

Is Might Right? Boko Haram, the Joint Military Task Force, and the Global Jihad

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In this paper, I critically examine the ongoing religious terrorism of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, focusing on why the group exists and its growing connection to the global jihad. I evaluate the coercive and conciliatory responses of the Nigerian government to Boko Haram, with particular reference to the Joint Military Task Force. Problematizing a security-only, killing approach to dealing with religious terrorism, I argue that countries fighting terror abroad should learn from the Nigerian experience of fighting Boko Haram that the war on terror begets a vicious cycle of terror and war without end.

Key words: Boko Haram; religious terrorism; Northern Nigeria; global jihad; carrot and stick; joint military task force; non-killing

Introduction

This paper is about the current religious terrorism of a radical Islamist group from northeastern Nigeria that officially calls itself Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, meaning "People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad." However, the group has become known by the name given to it by locals: Boko Haram (BH), which in the Hausa language means "Western education is unlawful." Since its founding in 2002, BH has claimed over 10,000 lives, leaving millions in Nigeria gripped by fear.¹ The group's ultimate goal is to create an Islamic state governed by the supreme law of *sharia*.² Unfortunately, attempts

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at negotiating with BH, including the recent amnesty offer extended to its members, have stalled because of distrust on both sides and the factionalized leadership of the group's different cells.

In this paper, I critically examine the problem of BH in northern Nigeria, focusing on why the group exists and its growing connection to the global jihad of transnational terrorist groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Somali-based al-Shabaab. I evaluate the coercive and conciliatory responses of the Nigerian government to the BH security threat, with particular reference to the special Joint Military Task Force (JTF) and its current offensive strategy against the jihadist group. Problematizing a security-only approach to dealing with religious terrorism, I argue that countries fighting terror should learn from the Nigerian experience of fighting BH that the war on terror only begets a vicious cycle of terror and war without end.

Theoretical Framework: Confronting Terrorism

There is no standard definition of terrorism, as illustrated by Alex Schmid's finding of over 100 different uses of the term.³ However, most definitions contain some common features. Terrorism, including politically or religiously motivated violence, is: (a) intimidatory in intent; (b) aiming to generate fear in a wider audience, and (c) pursued chiefly through the use of violence or psychological weaponry.⁴ In this article, terrorism will be defined in accordance with the 1999 Algiers Convention as an act "calculated or intended to: intimidate, put in fear, force, coerce or induce any government, body, institution, the general public or any segment thereof, to do or abstain from doing any act, or to adopt or abandon a particular standpoint, or to act according to certain principles; or disrupt any public service, the delivery of any essential service to the public or to create a public emergency; or create general insurrection in a State."⁵ Conceived in this way, acts of terrorism can be carried out by states, state actors, non-state actors, groups, or individuals in the pursuit of specific objectives or valued ideals. This definition is especially relevant in the Nigerian context, where the government is inclined to use terror against its own populations.

With regard to how states can deal with terrorist groups, two competing counter-terrorism approaches may be gleaned from existing literature: coercion and conciliation. The crux of the debate is whether states should

use harsh policies to punish terrorists and thus deter future acts, or focus on root causes and reduce incentives to use terrorism.⁶ Phrased alternatively: Do coercive policies deter terrorism, or do they create a vicious cycle of violence? This question, on which there is little consensus, was brought to the fore after the 9/11 attacks.⁷ A coercive approach includes the use of physical force by governments to injure or kill terrorists or their supporters. This approach extends to state terror, assassination, missile strikes, and invasion. Many states subscribe to this coercive approach, which explains Israel's reprisal policy and the United States' global war on terror.⁸ The logic of coercion assumes that the tactic of retaliation against terrorists will discourage future acts. Conversely, states that fail to respond aggressively, or that concede to terrorist demands, acquire a reputation for being soft, thus encouraging terrorists.⁹

In contrast, a conciliatory approach holds that states should address the root causes of terrorism, thereby decreasing the legitimacy of the terrorist's claims and the traction for its cause. States use conciliation to resolve a crisis or to forestall future crises by negotiating with terrorists.¹⁰ Examples of concessions include social reform, the release of prisoners, or negotiation with a state sponsor. Although critics view concessions as capitulation to terrorist demands, this approach in fact includes attempts to persuade groups and their supporters to relinquish terrorism by promising change.¹¹ Opponents of a coercive approach argue that it not only fails to deter terrorism, it actually increases opposition to the government and leads to cycles of violence. Northern Ireland, Israel, and Chechnya illustrate government behavior that not only failed to stop terrorism but actually prolonged violence.¹² Opponents also point to the offensive strategy pursued by the Bush administration in the US, which has too often been "counterproductive and self-defeating,"¹³ jeopardizing international cooperation in the fight against terrorism and providing ammunition for terrorist recruitment in the Middle East and beyond.

Drawing on the conciliation approach, I argue against a security-only strategy of killing by demonstrating that more killing results in more terrorism. Deterrence is not effective against terrorists who are prepared to sacrifice their lives. Specifically, I argue that countries fighting terror abroad, such as the US, the UK, and France, should learn from the Nigerian experience of fighting BH that the war on terror only begets a vicious cycle of terror and spiraling violence with no end in sight. Reliance on hard power

to fight religious terrorism misunderstands the nature of the violence and makes the threat considerably worse. I argue instead for a non-killing approach that identifies the motivations and grievances of terrorist groups and seeks to meaningfully address them.

A non-killing approach includes the concepts of peace (absence of war and conditions conducive to war), nonviolence (psychological, physical, and structural), and ahimsa (non-injury in thought, word, and deed).¹⁴ The sustainability of a non-killing approach is supported by Glenn Paige's ground-breaking non-killing thesis, which cogently demonstrates that less than 0.5 percent of all humans who ever existed actually killed other humans.¹⁵ Paige defines a non-killing society as "a human community, smallest to largest, local to global, characterized by no killing of humans and no threats to kill; no weapons designed to kill humans and no justifications for using them; and no conditions of society dependent upon threat or use of killing force for maintenance or change."¹⁶ The crux of Paige's argument is that extant structures of society do not require lethality as a necessary condition for change or maintenance. This contention is put forward as a challenge and superior alternative to the time-honored belief that lethality is ineluctable in human relations – a belief that continues to (mis)inform the global war on terror.

Radical Islamism, which this paper directly addresses, is a by-product of a number of historical developments, including the social, political, and economic dysfunctionalities of Muslim societies that have blocked these nations from satisfactory development. The shortcomings of these societies created an aperture for extremists to exploit a sense of civilizational humiliation with a re-reading of Islamic history and doctrine that blames and abhors the West. As I will explain later with the case of BH, part of the problem is that jihadist groups are infusing religion into a long-churning brew of grievances about corruption, repression, injustice, and unfair distribution of wealth and power. As Daniel Benjamin argues, "In most Muslim countries there is a genuine rage at appalling governance and corruption – a central grievance of jihadists, who speak of the 'apostate' rulers, thus translating the anger into a religious idiom."¹⁷

A security-only military strategy typically leads to benefits for radical Islamists. They gain critical experience in tactics and create new networks of support as well as social bonds among disparate groups that enable future collaboration. This strategy also gives them opportunities to raise

funds and acquire weapons and other accoutrements. Moreover, the use of military force as a counterterrorism strategy is frequently ill-advised because it is inevitably indiscriminate and often results in the alienation of precisely those individuals in a given community whom we do not want radicalized. Furthermore, military action against terrorist targets frequently results in the death of innocent people, no matter how much care is taken. The foregoing will become more evident when we consider the non-moderated and unaccountable military response to BH terrorism – a response that has caused more harm than good in Nigeria.

Understanding Religious Terrorism

The nexus between religion and terrorism has a long genealogy in Western scholarship. The concept of religious terrorism goes back to David Rapoport's paper¹⁸ analyzing the use of terror in the three monotheistic religions. This seminal paper inspired many similar works that sought to explain "why violence and religion have re-emerged so dramatically at this moment in history and why they have so frequently been found in combination."¹⁹ As Scott Appleby puts it: Why does religion seem to need violence, and violence religion?²⁰ In this strand of literature, religious terrorism has been raised above a simple label to a set of descriptive characteristics and substantive claims that appear to delineate it as a specific "type" of political violence, fundamentally different from previous or other forms of terrorism.²¹

The claim about the special nature of religious terrorism rests on a number of key hypotheses (H), three of which are succinctly depicted in figure 1.

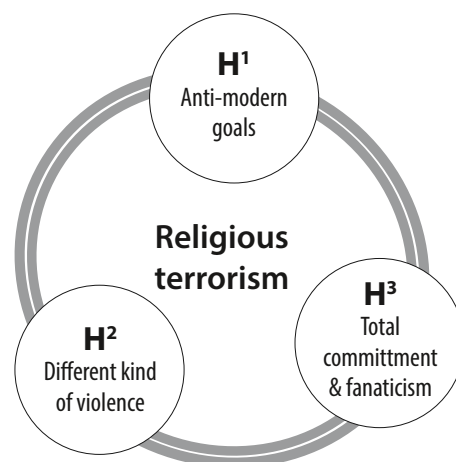


Figure 1. Three Hypotheses of Religious Terrorism

H¹: Religious terrorists have anti-modern goals of returning society to an idealized version of the past and are therefore necessarily anti-democratic and anti-progressive.

Audrey Cronin, for example, argues that “the forces of history seem to be driving international terrorism back to a much earlier time, with echoes of the behavior of ‘sacred’ terrorists... clearly apparent in the terrorist organization such as al-Qaeda.”²² For his part, Mark Juergensmeyer contends that religious terrorists work to “an anti-modern political agenda.”²³ It is further argued that religious terrorists have objectives that are absolutist, inflexible, unrealistic, devoid of political pragmatism, and hostile to negotiation.²⁴ In his excellent article titled “The Origins of the New Terrorism,” Matthew Morgan charges, “Today’s terrorists don’t want a seat at the table; they want to destroy the table and everyone sitting at it.”²⁵ Daniel L. Byman notes of al-Qaeda, “Because of the scope of its grievances, its broader agenda of rectifying humiliation and a poisoned worldview that glorifies jihad as a solution, appeasing al-Qaeda is difficult in theory and impossible in practice.”²⁶ This view is supported by Daniel Benjamin who argues that unlike most terrorist groups, al-Qaeda “eschews incremental gains and seeks no part of a negotiation process; it seeks to achieve its primary ends, including mobilization of a large number of Muslims, through violence.”²⁷

H²: Religious terrorists employ a different kind of violence from that of their secular counterparts.

It is argued that for the religious terrorist, “violence is... a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand,”²⁸ as opposed to a tactical means to a political end. Furthermore, some have suggested that because religious terrorists have transcendental aims, are engaged in a cosmic war, and lack an earthly constituency, they are not constrained in their pedagogy of violence and take an apocalyptic view of violent confrontation: “What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle – cosmic war – in the service of worldly political battles.”²⁹ For this reason, acts of religious terror serve not only as tactics in a political struggle, but also as evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation. Thus, religious terrorists aim for maximum casualties and are willing to use weapons of mass destruction.³⁰ As Magnus Ranstorp puts it, they are “relatively unconstrained in the lethality and the indiscriminate nature

of violence used [because they lack] any moral constraints in the use of violence.”³¹

H³: Religious terrorists have the capacity to evoke total commitment and fanaticism from their members.

It is argued that religious terrorists are characterized by the suspension of doubt and an end-justifies-the-means *weltanschauung* (worldview) – in contrast to the supposedly more measured attitudes of secular groups.³² Mark Juergensmeyer argues that “these disturbing displays have been accompanied by strong claims of moral justification and an enduring absolutism, characterized by the intensity of the religious activists’ commitment.”³³ Moreover, it is suggested that in some cases the certainties of the religious viewpoint and the promises of the next world are primary motivating factors in driving insecure, alienated, and marginalized youths to join religious terrorist groups as a means of psychological empowerment. It is further argued that such impressionable, alienated, and disempowered young people are vulnerable to forms of brainwashing and undue influence by recruiters, extremist preachers, or internet materials.³⁴

In the following paragraphs, I draw on the foregoing hypotheses of religious terrorism to explain BH’s campaign of violence in Nigeria.

Religious Terrorism: Boko Haram – A Case Study

We want to reiterate that we are warriors who are carrying out Jihad (religious war) in Nigeria and our struggle is based on the traditions of the holy prophet. We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that the Muslims can be liberated... We do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities.³⁵

Mohammed Yusuf, born on January 29, 1970, in the village of Girgir in Yobe State, Nigeria, founded BH in 2002 with the goal of establishing a *sharia* government in northern Nigeria’s Borno state. Yusuf established a religious complex in his hometown that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighboring countries enrolled their children. However, the center had ulterior political goals, and soon it was also serving as a recruiting ground for future jihadists to fight the state. BH found support among the impoverished and alienated northern

population, many of whom were attracted by the group's condemnation of the corrupt and apostate ruling elites in Nigeria.³⁶ The group includes members from neighboring Chad and Niger who speak only Arabic. BH has been able to attract more than 280,000 members across northern Nigeria as well as Chad and the Republic of Niger.³⁷

BH's ideology is embedded in radical Salafism – a minority trend within Islam that dates back to the ninth century and whose main features were crystallized in the teachings of a fourteenth-century Islamic scholar, Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). The hallmark of Salafism is a call to modern Muslims to return to the pure Islam of the Prophet Muhammad's generation and the two generations that followed. Muslims of this early period are called al-Salaf al-Salih (the pious forefathers), whence the name Salafi. BH's ideology is durable and has, for some Muslims, a compelling authenticity because of its appropriation of canonic Islamic texts. For example, BH adherents are reportedly influenced by the Qur'anic phrase evoking fanaticism and total commitment (see H³): "Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors."³⁸ Group members view it as their necessary duty and goal to engage in a violent struggle against perceived enemies of Islam, both at home and abroad. Its members see the overthrow of secular governments as justified because their rulers are viewed as accepting or leaning toward the ways of Islam's enemies.

As the name suggests, BH is vehemently opposed to what it sees as a Western-based incursion that erodes traditional customs and values among Muslim communities in northern Nigeria. The group's first leader, Mohammed Yusuf, told the BBC in 2009, "Western-style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our beliefs in Islam."³⁹ Elsewhere, the charismatic leader argued, "Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a *kafir* [infidel] land. The current system is contrary to true Islamic beliefs."⁴⁰ Thus, BH clearly reveals itself as a group with the anti-modern goals of returning society to an idealized version of the past (see H¹).

BH became an ultra-radical group in 2009 following confrontations between the Islamist group and the state's security agency in Bauchi State, which was mandated to enforce a newly introduced law requiring motorcyclists in the entire country to wear safety helmets. The violent confrontation was triggered by a BH funeral procession in Maiduguri

during which BH mourners reneged on the helmet law. Members of an anti-robbery task force, made up of the police and army, opened fire on the BH mourners, killing 17 members in the process. Mohammed Yusuf demanded justice, but “the authorities neither investigated the alleged excessive use of force nor apologized for the shooting.”⁴¹ On July 21, the group’s hideout in Bauchi was also ransacked by state security forces and materials for making explosives were confiscated.

Following this crackdown, the Islamist group mobilized its members for reprisal attacks. On July 26, BH members burned down a police station in Dutsen Tanshi, on the outskirts of Bauchi, resulting in the death of five Boko Haram members and severe injury to several police officers. In response, the military and police raided a mosque and home in Bauchi where BH members had regrouped, killing dozens of the group’s members. The police reported that 52 BH members, two police officers, and a soldier were killed in the violence in Bauchi. Yusuf vowed revenge, saying he was prepared to fight to the death in retaliation for the killing of his followers. True to his promise, the BH leader mobilized his followers for coordinated attacks across Maiduguri, attacking the police stations and homes of police officers, including retired ones. They torched churches and raided the main prison – freeing inmates and killing prison guards.

In response, on July 28, Yusuf’s compound was shelled by the Nigerian army and many of his followers were arrested, with at least several dozen killed in police custody.⁴² On July 29, in Postiskum, state security forces also raided the group’s hideout on the outskirts of the town, killing at least 43 of Yusuf’s followers. The riot was temporarily quelled after Nigerian forces captured and killed Mohammed Yusuf and roughly 1,000 of his followers. Yusuf’s death and the bloodshed of BH’s members drove the movement to transform itself into a network of underground cells with a hidden leadership – a situation that today makes any military solution illusory.⁴³ The movement went dormant for a year before reemerging in 2010 with increasingly sophisticated attacks that were purportedly connected to the growing foreign support of global jihadist groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Somali-based al-Shabaab, as well as the al-Muntada Trust Fund and the Islamic World Society. Far from eliminating the threat of BH, the resort to violence on the part of the Nigerian government ultimately radicalized the Islamist group and drove

its leaders to forge ties with the global jihadist movement as a survival strategy.

BH's modus operandi has involved the use of suicide bombing and gunmen on motorbikes, killing police, politicians, and anyone who criticizes it, including Muslim clerics who disclose information of their whereabouts to state security services. In 2012, BH launched several attacks against police officers, demanding the release of all its prisoners and the prosecution of those responsible for the killing of its founder.⁴⁴ In June and August 2011, BH terrorists bombed the Nigerian police headquarters and the UN Headquarters, both located in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. During the first ten months of 2012 alone, more than 900 people died in attacks by BH – more than in 2010 and 2011 combined.⁴⁵

On July 6, 2013, a group of alleged BH Islamists stormed a boarding school in Yobe State, northeastern Nigeria, burning 29 students and one teacher alive.⁴⁶ Following the horrific murder, Abubakar Shekau, the current BH leader, released a 15-minute video calling for more such attacks. Confirming BH's anti-democratic and anti-progressive stance (see H¹), Shekau unequivocally stated in the video, "The Quran teaches that we must shun democracy, we must shun the constitution, [and] we must shun Western education." In the latest bloodbath in Borno state, a group of BH Islamists are believed to have assassinated 44 people while praying in a mosque. The foregoing attests to the indiscriminate nature of violence used by BH and the lack of any moral constraint (see H²).

Boko Haram and the Global Jihad

One of BH's major ambitions is to become a key player in the global jihad, which is being fought by transnational terrorist groups like the Islamic Maghreb's al-Qaeda, its affiliates in Mali and the entire Sahel, and Somali-based al-Shabaab. The rapidly growing Muslim populations of Africa have been targeted by jihadist groups for recruitment, and parts of the Sahel have become a safe haven for the radicals of the Maghreb. It will not be surprising if Boko Haram's intentions are to exploit conflicted areas and join the *mujahedin* (warriors of the jihad) in foreign and Arab countries like Chechnya and Afghanistan. Members of BH are known to have received training with the Somali-based al-Shabaab. BH members have also fought in Mali alongside groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, and it would be a major

threat to the Egyptian regime and to Israel if they joined jihadist groups in the Sinai Peninsula.

BH has also expanded its propaganda efforts to demonstrate solidarity with al-Qaeda and its affiliates. In July 2010, current BH leader Abubakar Shekau released an online statement praising al-Qaeda and offering condolences to al-Qaeda of Iraq for its loss of Abu Ayyub al Masri and Abu Omar al Baghdadadi, two top al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. In another video released in November 2012, Shekau expressed his full support for the jihad being fought in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, Libya, and Mali. In the video, Shekau delivered his speech in Arabic, which gives the impression that he is appealing to the leaders of al-Qaeda and the wider jihadist family. In the 39-minute video, Shekau repeatedly calls the jihadist fighters “brothers.”⁴⁷ In August 2011, General Carter Ham, Commander of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), claimed that al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab are financing BH, and that both global jihadist terrorist groups shared training and fighters with BH. He described this as “the most dangerous thing to happen not only to the Africans, but to us as well.”⁴⁸ In November of that year, Algerian Deputy Foreign Minister Abdelkader Messahel said he had “no doubts that coordination exists between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda,” citing intelligence reports and common operating methods.⁴⁹

A major shift in BH’s ideology and strategic goals can be seen in the 2011 suicide car bombing of the UN building of Abuja. This was the first time that BH attacked a distinctly non-Nigerian target, following the al-Qaeda attacks of UN targets in Algeria and the al-Shabaab UN attacks in Somalia.⁵⁰ On November 24, 2012, a BH spokesman, Abul Qaqa, confirmed what many had long suspected: “It is true that we have links with al-Qaeda. They assist us and we assist them.”⁵¹ Boko Haram has also confirmed links in Somalia. According to a statement allegedly released by the group, “very soon, we will wage jihad... We want to make it known that our jihadists have arrived in Nigeria from Somalia where they received real training in warfare from our brethren who made that country ungovernable... This time round, our attacks will be fiercer and wider than they have been.”⁵² BH has since increased its suicide operations, with at least 19 suicide bomb attacks on various local targets in Nigeria, including churches, mosques, beer parlors, newspaper offices, government officials, and security forces.⁵³

In 2012, the US State Department added BH's most visible leader, Abubakar Shekau, to the list of specially designated global terrorists. Recently, the US announced a \$7 million bounty for the capture of Shekau, placing him in the top echelon of wanted jihadist leaders.⁵⁴ Four other al-Qaeda leaders in Africa were also included in the "Rewards for Justice" list. The US State Department noted that that BH and al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and Saudi Arabia are cooperating to "strengthen Boko Haram's capacity to conduct terrorist attacks."⁵⁵ If Boko Haram decides to enhance its global activity beyond the boundaries of Nigeria, it will pose a serious threat to the jihadist targets. The Sinai Peninsula as well as the Syrian battlefield could well be a concern for the neighboring countries.

State Responses

Jeffrey Seul once argued that "religion is not the cause of religious conflict; rather for many... it frequently supplies the fault line along which intergroup identity and resource competition occurs."⁵⁶ In line with this perspective, it has been argued that the stark polarization in Nigeria – 75 per cent of northerners live in poverty, compared with 27 per cent of those in the Christian south – is a factor behind local insurrections such as that of Boko Haram. According to a recent report on northern Nigeria by Human Rights Watch, unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and inequalities of wealth are a source of deep frustration in parts of the Muslim north.⁵⁷ The extent of relative deprivation in northern Nigeria has led several analysts to argue that "religious dimensions of the conflict have been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement and inequality are the root causes."⁵⁸

While acknowledging the skillful way in which BH has exploited the extant circumstances of relative deprivation and political grievance in northern Nigeria to promote its vision of turning Nigeria into an Islamic state governed by *sharia*, I argue that the ultra-violent turn BH took should also be traced back to the extrajudicial killing of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and the ongoing arbitrary arrest, torture, and killing of its members by state security forces. Until 2009 BH was seen as radical but not ultra-violent.⁵⁹ The killing of the group's founder under police custody provoked a staunch reaction from BH members who primarily want to settle their scores with the police and army.⁶⁰ In a video that was released in June 2010, Abubakar Shekau – the group's current leader – vowed to avenge the deaths

of its members. In a typical Al-Qaeda-style video, Shekau warned, “Do not think Jihad is over: Rather Jihad has just begun.”⁶¹ It is no coincidence that between January and September 2012, at least 119 police officers lost their lives in suspected BH attacks, more than in 2010 and 2011 combined.⁶²

How has the Nigerian state responded to BH? Two major approaches may be identified: conciliatory and coercive. The former – a rare approach by the Nigerian government – involves political negotiation with all stakeholders in the BH conflict. At the state level, applications of the carrot approach have been few and far between, involving overtures and rapprochements to BH insurgents. In the most recent and noteworthy attempt to negotiate with BH, President Jonathan established a 26-member amnesty-oriented body, the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North. The committee, comprising former and current government officials, religious authorities, and human rights activists, was given a three-month mandate to try to convince BH members to lay down their arms in exchange for a state pardon and social integration.⁶³ However, BH’s supreme leader, Abubakar Shekau, responded to the amnesty entreaties of the Nigerian government by saying that his group has not committed any wrong, and that amnesty would not be applicable to them. Rather, Shekau argued, the Nigerian government was committing atrocities against Muslims. In his words: “Surprisingly, the Nigerian government is talking about granting us amnesty. What wrong have we done? On the contrary, it is we that should grant you [a] pardon.”⁶⁴ Shekau vowed not to stop his group’s jihad to establish Islamic state in Nigeria under a strict form of *sharia* law.⁶⁵

True to his avowal, less than a week after BH rejected Nigeria’s amnesty offer, the jihadist group launched two violent back-to-back attacks in northern Nigeria. In the first attack, BH fighters laid siege to the town of Bama in Borno State, killing 55 people, mostly police and security forces, and freeing over 100 prison inmates. Days later, BH killed 53 people and burnt down 13 villages in central Nigeria’s Benue State.⁶⁶ In the wake of these violent attacks, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in three northern states where BH has been most active – Borno, Adamawa and Yobe – in an attempt to restore order and reclaim control of the territories taken over by the radical group.⁶⁷ According to Jonathan, “What we are facing is not just militancy or criminality, but a rebellion and insurgency by terrorist groups which pose a very serious threat to national unity and

territorial integrity.”⁶⁸ The president vowed to “take all necessary action... to put an end to the impunity of insurgents and terrorists.”⁶⁹ To this end, the Nigerian government established a special Joint Military Task Force (JTF), known as “Operation Restore Order,” to mount an aggressive pursuit of and crackdown on BH members and major hideouts.

It is important to note that this is not the first time the Nigerian government has declared a state of emergency as a result of BH attacks. Following a string of BH bombings across northern Nigeria in late 2011, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency, suspending constitutional guarantees in 15 areas within four northern states. The state of emergency, however, failed spectacularly to stem the tide of violent attacks in the restive region. Nor did coercive regulation issued in April 2012, granting security forces emergency powers to crush the BH threat, succeed in this regard. In fact, during the six months that the state of emergency was in effect, BH carried out more attacks and killed more people than in 2010 and 2011 combined.⁷⁰ The preference for a military solution to BH is hardly surprising if we recall the words of the late Nigerian political scientist, Professor Claude Ake: “More often than not, the postcolonial state in Nigeria presented itself as an apparatus of violence, and while its base in social forces remained extremely narrow it relied unduly on coercion for compliance, rather than authority.”⁷¹

In Nigeria’s largest military deployment since the 1967-70 Civil War, the federal government ordered some 8,000 troops to the troubled northern region in a military offensive against BH. A curfew was imposed on Maiduguri as the JTF used air strikes to target BH strongholds. A blockade was also imposed on the group’s traditional base of Maiduguri in Borno State, in order to reestablish Nigeria’s territorial integrity.⁷² However, far too often, members of the JTF have been accused of killing innocent people in the name of policing terrorism in northern Nigeria. In Borno state, for example, JTF members have resorted to extra-legal killings, dragnet arrests, and intimidation of the hapless Bornu residents.⁷³ Far from conducting intelligence-driven operations, the JTF simply cordoned off areas and carried out house-to-house searches, at times shooting young men in these homes.⁷⁴ These raids have become so frequent that parents have advised their sons to flee as soon as they hear of an attack.

In a series of probing interviews with residents of Maiduguri, Human Rights Watch reported: “During raids into communities soldiers have

set fire to houses, shops, and cars, randomly arrested men from the neighborhood, and in some cases executed them in front of their shops or houses.”⁷⁵ During recent crossfire between members of the JTF and BH fighters in Baga, near Nigeria’s border with Cameroon, up to 187 people were killed and another 77 were injured. But Baga residents have accused the JTF, not BH, of firing indiscriminately at civilians and setting fire to much of the historical fishing town.⁷⁶ The Nigerian authorities rarely brought anyone to justice for these crimes against civilians. One of the problems of using the military and the police in northern Nigeria is that they are national – not local – forces and are therefore unlikely to share ethnic and cultural backgrounds with the local population. Recently, US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a strongly worded statement saying, “We are... deeply concerned by credible allegations that Nigerian security forces are committing gross human rights violations, which, in turn, only escalate the violence and fuel extremism.”⁷⁷ Yet the US is in no credible position to be “deeply concerned” about the use of violence and human rights violations in Nigeria because the US continues to apply a similar strategy in its global war on terror in the Middle East and beyond.⁷⁸

I argue that countries fighting terror abroad, such as the US, the UK, and France, should learn from the Nigerian experience of fighting BH that the war on terror is a war without end, which only begets a vicious cycle of terror. A security-only military approach to fighting terrorism not only precludes democratic culture and attitudes, but further radicalizes the religious terrorist group and strengthens the collective resolve of its members, who are unlikely to compromise (which means betraying their faith). Likewise, threats of violence or prison are rarely an effective deterrent. According to a recent statement by BH leader Abubakar Shekau, “Since we started this ongoing war, which they call state of emergency... in some instances soldiers who faced us turned and ran.”⁷⁹ Shekau’s claims that BH has gained the upper hand in the war contradict the one-sided claim by the Nigerian government that the JTF is winning the war on terror.

In the final analysis, countries fighting terrorism must learn that a declared war on terror has only a limited capacity to make a real difference because “[it] can never address the underlying conditions that can shape those [like BH] who reject the prevailing order and develop radical positions, or opt to use violence in the first place.”⁸⁰ The global war on terror is likely to achieve a pyrrhic victory that will further undermine

governmental authority, embolden the mobilization and spread of radical jihadist groups in Africa, and ultimately force the problem underground to emerge stronger at a later time, as the BH case has demonstrated. What Nigeria has lacked since independence is a viable concept of strategic counterterrorism – a doctrine that will guide our actions, help undermine the recruitment of terrorists, and change the environment they inhabit into an increasingly non-permissive one. An effective counterterrorism policy in Nigeria must go beyond a security-only killing strategy to embed counterterrorism in an overarching national security strategy that appreciates the broader context in which Islamist radicalization occurs and seeks to meaningfully and non-violently alter it. In other words, Nigeria must shift away from a security policy that makes counterterrorism the prism through which everything is evaluated and decided.

A long term strategy that will make Muslim societies less able to serve as incubators of radicalism and will undercut the jihadist appeal must use force sparingly and responsibly. It must aim to address fundamental human needs by incorporating development, security, and respect for human rights. Poverty and unemployment in the Muslim north, coupled with the population's increase and the government's inability to deal effectively with non-state groups, can turn northern states into an ideal recruitment ground for global jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. Finally, there is a need for an intelligence-led strategy to better confront BH's localized terrorist activities and global aspirations. In addition, there is a necessity for greater international cooperation in order to identify and intersect BH's ever-increasing external funding and weapons sources as well as the training that is crucial to the group's operational capabilities.

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