



## Growing Threat of Terrorism in Africa: The Case of Boko Haram

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There has been an extraordinary increase in terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists connected to al-Qaida and ISIS across Africa over the recent years. In the past month itself, several terror attacks carried out by Islamic extremist groups across Africa, ranging from Nigeria, Burkina Faso to Somalia, have captured headlines and world attention. While these attacks raise concern of a new wave of Islamic extremism intensifying and spreading in Africa, it also brings into question the capacity of African states to contain the threat, which has wider security implications. This issue brief attempts at understanding this phenomenon of Islamic extremism in Africa with focus on Boko Haram terrorism.

Over the course of 2015, Africa has seen a number of terrorist incidents. With the beginning of the New Year till the past week, Africa continues to witness deadly attacks by Islamic groups. Some of the prominent attacks that took place in the past weeks include:

- On January 31, Boko Haram extremists armed with guns and explosives stormed and torched a village in Nigeria killing scores of people, including children. It was the latest of a series of deadly attacks attributed to the ISIS-affiliated terror group. On January 13, two female suicide bombers attacked a mosque in a town near Cameroon's border with Nigeria, killing 10 people
- On January 21, al-Shabaab fighters stormed and took over a beachfront restaurant in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu in which more than 20 people were killed. Earlier on

January 15, al-Shabaab had attacked an African Union base in Somalia, killing a number of Kenyan peacekeepers.

- On January 15, gunmen stormed a cafe popular with foreigners in Burkina Faso's capital, and then attacked a nearby luxury hotel, killing at least 30 people after more than 12-hour siege. The attack was similar to the Bamako Hotel assault in Mali on November 30. The al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.

These back-to-back attacks point to an arc of terrorism that has stretched across the Sahel region, extending from the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the Red Sea in the East. The region is firmly in the grip of a network of Islamic militant groups, ranging from al-Shabaab in Somalia to Boko Haram in Nigeria, and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb along with its affiliate groups to ISIS franchises in Libya. Boko Haram and al-Shabaab are the most prolific and active groups by far but, recently, AQIM has expanded its reach, shifting its target from the UN and foreign military personnel to civilians. Countries such as Nigeria, Somalia, Mali and Libya have emerged as the epicentres of terrorism, impacting and threatening neighbouring countries including Kenya, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad.

The reason for which the Islamic groups have been operating with relative success can be attributed to a combination of factors including weak and corrupt states, porous borders, lack of governing institutions, ungoverned spaces, under-trained and under-equipped military, socio economic discontent of the population, underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment and conflicts. According to Gen. David M. Rodriguez, the head of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), "The network of al-Qaida and its affiliates and adherents continues to exploit Africa's under-governed regions and porous borders to train and conduct attacks."

In Libya, for instance, the power vacuum that followed the fall of Muammar Gaddafi has allowed militant groups, including AQIM, Boko Haram to acquire arms that they have been using to launch brutal attacks in the region. In fact, some analysts say that since 2011, after the fall of authoritarian governments in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, there has been a rise in Islamic extremism in Africa, as the jihadists have been able to exploit the weakened

governments. In addition to these factors, another worrying aspect has been the flourishing drug trade and other criminal networks in the region that provide a steady source of income to these groups to continue their operations.

There are concerns that many more unlikely countries could be at the risk of being the next launch pad or target of terror, owing to geography, weak government or unstable economy. The recent January 2016 spectacular hotel attack in Burkina Faso, a country with no history of terrorism, is a case in point, wherein the al-Qaida group has been able to exploit the instability in the country.

Terrorism analysts say that the most worrying trend today has been the growing competition among the militant groups (affiliated to al-Qaida or ISIS) to capture attention and territory in order to prove their potency, relevance and thus attract recruits. The recent intensity of attacks can be attributed to such trend that is emerging. Both al-Qaida and the ISIS affiliated groups in Africa embrace anti-Western, global jihad ideologies, along with their regional objectives, but when it comes to strategies they differ. The al-Qaida affiliated groups like al-Shabaab employ conventional terrorist tactics that include guerrilla style raids, kidnappings, hostage taking, bombings and suicide bombings. The ISIS affiliated groups like Boko Haram, of late, have a penchant for the use of brutal tactics, which include stoning, indiscriminate mass-casualty attacks and systematic oppression of women and girls, including enslavement, torture, rape and using them as suicide bombers.

While increasing competition poses significant security challenge, terrorism analysts and military officials say that the main concern for African security interests has been the expanding collaboration in recruitment, training, financing and operations among the militant groups within Africa and transregionally. They are using modern communications and sophisticated system of trainers to share military tactics, media strategies and ways of transferring money.<sup>1</sup> The transfer of expertise can be witnessed in the spread of suicide bombings in Nigeria, Libya, Tunisia, Somalia and Chad and in the growing use of improvised explosive devices. There is even a flow of recruits among them. This could explain why some of the hostages in the Radisson Blu hotel attack in Mali, a Francophone country, overheard the attackers speaking in English, pointing to the supposed involvement of Boko Haram fighters.

For Africa, the challenge today is how to contain the deepening reach of the al-Qaida and ISIS affiliated groups, which have emboldened the regional terror groups. Both the groups may be rivals, but they are similar in their use of terror as a mobilising strategy.

The effect can be witnessed in the growth of Boko Haram's six-year insurgency in Nigeria. Boko Haram has been around for decades. But money and training from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb gave its leader, Abubakar Shekau, a substantial boost when he assumed control in 2010.

In 2015, Boko Haram switched allegiance to the IS. Since then, it has carried out a number of brutal attacks in crowded places, such as markets, and religious places. According to the Site Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadi websites, Boko Haram has killed more than 1,000 people since President Muhammad Buhari took office in May 2015. Despite military setbacks in Nigeria, it has become a regional threat. It has mounted attacks in neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Niger by exploiting linkages in the wider terror network.

In this backdrop of growing threat of terrorism in Africa by Islamic groups affiliated to al-Qaida and IS, the following section explores the case of Boko Haram, the group which has used its linkages with both al-Qaida and IS to reach its goal in Nigeria.

### **Case of Boko Haram Threat**

Before the beginning of the New Year 2016, President Muhammad Buhari declared that Nigeria 'technically' won the war against Boko Haram, stating that Boko Haram insurgents no longer remained capable to mount "conventional attacks" against security forces or population centres.<sup>2</sup> Refuting such claims of military successes, many analysts argued that the threat of violence by Boko Haram looms large over the region as ever. Today, the argument of the critics hold true, as Boko Haram continues with its brutal terror acts killing scores of people in the recent months.

Since July 2009, Boko Haram has mounted serial attacks killing between 17,000 and 20,000 people. Nigeria has become the world's third most terrorised country after Iraq and Afghanistan according to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index. The only African countries closer

in ranking to Nigeria are Somalia and Libya, which are in the eighth and ninth positions, respectively. Earlier in November, the group was deemed the world's deadliest terror group with international dimensions, surpassing its ally, the ISIS.<sup>3</sup>

Who are Boko Haram Islamists? What factors led to the emergence of the group? What are its operational strategies and linkages? How has it impacted Nigeria and the region? What have been the responses and what are the options available to deal with the threat? What implications does such kind of terrorism have for India? These are some of the questions that this section attempts to explore.

### **Who are the Boko Haram Islamists?**

Boko Haram's official name is *Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad*, which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". It has become popular by the name Boko Haram, which means 'Western education is sinful' in the Hausa language. This name was given to the movement in the early 2000 by the local population in Maiduguri, the capital of northern Nigerian state of Borno where the movement originated.

The name, however, does not necessarily capture the full objective of the movement. According to the movement's rhetoric, as propagated through recorded sermons and video messages, its goal is to create an Islamic State based on Islamic law, or sharia and get rid of Western influences. It does not believe in any system of government, be it traditional or orthodox, except the Islamic system and it is against replacing Islamic teachings by conventional education (Boko).<sup>4</sup> It regards the Nigerian state as being run by non-believers, even when the country had a Muslim President. In its earlier forms, Boko Haram was also known as the Nigerian Taliban or Yusufiyya.<sup>5</sup> Unlike al-Qaeda and its affiliates, its focus is specifically on Nigeria and adjacent countries, even though it is linked with global jihadi groups in terms of ideology and logistical support. Nigeria's Islamic extremism context in the northern region has shaped Boko Haram into what it has become.

### **Emergence of Boko Haram: Context of northern Nigeria Militant Islam**

Most studies either date the origin of the Boko Haram group to September 2010, when it launched its first attack and became an insurgency under the leadership of Abubaker

Shekau, or to its official founding by Muhammad Yusuf in 2002. This, however, overlooks the history and organisation of the group before Yusuf and Shekau became its leaders. Northern Nigeria's militant religiosity context is an important factor in understanding the emergence of Boko Haram.

Boko Haram is not the first extremist Islamic movement in Nigeria to challenge the established state machinery through violence. Northern Nigeria has a well-documented history of extremist Islamic movements dating back to the holy war (jihad) fought by Sheik Usman Dan Fodio (1754–1817) in the early 19th century.<sup>6</sup> Some authors have argued that since the Sokoto caliphate, which ruled parts of what is now northern Nigeria, Niger and Southern Cameroon, fell under British control in 1903, there has been a strong resistance among the Muslims in the area to western education.<sup>7</sup>

For instance, in the first two decades following Nigeria's independence in October 1960, northern Nigeria experienced a violent confrontation between a radical Islamist sect known as *Maitatsine* and the Nigerian Police Force in the city of Kano and Maidugiri. *Maitatsine* uprisings had their roots in the 'deeply conservative practice of Islam', which has been dominant in the region since Usman Dan Fodio's holy war.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1980s, Sheik Abubaka Mahmoud Gumi (1922–1992) was another renowned Islamic scholar in Nigeria, who encouraged militant Islam.<sup>9</sup> He promoted the implementation of Sharia courts in southern Nigeria, arguing that Nigeria should be brought under the Sharia law.<sup>10</sup> Sheik's ideas radicalized many Muslims in Nigeria leading to increased tensions between Muslims and Christians, especially in northern Nigeria. The burning of eight prominent churches in Kano by Muslims in October 1982 indicated the beginning of a religious war.<sup>11</sup>

Further, the Iranian revolution of 1979 resulted in growing demand for Sharia law to be adopted across Nigeria. It also resulted in the formation of the Nigerian Shia movement – called the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) – modelled on Hizbullah, by the radical Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky. The region witnessed protests marked by the veneration of portraits of

Iranian leaders Khomeini and Khamenei and Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and the burning of American and Israeli flags.



Source: AFP

In addition, Saudi-sponsored missionaries from Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Pakistan, and other countries were involved in promoting *Wahhabi* doctrine and orthodoxy beginning in the 1990s. This led to the adoption of Sharia law in twelve northern states between 1999 and 2001.

Thus, ideological radicalisation has been an ongoing process in Nigeria. Before Muhammad Yusuf emerged as the leader of Boko Haram, the north eastern states especially Borno, Yobe and Bauchi were ideologically fertile for exploitation.

Against this background, the charismatic Muslim cleric, Mohammed Yusuf, formed Boko Haram in Maiduguri in 2002. He set up a religious complex, which included a mosque and an Islamic school. Many poor Muslim families from across Nigeria, as well as neighbouring countries, enrolled their children at the school. Boko Haram shared some commonality with these diverse radical Islamic movements that emerged in northern Nigeria, in terms of criticism of the government for its inability to deal with socio-economic problems, especially in the northern areas of the country and also rejection of Western education and values.

### **Factors for the Rise of Boko Haram**

There are various explanations for the ascendancy of Boko Haram in Nigeria. As discussed above, it drew inspiration from the broader radical Islamist agenda prevailing in northern Nigeria. The leaders of Boko Haram were able to manipulate an already radicalised population and cultivate their own ideology to recruit and transform a socio-religious group

into a violent militant sect. Without this pre-radicalised population, it would have been less likely that Yusuf – a young leader in his thirties – would have been able to attract such a large following in such a short space of time.

It is also motivated by socio-economic grievances prevailing in the northern region. Nigeria is a highly polarised country with about 50 per cent of the country's population being Muslim, majority belonging to Hausa-Fulani tribe, mostly settled in the north, and 40 percent Christian and Animist, mainly of Yoruba and Igbo tribes, settled in the south.



Source: Nairaland Forum

The socio economic conditions between the North and the South are disparate. Nearly 75 per cent of northerners live in poverty, compared to 27 per cent of southerners. The southern regions of Nigeria are economically more prosperous than the northern regions, given the oil factor. The Niger Delta in the south has become the pivot of the Nigerian economy with more than 80 per cent of revenue being derived from oil, while the northern economy is dominated by agricultural production which is not modernised.

The north is also experiencing deindustrialisation affecting the textile, food and beverage, and other light industries, owing inter alia to energy shortages and the deterioration of infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> This division is often cited as the reason for the rise of Boko Haram, which has exploited these economic inequalities to its benefit.<sup>13</sup> Sope Elegbe, Research Director at the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), argues, “Unemployment is higher in the north than in the south. Mix this situation with radical Islam, which promises a better life for martyrs, and you can understand the growing violence in the north.”

Adding to this socio-economic disparity between North and South, the political marginalization of the North by the South also played a role in the ascendancy of Boko Haram violence. For instance, many northern Nigerians viewed the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan as illegitimate, arguing that he ignored an informal power-rotation agreement within the



People Democratic Party (PDP) elites, under which a Muslim should have assumed the presidency. Hence, several theories say that the politicians in the north raised Boko Haram to destabilise the south.

### **Boko Haram's Evolution and Transnational linkages**

#### **Operational Tactics**

In its first phase (*from 2002-2009*), Boko Haram was under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf. He mainly focused on withdrawal from society and establishing small camps and schools in the remote regions of Borno and Yobe states during the years 2002-2005.

As police pressure against these smaller groups began to grow toward the end of that period, the group morphed into more of an urban phenomenon. What made Boko Haram stand out among other Nigerian radical groups were its operations against the police that began in 2004. It directly confronted the Nigerian police and military, which culminated in the Nigerian military assault upon Muhammad Yusuf's compound, associated mosques, and his judicial murder, videotaped by soldiers. Hundreds of members of the group were killed with him. The suppression operation of 2009, and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf by Nigerian security forces in July of that year, was a turning point for Boko Haram. It was thought that the group had become defunct.

In September 2010, however, Boko Haram carried out a prison break (said to have released some 700 prisoners), and the group began operations again under the leadership of Abubakar bin Muhammad Shekau. Its major operations since then have been attacks on military, police, teachers/university, banks, markets, Christian preachers, churches and targeted assassinations. The targeted assassinations involved political figures and prominent clerics. The major methodologies had been driven by shootings and bombings from motorcycles.

Since 2011, after Jonathan Goodluck became the President and the Libya crisis, Boko Haram insurgency started to become violent and deadlier (domestic as well as external), and increased its geographical reach. The year 2011 witnessed a rise in the group's attacks as

apparent from a series of incidents such as suicide car-bombing of the United Nations (UN) building in Abuja in August, bombing of the national police headquarters in Abuja in June and burning down a hotel in Maiduguri in April. The group also indiscriminately started targeting both Muslim and Christian civilians, including attacks on mosques and churches, as well as public spaces such as markets and bus stations.

Most dramatic transition of Boko Haram was when it started the use of suicide attacks in these strikes. Other than al-Shabaab in Somalia and to some extent al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, no other African radical Muslim group used suicide attacks then. The coordination and sophistication of these attacks suggested training assistance from international networks, especially al-Shabaab (which operates in the Horn of Africa and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)). In a statement to the United States house armed services committee in March 2012, Army General Carter Ham Commander of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) had said that Boko Haram had established contacts with AQIM and al-Shabaab.<sup>14</sup> On similar lines, the Algerian Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdelkader Messahel had said he had “no doubts that coordination exists between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda,” citing intelligence reports and similar operating methods.<sup>15</sup> After the kidnapping of Chibok girls in April 2014, it has been observed that the use of young girls in suicide bombings has become more frequent.

Boko Haram also got involved in kidnappings of western nationals in Cameroon for ransom. The Ansaru group, a splinter group of Boko Haram, coordinated with Boko Haram in carrying out these acts. Some cases include the kidnapping of a French priest Georges Vandebeusch in November 2013 as well as that of a seven-member French family, which is believed to have produced a ransom of USD 3 million. These kidnappings happened after the French intervention in Mali, pointing to Boko Haram’s transnational ideological and logistical connections with Islamist groups in the Sahel region, particularly AQIM.<sup>16</sup>

It switched its tactics later in 2014 towards capturing territories, by holding on to territory rather than retreating after an attack. In July 2014, Boko Haram was reported for the first time to have taken control over a city, Damboa in Borno state. In August 2014, the leader Abubaker Shekau declared a caliphate in areas under Boko Haram's control, with the town of Gwoza as its seat of power. Shekau also publicly pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS),

turning his back on al-Qaeda. IS accepted the pledge, naming the territory under Boko Haram's control as the Islamic State of West Africa Province and as being part of the global caliphate it was trying to establish.

However, in March 2015, after the regional coalition force (Multinational Joint Task Force – made up of troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger) started its operations, Boko Haram started losing the towns under its control. Since Muhammad Buhari came to power in May 2015, military operations against the group led to reduction in Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria and loss of territorial gains made by Boko Haram. The Federal Government of Nigeria now claims that it has been able to drive out Boko Haram from its captured territories, restricting it to only the Borno region.

### Operational Area

The organization operates in the north-eastern border states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa bordering Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The group has taken advantage of weak security



environment, the radicalisation process, ethnic ties and socio-economic deprivation prevailing in the north-eastern region, and porous international borders, shared ethnicity and associations with other Islamic groups in the neighbouring countries. The ungoverned territories bordering Niger, Chad and Cameroon are sources of worry for the security services in the region, as the presence of Nigerian refugees (the internally displaced

people) and Boko Haram has increased the fears of radicalisation in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Boko Haram's shared ethnic links of the dominant Kanuri community as well as

other ethnic groups along the border provide safe havens for its members. Abubakar Shekau, the current leader of Boko Haram, has used his Kanuri connections to travel to Cameroon and Niger along the porous border.<sup>17</sup> The border towns also offer fertile recruitment grounds for the group. Niger and Nigeria have agreed to joint patrol of borders of 930 miles as part of security agreement in October 2012.

### Recruitment

The recruits have been mainly disaffected youths, unemployed graduates, and former Almajris. The phenomenon of Almajiri (street Children) is a popular old practice whereby children are sent to live and study under renowned Islamic teachers in some cities in northern Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> With destruction of villages and fleeing of youth to IDP camps since 2014, Boko Haram has resorted to forcible kidnappings of young girls and teenage boys to carry out its operation, particularly from bordering towns in Niger and Cameroon. They use untrained boys to acquire intelligence and carry out the first wave of attacks on villages or barracks. It has also been focusing on non-forcible recruits in Niger and Cameroon.<sup>19</sup> In Niger, teenage boys are recruited from the existing criminal gangs.<sup>20</sup> The recruits do not have any ideological affinity with Boko Haram and join purely due to economic incentive as they are offered a payment of approximately US\$3085 for joining Boko Haram.<sup>21</sup> The group reportedly has developed rear bases in the south of that country, which it considers a safe haven and recruitment area. Niger security services regard the group as a bigger threat to stability than the Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM.)

### Funding

Boko Haram's funding is reported to have many sources. In her book [\*Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency\*](#), Virginia Comolli explains that the sect had benefited from many sources – from northern officials to internet scams. During the early stages of Boko Haram (around 2002), there had been a number of officials and northern businessmen, who were involved in providing support. Criminal activities including bank robberies, extortion and racketeering, also generated revenues for Boko Haram. The group has also reportedly been funded by like-minded groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) believed that the Islamist insurgency has benefited from drug trafficking. According to UNODC, Boko Haram is involved in levying taxes, in the illicit trafficking of drugs and natural resources. Boko Haram controls large swathes of the road from Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, to Lake Chad, where Nigeria joins Niger, Chad and Cameroon, a well-known trafficking route. Petrol and diesel, textiles, fish, cigarettes and counterfeit drugs transit through it. Boko Haram though is not directly involved in the trade, but it's likely that they have been taxing the trade when it passes through the areas that they have control over.<sup>22</sup>

The sect also is believed to be involved in human trafficking, particularly selling girls, who have been kidnapped, to human traffickers' ring. Internet scams have also been a source of Boko Haram funding. To investigate suspicious financial transactions, Nigeria established a Financial Intelligence Unit in 2004 and an Anti-Money Laundering and Combating of Terrorism Regulation in 2009.<sup>23</sup>

### **Response Strategies to Deal with the Terror**

#### **National and Regional**

The Nigerian government has employed a mix of solutions ranging from crackdowns to outreach programmes to amnesty offers to deal with Boko Haram. Since 2004, it has deployed Joint Task Force (JTF) of police for counter-terrorism efforts in the regions where the group has been active. But the JTF mainly remained ineffective in dealing with terror, given its large scale corruption and human rights abuses.

On the local level, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a citizen-led initiative<sup>24</sup> was created on the rationale that strong knowledge of the local environment would allow the local population to arrest Boko Haram members. This has been a crucial advantage against the military JTF, which brought military personnel from around the country, who were not familiar with the local context or even local languages. By virtue of their deep knowledge of the local environment, the CJTF have been effective in capturing and neutralising hundreds of terrorists on many occasions. However, it is argued that CJTF exacerbated the distance between the State and the people.

In 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan set up the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North to identify and constructively engage key leaders of Boko Haram and to develop a workable framework for amnesty and disarmament of members of the group.<sup>25</sup> However, efforts by the government to engage the group in talks have failed mostly due to difficulties in identifying Boko Haram's demands as a basis for negotiations and credible interlocutors.<sup>26</sup> In May 2014, President Jonathan offered conditional amnesty to the members of the group, which Boko Haram rejected saying that they haven't done any wrong to be offered amnesty.

At present, the Federal Ministry of Defence is engaged in inter-agency collaboration between security services, calling for more synergies in order to win the hearts and minds of Nigerians in the fight against terrorism. Advocacies and other outreach programmes of the armed forces are being carried out with the aim of gaining sympathies from the civilian populace in degrading terrorism.

At the regional level, various measures have been taken to deal with the terror. A significant initiative has been the deployment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) in March 2015, by the Federal government of Nigeria along with neighbouring countries Niger, Chad and Cameroon, under regional framework of Lake Chad Basin commission. After the MJTF started its operations, Boko Haram insurgents have been driven away from their strongholds. By December 2015, the Nigerian government has been successful in taking back most of the territories occupied by Boko Haram except the Borno state, as discussed earlier, claiming that 'technically' they have won the war against Boko Haram. The Nigerian immigration authorities, in conjunction with a military task force, have also tightened control along the country's international borders with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger.

However, it is argued by analysts that so far the national and regional responses have been inadequate to deal with the threat. It has essentially treated Boko Haram as a military/security issue and has not found effective ways of addressing the root causes for its emergence, which lie in the socio-economic and political developments. The overall military response remains inadequate, given its transnational dynamics. Boko Haram continues to

remain a major security threat, carrying out deadly attacks, despite their territorial loss. The government's overreliance on the use of military force has been criticized.

### **International Response**

The international response to the problem initially was slow, as they did not see it threatening their interests. However, the successive revelations of the group's relationship with the global and regional *jihadi* movement have drawn attention and action by the international community. The attacks on the UN compound, kidnapping of foreign nationals and the mass abduction of the girls has compelled the international community to act substantially against Boko Haram. In direct response to the most recent rise in Boko Haram's activities, countries such as the US, France, the UK, China, Israel, Sri Lanka and India have provided assistance.

**The UN** did not take any major step till the mass abduction of the teenage girls in April 2014. After the incident, on May 22, 2014, the Security Council put Boko Haram in its Al-Qaeda Sanctions List on demand by the Nigerian Government, in paragraph 1 of the Security Council Resolution 2083 (2012), adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter."<sup>27</sup> This led to travel bans, freezing of assets and other measures.

**The US** since the beginning of May 2014 has been providing military, law enforcement and intelligence assistance, as well as manned and unmanned aircrafts. There have been unconfirmed reports that Nigerian soldiers are being sent to the United States as part of Nigerian Army's long-standing relationship with its American counterparts to receive training in counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and bomb-disposal, specifically aimed at fighting Boko Haram. The US designated both Boko Haram and Ansaru as terrorist organisations in November 2013.

**The European Union**, under regulation No 583/2014 (entering into force on 29 May 2014), added Boko Haram to the lists of persons, groups and entities covered by the freezing of funds and economic resources. In resolution 0024/2014, which was adopted in July 2014, the European Parliament not only condemned the attacks and killings, but urged the Government of Nigeria to address the root causes of the insurgency, including the lack of efficient and impartial judiciary.

**The UK** Government's interest in Nigeria grew after the "Woolwich incident" in which a British drummer was brutally killed on road by two British converted Muslims of Nigerian descent. The UK has more than 500000 Nigerian immigrants. After the incident, the British Foreign Affairs Committee included Nigeria in its focus. The UK Government advised the Nigerian Government for the use of non-military approaches and regional collaboration to deal with the socio-economic aspects of the growth of Boko Haram. It is also involved in intelligence and technical assistance against the group.<sup>28</sup>

**The French** has been involved as a coordinator in consolidating Western and regional efforts against Boko Haram. French operations against the al-Qaeda affiliated groups in Mali had weakened Boko Haram and affected its operations. François Hollande, the President of France, also supported the idea of a global action plan against Boko Haram. Earlier, France had also announced that it would build a 3000 troops strong cross-border anti-terrorism unit in the Sahel region.<sup>29</sup>

**Israel** has offered anti-terror assistance to Nigeria and China has also offered assistance in the search and rescue of the abducted Nigerian girls.

**The Sri Lankan** Military has assured the Nigerian counterparts to support their counter-terrorism campaign, given their own experience of dealing with terrorism, which they consider as comparable to the Nigerian situation.<sup>30</sup>

**India**, on its part, has also pledged to support the Federal Government of Nigeria in the war against terrorism and all other forms of security challenges facing the country. In the Third India-Africa Summit held from October 26-30, India strongly advocated stepping-up cooperation in counter terrorism efforts through intelligence exchange and training.

### **Conclusion**

Boko Haram's transformation into a deadly group has resulted out of a complex web of socio-economic and political dynamics within Nigeria, as well as with support from external forces, particularly its linkages and collaborations with groups in the Sahel region in terms of ideology and logistics. Though the group was crushed by the Nigerian forces in 2009, yet it



was able to regroup through the support and linkages of the external *jihadi* forces. Since its comeback in 2010-11, Boko Haram has engaged in brutal and violent forms of attacks in Nigeria and neighbouring countries. At present, though the military has made substantial progress in dealing with the threat by driving away insurgents from their strongholds, yet the group has been able to execute successful attacks recently. Given its transnational dynamics, the group poses enormous security challenge not only for the state, but also for the region and international community.

As far as India is concerned, the threat has implications for it, as Nigeria has been a strategically important partner for India. Economically, it is the largest trading partner in Africa due to oil based trade links, importing 8-12 percent of crude from Nigeria. It is in India's interest to provide comprehensive support to the Nigerian government and its people. Both sides can cooperate in sub-conventional warfare as far as combating terrorism is concerned. Moreover, managing challenges related to security is feasible if India and Nigeria can politically draw from each other and learn from their best practices on managing diversity and social heterogeneity in terms of designing representative institutions, the federal arrangement and the devolution of powers to ensure social harmony.

Other terror groups operating in the Sahel region not only have implications for the peace and stability of the region, but also for other international actors including India. The way the African states in the Sahel region are becoming breeding grounds of terror groups with transnational networks, concerns are raised that the targets could go beyond Africa. Analysts say that a successful terror attack in the US or Europe, planned in Africa and executed by African extremists is only a matter of time. So also, the possibility that terrorism in India would have its origins in Sahel region of Africa cannot be ruled out in future.

Moreover, the growing competition and collaboration among the Islamic extremist groups in Africa is itself a worrying trend, which does not insulate anyone from being the target. India, on its part, needs to be concerned as it is deepening its partnership with African countries. If one were to look at some of the prominent spectacular attacks in Africa in the recent past, there is a resemblance between the Kenya Westgate mall attack, Mali Radisson

Blu hotel attack, the Burkina Faso hotel attack, and the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai. These attacks were against soft targets in cosmopolitan cities, popular with foreigners.

The alignment of terror groups makes more urgent the need to quickly integrate the continent's security apparatus. Equally important is also the need for African states to strengthen their governance institutions. India needs to support the regional and continent-wide security partnership initiatives undertaken by the AU and the regional bodies like ECOWAS and strengthen counter-insurgency capacity, including the governance institutions of individual countries. It should also scale up its intelligence and counter-terrorism linkages with African countries.

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The Views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

#### ***Endnotes:***

<sup>1</sup> Carlotta Gall, Jihadists Deepen Collaboration in Africa, New York Times January 4, 2016

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