

NIGERIA: Recent Violence

I. Background to Boko Haram

Boko Haram is not a recent phenomenon. The group initially came to prominence in 2003. At the time it alternatively called itself *Sunna Wal Jamma* or “the Taliban” or “Yussufiyya” after its founder-leader, Mohammed Yusuf, who styled himself on Mullah Omar. Mohammed Yusuf believed Islam had been corrupted by Westernisation and all that it brought, especially education and Christianity, and rejected the legitimacy of the state and of Muslim traditional rulers. Consequently, from the outset the group sought the destruction of federal Nigeria and its replacement with a Shari’a state governed by an orthodoxy defined by Mohammed Yusuf.

Initially Boko Haram consisted of former university students and disaffected scions of wealthy northern families, and was thought at that time to be around 200 strong. In late 2003, it began a brief armed uprising in Yobe State in north-east Nigeria by issuing pamphlets declaring its determination to make Nigeria a Muslim State. Then the young militants proceeded to invade Kanamma and Geidam Local Government Areas (LGAs), and destroyed Kanamma police station, killing a policeman and carting off weapons while chanting *Allah u Akbar* – God is great. Afterwards, they marched to the town centre, took over a primary school, renamed it “Afghanistan”, hoisted their own flag and declared a *jihād* against Christians and the Nigerian Federal Government. These aims remain unchanged. The group went on to cause havoc in several towns and villages, including the state capital Damaturu, occasioning the displacement of around 10,000 people. Federal forces eventually crushed the uprising and arrested several members of the group, four of whom were killed while allegedly attempting to escape from Damaturu prison.

In September 2004, the group murdered over a dozen Christians during raids on the towns of Bama and Gwoza in Borno State, situated in the north-east close to the border with Cameroon. Around 60 sect members were also reported to have attacked police stations in the area, killing four policemen. As a joint police and army force launched an operation against them, the group took seven people hostage, forcing them to act as porters as they retreated over the Mandara hills and into neighbouring Cameroon. One of the hostages escaped and was interviewed by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) at that time, while two are known to have been murdered.ⁱ

Despite such notorious activities, by the time the group once again made headlines, it had not only set up a headquarters in the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, but had also established a presence in several northern states. The group was by then known locally as Boko Haram (regularly translated ‘Western education is forbidden’). It would appear that Boko Haram had come to some form of accommodation with northern authorities. There is speculation, that state governors made use of the group for nefarious political purposes, and that the group may even have played a major role in the 2006 Cartoon Riots, when around 65 Christians were killed, 57 churches were destroyed and hundreds of Christian businesses razed to the ground in Maiduguri on 18 February in what was billed a protest at the 2005 publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed in Denmark. However, in July 2009, complaining of harassment and mistreatment, Boko Haram launched coordinated attacks in Bauchi, Yobe, Kano and Borno States, resulting in the deaths of at least 1,000 people. Once again a joint security force was mustered, and the group was driven back to its stronghold in Maiduguri’s Railway suburb. Although at the time Boko Haram claimed their quarrel was with state officials who were mistreating its adherents and assured Christians in the area they would be safe, Boko Haram proceeded to murder three pastors, torch over twenty churches, destroy numerous Christian-owned businesses and hold over 100 Christians hostage at its headquarters for use as human shields against the encircling federal forces. Surviving hostages

interviewed by CSW vividly described how male hostages were either forcibly converted or beheaded, while females were subjected to hard labour upon refusing to convert. ⁱⁱ

Following the destruction of the Maiduguri headquarters and extra-judicial killing of its leader the group went underground. In February 2010, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) offered training and equipment to Nigerian Muslims, who it claimed were being oppressed.ⁱⁱⁱ When Boko Haram remerged in September 2010, it mounted a spectacular attack destroying Bauchi's federal prison and freeing 700 inmates, including around 100 suspected Boko Haram members. The uncharacteristic methodology indicated specialist training and purported spokesmen for the group have since claimed on several occasions that the group is variously affiliated with Somalia's al Shabaab, AQIM or both.^{iv}

Today's Boko Haram adopts an array of sophisticated tactics including; improved bomb and IED manufacturing capacity, massive attacks on Christian suburbs, destructions of schools and churches, hit and run drive-by murders of officials, imams, traditional rulers and other individuals deemed to have betrayed or oppose it. Of greatest significance are suicide bombings, previously unknown in Nigeria, that largely target churches and high profile locations such as the United Nations headquarters in Abuja and media houses. The group now calls itself Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad - People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad. It also expresses, regularly and openly, that one of its major goals is to cleanse the north of Christianity. On the surface this would appear to be a nearly impossible goal; however, the group is making headway in such states as Yobe, Borno, Kano and parts of Kastina, where in many cases, even indigenous Christians are fleeing.^v The group also expresses particular hostility towards Plateau, the only recognised majority Christian state, and Kaduna State, which elected a Christian governor.

2. The recent violence in Plateau State

In remote areas of Plateau and Bauchi States, hit and run night attacks on non-Muslim villages by well-armed Fulani men, some dressed in uniform, have been occurring sporadically since 2010. More recently, there have also been sporadic attacks on villages in predominantly Christian southern Kaduna State. In March, three villages in Chikun LGA were attacked by unidentified men armed with AK 47s, who killed ten villagers.^{vi} Then in June, during an attack by armed Fulani tribesmen on Sansun Village in Zangon Kataf LGA in Southern Kaduna State, a man named Matthew Aetung and his son, were hacked to death, his wife was critically injured, and his home was razed to the ground.^{vii} In most of these cases the assailants are thought to have made use of traditional herding routes to evade detection, leading some outside observers to erroneously conclude that they are primarily caused by competition between herders and farmers for land. There are also regular reports, particularly in Plateau and Bauchi States, of the security forces allegedly failing to assist the victims in a timely manner. These attacks can last several hours. However, despite regularly being contacted while violence is underway, the security forces invariably arrive after the attack is over.

The events that occurred in Plateau State over 7 and 8 July were a major escalation of this phenomenon. An estimated 12 villages in Riyom and Barkin Ladi, situated on the outskirts of the state capital Jos, were attacked simultaneously on Saturday 7 July by hundreds of heavily armed gunmen wearing military camouflage and bullet proof vests, in raids reminiscent of the 2010 attacks on Dogo Nahauwa, Zot and Ratsat villages in Jos South, which claimed an estimated 400 lives. Early news reports suggested that at least 25 people were killed, five hospitalised and approximately 150 displaced. As is usually the case during these attacks, the majority of whom were women, children and the elderly. Reports also indicate that around 19 of the gunmen were later killed and one was taken alive during an exchange of fire with the Special Task Force (STF).

A mass burial was hastily organised for the next day, and as mourners proceeded to the burial site they reportedly discovered the burnt remains of around 50 additional victims who had fled from

their homes to shelter in a the home of a local pastor in Matse Village, Riyom Local Government Area (LGA). As they buried the dead, the mourners themselves were ambushed by armed men. The attack claimed the lives of around 20 people, including Federal Senator for Plateau State North Gyang Dalyop Datong and Majority Leader in the Plateau State House of Assembly Honourable (Hon.) Gyang James Fulani, while a member of the Federal House of Representatives, Honourable Simon Mwadkom, narrowly escaped death.

Although a report circulated to the effect that the two men had died of shock or during a stampede occasioned by the sound of gunfire, several mourners insist the men were shot dead. The latter accounts appeared increasingly credible the following day, when Boko Haram issued a statement claiming responsibility for the weekend of violence, including the deaths of the two politicians. Amongst other things the statement said Christians will “never know peace again” until they convert to Islam and insisted it would “continue to look for government officials; they will not have rest of mind. We will attack their homes and security agencies in the same way they are attacking us and destroying our houses that we been renting.”^{viii} However, official sources cast doubt on Boko Haram’s claims, and during his regular statement denying responsibility for the violence, the leader of Fulani herders in Plateau State also denied any connection to Boko Haram.^{ix}

On 9 July, the government of Plateau State placed four local government areas under curfew, but relaxed this curfew on the morning of 10 July. However, by the evening of 10 July, it was confirmed that two more villages in Barkin Ladi had been razed to the ground on Saturday, 7 July. Then on Wednesday 11 July came unconfirmed reports that Fulani militants were regrouping in a hill camp near Barkin Ladi, where they were awaiting a fresh stock of armaments before moving onto the next stage of their campaign, namely, an attack on the southern part of Kaduna State, which is a predominantly Christian area.

3. Events over the weekend of 13-15 July

At least five people died outside Maiduguri’s central mosque on Friday 13 July when a teenage suicide bomber set off an explosion as he approached local dignitaries, including the deputy governor of Borno and the Shehu of Borno, the state’s most prominent Muslim traditional leader. Both men survived. However, while the bombing has been described as the first suicide attack at a mosque, it differs from attacks on churches in that it appears to have been a targeted but failed assassination attempt. On the same day, three gunmen murdered the education secretary of Marte Local Government in the state, Alhaji Abacha Abbas, at his home. Then on Monday, Nigerian news agencies reported that Hajja Bayayi, the councillor who represented Bolari Ward I had been shot dead in her Maiduguri home during curfew hours by unidentified gunmen, who stole her jewellery.^x

On Sunday 15 July, came reports that a car bomb had exploded near a filling station in Okene, near the Kogi State capital, Lokoja. The filling station is around 200 metres from a church, which was thought to been the real target. Two days later security forces in Kogi uncovered a bomb-making factory in Okaito, Okehi LGA. The two bedroom bungalow was reportedly disguised as a mosque in one room and a church in the other, and, among other devices, 46 IEDs were stored there.^{xi}

On the same day, it was reported that, two Boko Haram members had been overpowered by youths in the Mahuta suburb of Kaduna city. The two young men aged 17 and 22 are reported to have entered the area at 9am on motorbike together with a third man, armed with AK-47 rifles and to have begun shooting when they entered the house of the District Head of Mahuta. The official was able to escape unhurt but a young boy was reportedly shot. The assailants then emerged from the official’s home shooting sporadically at the people, but youths managed to overpower two of the three gun men. Early reports indicate that no one was killed but seven youths were taken to Kaduna Hospital and treated for gunshot wounds.^{xii} Local police later reported that one of the suspects had

led them to a hideout where a number of items were recovered, including two bags of chemicals, a jerry can of acid, and eight car alarm systems.^{xiii}

On Tuesday 17 July, trouble flared briefly in the Bukuru area in Jos when a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fired from a moving vehicle on the Ungwar Daba Bukuru Express Way damaged nearby buildings and killed a seven year-old boy. While it has been reported internationally that the target of the attack was the Nurul Islam School, there is local speculation that it was aimed at either the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation camp at Zang Commercial Secondary School or the Jos South Local Government Secretariat. Upon hearing the explosion Muslim youths in the area are reported to have taken to the streets shooting guns. However, they were eventually brought under control by members of the mobile police force. No other casualties were reported from that incident. However, earlier that day, raiders had attacked the Sabon Gida Kanar area, also in Bukuru, killing three people.^{xiv} Two more RPGs were fired on the same day during curfew hours; one landed close to Bukuru market and damaged a building, the other fell close to an STF post in Angwan Daba. There were no casualties.

4. Questionable Youth Corps postings

Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was created around 40 years ago in an effort to foster national unity in this vast country by allowing graduates from different states to serve in states they would otherwise never visit prior to embarking on their chosen careers. However, in northern and central Nigeria, Young Corps members (known locally as Corpers) from southern and eastern states have become increasingly vulnerable. For example, during the November 2008 violence in Jos, Plateau State, three members from southern Nigeria were dragged from their lodgings by a mob, hacked to death, and their bodies were set on fire. One of them was also a British citizen. In 2009, Grace Ushang from Cross Rivers State, was raped and murdered in Maiduguri, Borno State, allegedly by men who took exception to her uniform, which includes trousers. More recently, during the violence that erupted after the 2011 presidential elections Nigeria witnessed the murders of many members of the Youth Corps in several northern states. They had been assisting with the election as part of their civic duties, and were targeted both for this reason, and because their ethnicity identified them as non-Muslim in the eyes of their assailants.

The Minister of Youth Development, Alhaji Inuwa Abdulkadir, has caused widespread anger by his insistence that, barring constitutional changes, current members of the NYSC would still be posted to Borno, Yobe and other troubled states as a "national sacrifice".^{xv} Not only is this statement being condemned as insensitive and unbecoming of any politician, let alone one charged with youth affairs, it also contradicts a directive issued by the Director-General of the NYSC, Brigadier-General Nnamdi Okore-Affia, which stated that members assigned to Bauchi, Gombe, Plateau, Kano and Kaduna States were to report to the NYSC Directorate Headquarters in Abuja for redeployment, while those posted to Yobe and Borno States would have their orientation at NYSC camps in Nasarawa and Benue States respectively. The minister's statement also runs contrary to the provisions of a resolution passed by the Federal House of Representatives requesting the NYSC to end all the postings to troubled northern states.

5. The ambivalent American response

There is a school of thought that appears to have gained acceptance in influential American circles that espouses the view that the emergence of Boko Haram is largely attributable to poverty in northern Nigerian and a reaction to endemic corruption. This line is most frequently articulated by the US Assistant Secretary of State, Ambassador Johnnie Carson, who recently outlined the need for a ministry of northern affairs to deal with what he termed "longstanding northern grievances"^{xvi}. In reality, "northerners have exercised the reins of power for the majority of Nigeria's independence.

These northern leaders – particularly military generals – became fabulously rich, while maintaining a system of patronage in their own areas for their own political purposes. Even since 1999, the north east and north west [of Nigeria] still receive higher federal allocation than the south east. The problem in the north stems from what the leaders the north supports or elects to govern it are doing with the money. That is where the responsibility for underdevelopment of the region primarily lies.”^{xvii}

Attributing the emergence of Boko Haram to underdevelopment, poverty, injustice or opposition to corruption effectively justifies the activities of a violent group that has clearly stated its *raison d’être* from the outset and continues to do so on every possible occasion. While it does indeed seek to take advantage of unemployed northern Muslim masses, there should no longer be any doubt that Boko Haram is a terrorist organisation that is using violence and the threat of violence to bring about its long standing aim of transforming a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation into a country governed by its own interpretation of shari’a law. Nevertheless, the State Department in particular continues to resist calls to designate Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization. Moreover, the logic behind the recent decision to merely designate three Boko Haram members as terrorists, as opposed to the entire organisation, is difficult to comprehend. This will not fully address the scale of the problem posed by Boko Haram and will therefore be of limited use in exposing and disrupting its financial or other networks. The decision is indeed tantamount to “designating Bin Laden as a terrorist, but failing to designate Al Qaeda as a terrorist organization.”^{xviii} It is only a matter of time before the group itself receives this designation; however, by then it will have ensured maximum benefit from the time and space afforded to it by this period of vacillation

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

There is deep anger in the Barkin Ladi and Riyom areas, where for the last three years people have complained to the authorities of the presence of a militant training camp in the area, yet nothing appears to have been done to address this concern. Similarly in 2011, sources in Bauchi reported the presence of a group of around 2,000 militants from Niger, Katsina, Kano, Sokoto and other northern Nigerian states, who allegedly dressed in army and mobile police uniforms, and were encamped in the Bununu area of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area (LGA). Again, no discernible official action appears to have been taken.

The weekend of violence in Plateau State served as an indication that any alleged official procrastination had yielded extremely deadly results. Days before his death Senator Dantung spoke at the funeral of a family that had been murdered by armed Fulanis, making an impassioned plea for decisive action to deal with the killers, who he presciently asserted were in the hills re-arming for further attacks.^{xix} It would appear that his death and those of the other politicians may be the catalysts for such action. On Sunday 15 July, the STF announced it was launching a military operation to search for the militant’s hide outs. As part of what has been termed “Operation Safe Haven”, the military has given the inhabitants of five villages in Barkin Ladi and Riyom LGAs (namely, Mahanga, Kakuruk, Kuzen, Maseh, and Song 2) 48 hours to leave their homes before it embarks on intensive house to house searches, and has advised the inhabitants of the neighbouring areas to move cautiously while the operation is underway.^{xx} The six villages are inhabited by members of the Fulani tribe. While the STF insists this is a temporary measure to ensure villagers are not caught in crossfire, the villagers are reportedly refusing to leave their homes.

Regardless of the misgivings of the Fulani community, there is clearly an urgent need for adequate protection for Christian villages in Plateau, Kaduna, Bauchi and Kano States, which are all situated within reach of the militants, and for the Nigerian authorities to take effective measures to deal with militant strongholds once they are located. It is vital that the federal government is seen to be both willing and able to tackle this insurgency decisively. A continuing failure to do so will engender a situation where, to ensure their own survival, an increasing number of citizens will take the defence

of their respective communities into their own hands, fuelling a cycle of retributive violence and thereby adding to general lawlessness in the nation. Retaliation already occurs. Following the bombings of three churches in Kaduna^{xxi}, which themselves followed three consecutive weekends of suicide attacks on churches, youths in the predominantly Christian southern part of Kaduna City began to exact revenge on members of the Muslim community, some of whom were guilty, but many of whom may have been innocent. Sporadic outbreaks of violence continued to occur throughout the city despite the imposition of a 24 hour curfew as Muslim youths retaliated in turn, and again, the innocent were the main victims. Retributive violence also broke out briefly in Plateau State on Sunday, 9 July, as news emerged of the deaths of the politicians, occasioning the imposition of the state of emergency in the four LGAs. At such times tensions are regularly exacerbated by rumours and false reports, usually circulated via text message, claiming that members of the opposite religious community are either indulging in or planning some kind of violent activity. By the time such rumours are denied by state officials, they have damaged community relations further by heightening suspicion and causing terror and apprehension.

It is vital that identified sponsors of Boko Haram and other religion-related violence are found and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, regardless of social standing, as this will assist in ending impunity and stemming terrorism. Moreover, given the recent statement by the head of the US Africa Command (Africom) that Boko Haram, the Somali Islamist militia al Shabaab and AQIM are increasingly seeking to coordinate efforts,^{xxii} and the fact that Somalis and Nigerians have been sighted amongst Islamist militia in northern Mali, it is clear that the security implications engendered by Boko Haram extend far beyond Nigeria's borders. International co-operation and action are vital elements to disrupting the organisation's funders, backers and training network. The group's stated links to international terrorist networks urgently require a comprehensive international approach, especially since the de-facto creation of a state in northern Mali in part by a group sympathetic to AQIM raises the spectre of a Taliban/Afghanistan-style base for Al Qaeda in West Africa, with all its concomitant implications. "Nigeria isn't going to turn into Somalia or Yemen - let alone Iraq or Afghanistan - overnight. But if the religiously fuelled violence there is not contained, it might become yet another front in the war on terror."^{xxiii}

ⁱ CSW Press Release <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=369> and briefing paper, September and October 2004 respectively

ⁱⁱ Findings of Visit to Nigeria, CSW, April 2006,

<http://www.cswng.org/files/findings%20of%20visit%20to%20nigeria%20april2006.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ See AQIM's statement of 2/2010 <http://www.globalterroralert.com/images/documents/pdf/0210/aqim-the-annihilation-muslims-in-nigeria.pdf>

^{iv} "Boko Haram claims al Qaeda links", <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Boko-Haram-claims-al-Qaeda-links-20111124>; Boko Haram seen linked to other terrorist groups, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/west/Boko-Haram-Seen-Linked-to-Other-African-Terror-Groups--136260858.html>

^v "Nigeria: Overview of recent violence", CSW Briefing , 1 January 2012

<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=149>

^{vi} "Military arrest two after attempted Boko Haram bombings in Kano", 23 March 2012

<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1336>

^{vii} "Two churches targeted in Bauchi", CSW press release, 4 June 2012,

<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1375>

^{viii} "Nigeria's Boko Haram claims attack that killed 65", Buhari Bello, Jos, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/07/10/uk-nigeria-bokoharam-idUKBRE8690XE20120710>. Translation of the full text from English to Hausa courtesy of CSW Nigeria

^{ix} "Nigeria's Boko Haram claims attacks that killed 65", Reuters, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/07/10/uk-nigeria-bokoharam-idUKBRE8690XE20120710>

^x <http://www.naijaline.com/forums/july/woman-councillor-killed-maiduguri>

^{xi} <http://tribune.com.ng/index.php/front-page-news/44298-kogi-police-recover-46-bombs-from-building-housing-church-mosque>

^{xii} <http://www.informationnigeria.org/2012/07/youths-captured-boko-haram-members-in-kaduna.html>

^{xiii} http://www.compassnewspaper.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5653:bomb-factory-raided-in-kaduna&catid=35:headlines

^{xiv} <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1405>

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- ^{xv} Posting NYSC members to troubled states in Nigeria is a sacrifice to th nation –Minister of Youth, 11 July 2012
<http://www.ngex.com/news/public/newsinfo.php?nid=9271&pageindx=1>
- ^{xvi} Assistant Secretary of State, Ambassador Johnnie Carsons during “Promise and Peril in Nigeria”, a debate at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies on 11 April 2012
- ^{xvii} “No Your Excellency, you missed the point”, Reverend Y S Nmadu , CEO, CSW Nigeria, 24,04,2012
<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=1216>
- ^{xviii} Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), “ US Policy Towards Nigeria West Africa’s Troubled Titan”, Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing, 10 July 2012, Washington DC
<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/112/HHRG-112-FA16-WState-OritsejaforA-20120710.pdf>
- ^{xix} “Nigeria: Dantong- Dies, Defeats Death”, Vanguard, 1 July 2012,
<file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Administrator/My%20Documents/Downloads/allAfrica.com%20Nigeria%20%20Dantong%20-%20Dies,%20Defeats%20Death.htm>
- ^{xx} “Nigeria: Dantong’s death. STF gives six villages 48 hours to evacuate” Leadership, 15 July 2012,
<http://allafrica.com/stories/201207150156.html>
- ^{xxi} “Curfew in Kaduna following bombings of three churches”, CSWpress release, 18 June, 2012,
<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1383>
- ^{xxii} “Africa’s Islamists ‘coordinate efforts’”, Mark Doyle, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18592789>
- ^{xxiii} “Is Nigeria the next front in the War on Terror?” Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Foreign Policy, 3 July 2012