners that distinguished Ansaru from Boko Haram, has also had close connections with West African radicals. Apparently during 2012, Shekau fled to Gao (controlled at that time by MUJAO and AQIM), but there is no good evidence of him having had personal foreign connections other than this trip.

If one understands that Boko Haram consists of several loosely tied groups led by the three above—with Shekau being the dominant figure and the one in control of the most fighters and territory, but also being the most socially isolated and parochial—then the picture becomes clear. Boko Haram as a movement is Nigeria-focused, and although it has definitely solicited recruits from Cameroon and perhaps other West African countries, it has no globalist tendencies similar to al-Qaeda, ISIS, or al-Shabab. What influence there is from foreign jihadists is mainly through idea diffusion and some social networking with other West and North African radicals, rather than with the larger world of Salafi-jihadism.

Prognosis and Policy

On November 30, 2011, the US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence issued a report on Boko Haram.⁴⁹ This

⁴⁸ Most of this has been collected by Jacob Zenn. See his articles “Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria” and “Boko Haram and the Kidnapping of the Chibok Schoolgirls.”

⁴⁹ “Boko Haram: Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland” (report, US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, November 2011),

report was one of the first to take US policy on Boko Haram seriously. While the report has its flaws, it dealt with Boko Haram from a policy point of view. To date, it is difficult to isolate the US policy toward Boko Haram—the bottom line is that there is not that much the United States can do. Different measures, such as freezing of assets,⁵⁰ have been taken, but probably the most effective US presence combatting Boko Haram has been in Niger.⁵¹ It is interesting and indicative that thus far Boko Haram, while operating extremely close to the Nigerien border with Nigeria, has not carried out operations in Niger. This fact is in spite of there being a large lawless element within Niger (the Tuareg, who have revolted a number of times), and especially in the region of Maradi and Zinder, where there are close ties with Nigerian radical elements. However, it is apparent that the United States Africa Command—which is responsible for military relations with African nations—has been successful in its mission in Niger to train together with the Nigerien army in the border region with Nigeria and Chad.

Boko Haram currently stands at the edge of founding its own state in northern Nigeria and Cameroon. Clearly this point was reached during fall 2014 as a result of the example of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. With this trajectory in mind, it is possible to visualize several scenarios for the immediate future. The first and most dangerous scenario would be that Boko Haram could succeed in founding an Islamic state divorced from accepted boundaries. If this were to happen, then there would be a number of ramifications. The Nigerian government would presumably be compelled to finally act against Boko Haram in order to maintain the territorial integrity of its state. While hitherto the Nigerian military has waged an indifferent campaign against Boko Haram, raising serious questions as to its abilities and motivation (not to speak of those of the Nigerian government), the actual foundation of a state would compel Boko Haram to come out into the open to some extent. It is possible that such a state would attract other Salafi-jihadi groups or sympathizers in the Muslim north who until now have been repelled by Boko Haram's

<http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Boko%20Haram-%20Emerging%20Threat%20to%20the%20US%20Homeland.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Which it did in September 2013: “US names Nigeria’s Boko Haram a terror organisation,” *France 24*, November 13, 2013, <http://www.france24.com/en/20131113-usa-name-nigeria-boko-haram-terrorist-islamists/>; the European Union also passed a resolution on July 17, 2014: “Nigeria, recent attacks by Boko Haram,” Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, July 17, 2014, <http://protectingeducation.org/news/nigeria-recent-attacks-boko-haram>.

⁵¹ Eliza Griswold, “Can General Linder’s Special Operations Forces Stop the Next Terrorist Threat?” *The New York Times*, June 13, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/15/magazine/can-general-linders-special-operations-forces-stop-the-next-terrorist-threat.html?_r=0.

violence and nihilism. If Boko Haram could win over some elements of the Fulani-Hausa elite to its side, then it could stand a chance in maintaining itself.

The mere foundation, successfully, of an Islamic state in northern Nigeria would be traumatic for West Africa especially and for Africa as a whole, as such a state would serve as a locus for large numbers of displaced Salafi-jihadi fighters and opportunists. The example of Seleka in the CAR during the brief period of its rule (March–December 2013) is a grim reminder of what could happen if such a group was able to maintain itself over a population for any period of time. This eventuality would most probably mean that the United States would have to intervene or at least support the Nigerian government in a more direct manner than it is currently.

However, it is by no means clear that Boko Haram has the capacity to found an actual state. Although it controls a substantial number of villages,⁵² the group does so by preventing the Nigerian state from controlling them rather than actually administering them, as does ISIS in its state. To date Boko Haram has not demonstrated any abilities in administration or consolidation. As territories fall under its control, its spokesmen make proclamations concerning them, and then usually within a week or so the Nigerian military or local vigilantes drive Boko Haram away. Nonetheless, it is possible that within a year or so Boko Haram will gain the ability to actually found and administer a state.

A second trajectory would posit that Boko Haram and the Nigerian government remain locked in a struggle that neither one can win. While the structural advantages are all with the Nigerian military, its morale is low and equipment substandard. Boko Haram has gained a large amount of equipment by capture from the Nigerian military and through purchase. Therefore, the two sides are at the present time almost evenly matched.⁵³ Boko Haram has the advantage of the initiative and can apparently strike at will. Beyond this, Boko Haram enjoys the advantage of knowing what it is fighting for, while the Nigerian military has no idea what it is fighting for. Boko Haram

⁵² These vary in number almost from day-to-day, but see the list given by the northern politician Isa Lwan, who counts 18 in Borno alone: “Lawmaker lists 18 Borno villages under Boko Haram’s control,” *24/7 Nigeria News Update*, October 23, 2014,

<http://247nigerianewsupdate.co/lawmaker-lists-18-borno-villages-under-boko-harams-control/>; and “War in Nigeria: Map of Boko Haram Control (September 2014),” *Political Geography Now*, September 29, 2014, <http://www.polgeonow.com/2014/09/war-in-nigeria-map-of-boko-haram.html>.

⁵³ Assuming the rough estimate of Boko Haram fighters to be between 10,000 and 15,000 to upwards of 50,000.

is also fighting in familiar territory. It is possible with this trajectory to assume that fighting could continue almost indefinitely. The Nigerian military cannot cede control over Nigerian soil, but Boko Haram, assuming that it is ideologically and religiously driven, cannot be mollified with anything less than an Islamic state.

This situation could be broken by several variables. One is that the Nigerian government and military's predicament could cause more forceful leaders to come to the fore, who could recognize the stakes and actually fight Boko Haram. Two is that Boko Haram could either split or suffer a morale loss as a result of some defeat or setback that could cause it to want to negotiate or be co-opted by the Nigerian government (presumably along the lines of the settlement with the Delta rebels in 2009). Three is that outside African actors, such as either Cameroon or Chad, fearing the spread of Boko Haram could decisively intervene in northeastern Nigeria. This latter eventuality would be very embarrassing for the Nigerian government, but if Cameroon, for example, feared Boko Haram sufficiently, it might be motivated to take such a step. This would have the effect (presumably) of denying the group its safe havens in the Sambisa Forest, close to the Cameroonian border.

The United States in the case of this latter trajectory should stay away from the Nigerian civil war, and at the very most influence events diplomatically or through military aid, rather than directly. In the end, the United States should remember that Boko Haram does not affect any of our vital interests at the present in spite of its proximity to oil fields in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. All of those fields, however, are comparatively distant from the fighting, and to date Boko Haram has not demonstrated any ability or willingness to target them.

Another internal variable that could break the status quo is that Nigerian civilians—vigilantes from either the north or the south—could take the initiative away from the government forces and spark a popular response to the civil war. Although the passivity of the Nigerian population in the face of overwhelming governmental incompetence—and in some cases indifference—to slaughter is astounding, it is increasingly clear that vigilantes and local forces are quite effective

in defending their own locales from Boko Haram.⁵⁴ Although these groups are poorly equipped, on several occasions they have been effective in driving Boko Haram off. However, whether they would go further than this and actually create bottom-up forces capable of engaging Boko Haram and pursue the group beyond the confines of their local environments remains a very open question.

A third trajectory could come about if Boko Haram were to become integrated with a putative Salafi-jihadi state developing elsewhere in West or North Africa. At the current time such an eventuality is distant, as most jihadi groups throughout the region are in a comparative decline. But in disparate locations such as Libya, Mali, CAR, and other places, there are indications of possible resurgence. Most of the Salafi-jihadi groups in these areas were checked by foreign interventions. Were there to be an explosive growth of an Islamic state akin to that of ISIS during summer 2014 in West or Central Africa, it is possible that Boko Haram could link up with it. In this case a putative Islamic state in West Africa could actually challenge the Nigerian state and perhaps even defeat it militarily. Although one might scoff at the likelihood that this could happen, it bears remembering that few believed that ISIS could actually effectively dominate such a region as Iraq and Syria and even challenge the Iraqi government at the gates of Baghdad. Most probably a defeat of Nigeria such as this would involve the loss of the Muslim north. This trajectory would be very dangerous and might be too large even for US intervention to be effective against it.

In general, the prognosis for Nigeria should be that Boko Haram and the Nigerian military will remain locked in a no-win situation. The current strategy of Boko Haram does seem to be leading to the foundation of a state, but this goal remains as yet elusive. It may very well be that Boko Haram will enjoy substantial victories during the immediate future and perhaps even take a major city such as Damaturu, Potiskum, or even Maiduguri. If that were indeed to happen, then there most likely would be a massacre of the local population.

⁵⁴ See Alexis Okeowo, "Inside the Vigilante Fight Against Boko Haram," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/09/magazine/inside-the-vigilante-fight-against-boko-haram.html?_r=0; Aminu Abu Bakar, "Troops, vigilantes take back Nigerian town seized by Boko Haram," *CNN World*, November 16, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/16/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-town/>.

Conclusions

The reasonable observer of the second Nigerian civil war would be compelled to state that the war is being waged from one side only thus far. The Nigerian government and military have yet to take Boko Haram seriously either as a military foe or as an ideological opponent. One cannot place any faith in the pronouncements of the Nigerian government with regard to the fighting of Boko Haram, as systematically it has either denied the scope of the problem, underestimated the nature of the enemy, or practiced outright deception as to the events transpiring in northeastern Nigeria. This latter tendency, best illustrated when the Nigerian government announced a cease-fire with Boko Haram (October 17, 2014)—which was disconfirmed within several days by Boko Haram and appears to have been nothing but a campaign stunt to boost the election prospects of President Goodluck Jonathan—is particularly disturbing. Without presenting the situation honestly, it will be impossible in the future for the Nigerian government to gain the trust of the Nigerian people, which will be needed in order to combat Boko Haram or to demonstrate to the outside world that it is serious in fighting the enemy.

For the above reasons, I believe that it would be foolish for the United States government to involve itself with the fight against Boko Haram at this stage, at least until the Nigerian government has established an adequate track record of transparency. The human rights abuses associated with the Nigerian military in the northeast have been particularly disturbing. Additionally, the United States should be wary of a situation like that in Pakistan, where the elite might seek to prolong a given conflict in order to gain access to American military and financial resources. Certain elements of the Nigerian government and military are definitely set on US involvement in the conflict.⁵⁵ This fact should make us all the more cautious about involvement.

⁵⁵ See “Boko Haram and US Counterterrorism Assistance to Nigeria,” US Department of State, May 14, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/05/226072.htm>; for descriptions of aid on the ground, see Paul D. Shinkman, “What the US Is Really Doing in Nigeria,” *US News and World Report*, July 8, 2014, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/07/08/what-the-us-is-really-doing-in-nigeria>; for calls for further aid, see Phil Stewart, “Nigeria says US support lacking in Boko Haram battle,” *Reuters*, November 11, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/12/us-usa-nigeria-boko-haram-idUSKCN0IW01W20141112>; Nicholas Ibekwe, “America replies Nigeria, releases details of aid to Nigerian military in war against Boko Haram,” *Premium Times*, November 14, 2014, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/171127-america-replies-nigeria-releases-details-aid-nigerian-military-war-boko-haram.html>.

Ironically, the one area where we can see some positive results with regard to Boko Haram is in its operations against Nigeria's neighbors, primarily Cameroon. It appears that in contradistinction to Nigeria, Cameroon is taking the Boko Haram invasion quite seriously and combatting it directly as a military foe, as well as ideologically in order to forestall penetration of Boko Haram's ideas through the Muslim community of Cameroon. Another positive point is simply the fact that thus far Niger and, further away, Chad have been immune to Boko Haram's penetration.

Possibly the most hopeful sign is the attitude of the new emir of Kano, Lamido Sanusi, whose exhortations against Boko Haram probably triggered the horrifying attack against the Great Mosque of Kano on November 28, 2014. Although a majority of the victims of Boko Haram have been Christians and one of the primary stated goals of the group has been to affirm the dominance of Islam inside Nigeria, victory over Nigerian Salafi-jihadism can only come when Muslims and Christians fight it together. Attacks such as that on the Kano mosque highlight the fact that Boko Haram, for doctrinal and tactical reasons, has also targeted Muslims indiscriminately, and it may be that slaughters such as this will persuade the Nigerian government and military to fight the second Nigerian civil war seriously. It can be won, bit by bit, through isolating Boko Haram, following up on victories, denying it refuge, and above all, making sure that the population knows what type of a group it truly is.