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The message and methods of Boko Haram

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Abstract
Boko Haram emerged from a tiny group of Islamist militants who openly challenged the Nigerian state between December 2003 and October 2004 without success. Thereafter, the remains of the group joined Mohammed Yusuf, who had returned from self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia and proselytised in Borno until 2009, when the movement turned openly violent and was militarily suppressed. The group evolved, remodelled itself, and changed its tactics and strategies after a year’s lull, essentially in response to the state’s high-handed and brutal force. It moved from the dawah (proselytisation) phase marked by fiery speeches to the armed struggle phase in July 2009. Following a severe military crackdown and changing sub-regional dynamics in the Sahel, Boko Haram increasingly adopted the tactics of global Salafi Jihadist groups, including targeted assassinations, suicide bombings, and hostage taking. Although it emerged as a home-grown group with local grievances, developments in Mali and the international scene are increasingly drawing it into regional and global jihadi networks.

Introduction
Boko Haram is an Islamist movement which operated in north-eastern Nigeria and came to prominence in 2009. It was a fringe group under the leadership of Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, a fiery scholar resident in Maiduguri, who had not fully committed to violence before 2009. Through subtle and open harassment, Boko Haram was goaded into an open confrontation with the Nigerian state and violently suppressed in July 2009. Thereafter, it went underground, rebuilt, and resurfaced in October 2010 with a remarkable prison break at Bauchi and has since changed its tactics to targeted assassinations, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings, and massive deployment of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne IEDs, and, lately, kidnapping and hostage taking.

The message of the movement has transformed over the years. Before 2009, it was characterised by the blistering speeches of its leader Mohammed Yusuf. This period was characterised by proselytisation (dawah), which included verbal as-
assaults on secular authority, both traditional and modern – democratic. However, from 2010 onwards, Boko Haram committed itself to asymmetric warfare. Since its re-emergence the group had tried to mimic and adopt the tactics and strategies of global Salafist movements such as Al-Qaeda. Although heavily influenced by the message of Al-Qaeda and external developments, Boko Haram’s grievances remained local at inception; however, there have been attempts to link local grievances to international developments in Mali and beyond.

Three distinct and yet overlapping phases can be discerned in the evolution of Boko Haram. The first phase is what can be termed the Kanama phase (2003-05), when a militant jihadist group waged war on the Nigerian state but was repelled with casualties on both sides. This group was led by Muhammad Ali, a Nigerian who was radicalised by jihadi literature in Saudi Arabia and was believed to have fought alongside the mujahideen in Afghanistan. The second phase began with the collapse of the Kanama uprising and ended with the suppression of Boko Haram proper in July 2009. This period, which can be dubbed the dawah phase, was devoted to intensive proselytisation, recruitment, indoctrination, and radicalisation of its members. This phase involved extensive criticism of the extant secular system; debates with opposing ulama (clerics) on the propriety or otherwise of Western education, Westernisation, democracy, and secularism; and unceasing criticism of the corruption and bad governance under Governor Ali Modu Sheriff (2003-2011) of Borno State as well as the conspicuous consumption and opulence of the Western-educated elite in the midst of poverty. The third phase began with the 2009 suppression of the movement and the killing of its leadership in gory and barbaric form by Nigerian security agencies. Boko Haram went underground, re-organised, and resurfaced in 2010 with a vengeance. They not only targeted their perceived opponents, but indiscriminately attacked security officials, politicians associated with the ruling All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) government in Borno State, and resorted to bombing high profile targets in Abuja such as the Nigerian Police Headquarters as well as UN offices, in June and August 2011 respectively. As the military crackdown intensified, they became desperate and more militant, thereby resorting to more desperate measures, which they had despised in the past, such as burning of school buildings, attacking telecommunications base stations, killing and kidnapping of foreigners, slaughtering as opposed to shooting of opponents, and killing of health officials at routine vaccination clinics, as well as random shooting of pupils and teachers at schools.

This chapter attempts a reconstruction of the message and methods of Boko Haram before and after 2009, indicating the ebbs, flows, and nuances, as well as the contours of both the message and the methods. Boko Haram emerges as an amoebic group, continuously shaping and remodelling itself and its message to changing local and international developments.
Historical background

Nigeria’s pre-colonial history and mode of incorporation into the global capitalist system under British colonial rule determined, to a large extent, the pattern and development of its geo-cultural and religious influences. The northern areas of the country are predominantly Muslim due to centuries of contact with Muslim North Africa through trans-Saharan trade, the agency of the Kanem-Borno empire prior to the nineteenth century, and the Sokoto Caliphate since the 1804 jihad. In contemporary times, modern means of mass communication and globalisation have opened up the country to foreign influences at an incredibly rapid rate. The southern part of the country is predominantly Christian, with a substantial Muslim population. This is partly due to prolonged contact with European influences dating back to the fifteenth century. However, there are substantial and vibrant minorities and animists in both regions. Colonial policies of divide-and-rule reinforced perceptions of North-South separateness, thereby not only blocking the emergence of a pan-Nigerian movement against colonial rule, but also fossilising the differences and separateness. The emergence and consolidation of a tripodal regional structure and ethno-regional political parties in the late 1940s solidified these positions. These regional identities and policies continue to shape Nigerian politics and governance to this day (Osaghae 2002).

Muslim identity and thought in Nigeria derive from the Sufi brotherhoods of Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, primarily as a result of the historical role of the Kanem-Borno and Sokoto caliphates in the spread of Islam. The Sufi orders and the *Izalatul Bidi’a wa Ikhamatis Sunnah* (People Committed to the Removal of Innovations in Islam; hereafter Izala) are the two dominant contemporary Muslim foci of identity. The disdain towards and fear of *boko* (Western education) arose from its historically close association with the colonial state and Christian missionaries. This also suited colonial educational policy well, as the British had no intention of widespread education anyway. The aim of colonial education, particularly in northern Nigeria, was to maintain the existing status quo by “imparting some literacy to the aristocratic class, to the exclusion of the commoner classes” (Tukur 1979: 866). By the 1930s, colonial education had produced a limited cadre of Western-educated elite, who were conscious of their education and were yearning to play a role in society. Mainly children of the aristocratic class, the type of education they received was “different from the traditional education in their various societies, and this by itself was enough to mark them out as a group” (Kwanashie 2002: 50). This new education enabled them to climb the social and economic ladder over and above their peers who had a different kind of education, Quranic education. This was the origin of the animosity and distrust between the traditionally educated and Western-educated elite in northern Nigeria. Though subordinate to the Europeans, these educated elite were perceived as
collaborators by their Arabic-educated fellows. Thus the antagonism towards Western education continues in many northern Nigerian communities, which have defied government campaigns for school enrolment to this day. Mohammed Yusuf simply resurrected and built on an existing historical narrative.

Evolution of Boko Haram

The first open challenge to government authority in this area was by a tiny group of people who withdrew from the urban landscape of Maiduguri to rural Kanama in the Yunusari local government area of Yobe State in north-eastern Nigeria in December 2003. They referred to themselves as the “Nigerian Taliban” (sic). Their choice of rural Kanama as camp was made with an eye for military details. This site was carefully chosen for its remoteness and defensibility. The Kanama camp was forested and ensconced between two bodies of water near the Nigeria–Niger border. Trenches were dug and camouflaged across the only two access roads from Kanama and the exit road to Niger Republic, and sandbags were used to reinforce the defences. The militants then launched attacks on police stations and government buildings and generally wreaked havoc on the Yunusari, Tarmuwa, Borsari, Geidam, and Damaturu local government areas of Yobe State between 21 December 2003 and 1 January 2004.

Between January and September 2004, this tiny group resurfaced and terrorised the inhabitants of Damaturu, the Yobe State capital and Damboa, Bama, and Gwoza in neighbouring Borno State, attacking police stations and attempting prison breaks (Cook 2011: 10). They finally took a last stand atop the Mandara Mountains, from where they were dislodged by the Nigerian military using artillery shells (ibid.). In October 2004, they took 12 policemen hostage in Kala Balge and not much was heard of the captives for a long time.

Members of this group were mostly young people in their twenties. This was a very diverse group, which also included females assigned domestic chores such as cooking and fetching firewood and water. Some of them were children of notable public figures, including a nephew of the then serving Governor of Yobe State, a son of the secretary to Borno State government, and five children of a local wealthy contractor.

Mohammed Yusuf was neither an active physical participant nor a prominent figure at Kanama. However, he shared the same ideology as the group. The re-

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1 Interview: Anonymous, security officer who took part in the investigations at Kanama, 11 April 2010.
2 Nephew to Bukar Abba Ibrahim, Governor of Yobe State (1999-2007), now a serving senator; son of Abbagana Terab, secretary to the Borno State government; and five sons of Alhaji Kambar Adam. Interview: Anonymous, security officer who took part in the investigations at Kanama, 11 April 2010.
3 Mohammed Yusuf’s role along with Abu Umar and Ibrahim Abdulganiyu was talent spotting, recruitment, and indoctrination of members; however, he escaped to Saudi Arabia and remained there throughout the uprising. Interview, Audu Maisaje, Maiduguri, 13 February 2010.
mainder of those who survived the Kanama misadventure joined Mohammed Yusuf upon his return from exile in Saudi Arabia in 2005 to swell the group. The survivors of Kanama became the hawks within the Yusufiyya movement. Muhammad Ali, the leader of this incipient group, was in part responsible for initiating Mohammed Yusuf into militant jihadi ideology and world view. Yusuf’s conversion from the mainstream Islam prevalent in his area of operation to the fringe Islamic movement which he nurtured and led occurred c. 2005. Even though Muhammad Ali was the dominant influence in the indoctrination of Mohammed Yusuf, it was the years under Sheikh Ja’afar Mahmud Adam that radicalised as well as apparently legitimised the dawah. This largely accounts for the sense of betrayal and the stupendous energy expended in attempts to dissuade Yusuf from his new-found ideology and chosen course by very prominent Wahhabi scholars such as Ja’afar Mahmud Adam, Sheikh Muhammad Abba Aji, and Imam Ali Gabchiya. Mohammed Yusuf usually agreed with Sheikh Ja’afar on the shortcomings and baselessness of his position in private disputations but reverted to his original position as soon as he conferred with his followers.

The dawah phase

The period between the Kanama fiasco and the violent suppression of Boko Haram in July 2009 may be referred to as the second or dawah phase. Mohammed Yusuf returned from his self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia after a rapprochement with the state, brokered by Borno State deputy governor, Adamu Shettima Dibal and Sheikh Ja’afar Mahmud Adam, during the 2005 pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. According to Sheikh Ja’afar, Mohammed Yusuf had assured them that he was not a party to the Kanama uprising and swore never to espouse such violent jihadi ideology. This was the basis upon which Mohammed Yusuf was permitted to return to Nigeria, where he continued to preach in and around Maiduguri. At this time and up to the July 2009 crushing by the Nigerian state, the Yusufiyya movement had no official name for itself. It referred to itself as dawah, identified its mission as a return to the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama’a (Adherents to the Sunnah and the Community of Muslims), and referred to its members as “brothers”. The first reference to its current preferred name of Ahlus Sun-

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4 Interview, Ali Mowar, Maiduguri, 10 November 2009.
5 Interview with several Wahhabi scholars in Maiduguri between 2009 and 2011.
6 Sheikh Ja’afar Mahmud Adam, taped sermon on his relationship with Mohammed Yusuf, dated 6 June 2006. This tape was released by Mohammed Yusuf. However, the tape must have been released by Ja’afar earlier, probably in 2005. Copy in my possession.
7 This was the name by which they were known. They later adopted the name Jama’atu Ahlus Sunnah Lidda’awati wal Jihad (People Committed to the Removal of Innovation and Jihad), as against the popular but derisive Boko Haram, which they abhor.

The *dawah* is a major feature of radical Islam in the Muslim world. It is, in the words of Emmanuel Sivan (2003: 27),

[an] Islamist term which denotes a combination of propaganda, education, medical and welfare action – and its practitioners. Yet the *da’awa* has an importance beyond that of being a possible cradle for violence. It is bringing about change in many Muslim societies, and sometimes plays a role – albeit indirect – in politics.

Mohammed Yusuf had adopted the *dawah*, a major plank of Islamic jihadi strategy, very early in his peripatetic career. The narratives of the movement and the counter narratives were all developed at this stage in the evolution of the movement.

The narratives of Boko Haram

The message of Boko Haram, as outlined by Mohammed Yusuf, derived from and fed into the extant discourse and ideology of Islamism worldwide. Boko Haram narratives were framed within the radical Islamic discourse with which Mohammed Yusuf had become conversant. The main narratives of the sect, as outlined in Yusuf’s sermons, were distributed widely throughout northern Nigeria via the Islamist media of choice (audio tapes) and through open-air sermons. The rejection of secularism, democracy, Western education, and Westernisation were the major planks of the narratives.

The rejection of secularism and the pursuit of its replacement by Shariah is a current in radical Islam that goes back to the fourteenth century Damascus scholar Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328 CE). Ibn Taymiyyah wrote much on jihad and even elevated it above the Islamic pillars of fasting and pilgrimage (Bukay 2006: 4). Many modern scholars have used his *fatwas* (rulings) urging Muslims to rise against the Mongols to justify suicide bombings today (*ibid.*). However, the rejection of Western democracy partly derives from the same rejection of secularism but was further sharpened by the Saudi Arabian establishment’s aversion to democracy’s subversive element and the potential threat it could pose to the monarchy if unchecked. Therefore, Saudi scholars such as Sheikh Bakr Ibn Abdallah Abu Zaid (1944-2008) consistently attacked democracy and the freedoms it flaunted as anti-Islamic. Incidentally, none of Yusuf’s opponents in the various debates took him up on the issue of democracy, therefore making its un-Islamic nature look settled. They all concentrated on the issue of Western education, Westernisation, and the propriety or impropriety of working for government institutions.

The *Yusufiyaa dawah* was built around a close-knit group of followers, who believed in the justness of their cause and offered unalloyed loyalty to their lead-
er. Mohammed Yusuf believed in what he preached and constantly exhorted his followers that the road will be rough and tough, and only a select few who persevere and are rightly guided by Allah will make it. In a sermon delivered on 30 June 2006, he said:

"In this *dawah* we agreed that we are going to suffer like Bilal\(^9\) was dragged on the ground, just like Ammar Ibn Yasir\(^10\) was tortured, just like a spear was thrust unto Summayyah’s vagina.\(^11\) These are trials we are awaiting ... These are the hurdles we want to cross. Anyone who dies in the process goes to Paradise. This is our *dawah*.

He prepared the minds of his followers for possible consequences of their decision thus:\(^12\)

"In the process they will abuse you, call you names and some of you may even die. They will shoot some of you, and we will just pray “may Allah give you *aljanna*” [Paradise] and proceed without any qualms. Can we endure? We ought to endure. May Allah give us the will to endure? This is how our *dawah* is. Patience: this is what we need, brothers. And perseverance upon the truth. Allah is watching us. Victory is certain. What we lack are the helpers. We are not yet primed for victory, but we are working towards getting ready for victory. This is what we are looking for, brothers. This is an incipient *dawah*, but it cannot be crushed. It cannot be killed. If we really stand by what the Prophet says we should stand by, even if we die in the process, this *dawah* will continue – even after a hundred years. Once the truth comes out, you\(^13\) are in trouble.

The main planks of Yusuf’s narratives were framed, though not exclusively, around the following issues or variants of them: (1) the concept of *taghut* (idolatry), including secularism, democracy, and partisan politics; (2) Western education and Westernisation; (3) working for an un-Islamic government; and (4) repudiation of the charge of Kharijism levelled against them by the local *ulama*, especially his former colleagues in the Wahhabi group in Borno. The fight with the local Borno Izala in the run-up to the 2009 crisis was extremely acrimonious, but is outside the scope of this chapter.

The concept of *taghut* and its rejection and replacement by Shariah is a current in radical Islamic discourse that goes back to Ibn Taymiyyah, the scholar after whom the *Yusufiyya* named their mosque, *Markaz Ibn Taymiyyah*.\(^14\) Ibn Taymiyyah was a puritan Salafi scholar, who strove to ensure Islam’s adherence to Shariah, eradicate alien innovations, and rejuvenate correct Islamic thought and practice. Ibn Taymiyyah’s ruling on the Mongols has infused radical Islamic move-

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\(^8\) Audio tape, dated 30 June 2006, in Hausa language. All translations are mine.

\(^9\) Bilal Ibn Rabah al-Habashi (580-640 CE), an African slave companion of the Prophet Mohammed, who endured serious torture upon his conversion to Islam but still remained steadfast.

\(^10\) Another convert and companion of the Prophet, who along with his mother, Summayyah, was tortured for his conversion.

\(^11\) Summayyah bint Khayyat, mother to the aforementioned Ammar Ibn Yasir. She did not survive the tortures and is considered the first Muslim martyr.

\(^12\) Muhamed Yusuf sermon, audio tape, dated 30 June 2006.

\(^13\) Reference to his adversaries, which at this time included Sheikh Ja’afer Mahmud Adam, the staunchest critic of Mohammed Yusuf in his lifetime.

\(^14\) Ibn Taymiyyah Centre.
ments from Hassan al-Banna to Osama bin Laden (Euben & Zaman 2009). Mohammed Yusuf was heavily influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah, as seen by the copious references to him in his only book (Yusuf 2009a) and his sermons.

Quoting copiously from Ibn Taymiyyah, Mohammed Yusuf describes as *taghut* (idolatry) any form of executive, legislative, or judicial function derived from a secular constitution rather than from Islamic Shariah law. This is at the root of his opposition to secularism, democracy, and partisan politics as practised in Nigeria, and it led him on a collision course with Nigerian authorities on several occasions, culminating in the 2009 crisis. As far as he was concerned, fidelity to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and subjecting oneself to the institutions created by it amount to unbelief.

Those who formulate evil laws in their parliaments have made themselves partners to Allah, whether or not they feel it, whether or not they agree to this or disagree, whether or not they meant it ... Those who follow the legislative [sic] system and agree to take their cases to these courts are in agreement with *taghut* and are idolaters. (Yusuf 2009a: 66)

Even the symbolic bowing to the mace in the legislature did not escape Mohammed Yusuf’s (2009a: 67) censure, who insisted:

Parliamentarians and members of assemblies have combined between [sic] them making themselves gods and ascribing partners to Allah. This is because their mace is their object of worship in various ways such as bowing to it, subjecting themselves to it, loving it and using it as a symbol of *shirk* (apostasy), as they do not pass any bill or make decisions without it. [Without the mace] such decisions are unacceptable and has [sic] no legal backing.

Therefore, in Mohammed Yusuf’s conception, anyone who superintends or abides by the laws and regulations within Nigeria’s secular system is an unbeliever *simpliciter*. This was the cause of the protracted and often acrimonious debate with the Izala in the run-up to the 2009 violence.

The rejection of Western democracy derives from the same rejection of secularism but was further sharpened by the Saudi Arabian establishment’s aversion to democracy’s subversive streak and the threat it posed to the Saudi monarchy if unleashed. Saudi scholars such as Sheikh Bakr Ibn Abu Zaid consistently attacked democracy and the freedoms it flaunted as anti-Islamic. Mohammed Yusuf was heavily influenced by the writings of Saudi-based scholars such as Bakr Ibn Abu Zaid, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Abd-Allah Ibn Baaz (1910-99), and Sheikh Muhammad al-Amin ash Shanqiti (1907-73). As mentioned before, all of Yusuf’s opponents side-stepped the issue of democracy being un-Islamic, thereby making the issue appear incontestable or settled.

For the same reason that a government not based on Shariah is illegal, serving such a government is also illegitimate. Yusuf (2009a: 11) said:

Our call refuses employment under the government which does not rule by what Allah has revealed such as the French law, the American law, the British law or any other constitution or system that goes against the teachings of Islam and negates the Qur’an and Sunnah.
The legality or otherwise of Western education (Hausa: boko) and of serving in government became the main points of contention and debate with the Izala preachers. Yusuf was categorical that boko and serving the extant government were abhorrent and could lead to unbelief. When pressed to the wall in the debates with Isa Ibrahim Ali Pantami (Pantami-Yusuf 2006) and Idris Abdul Aziz Bauchi, Mohammed Yusuf was definitive that they are haram (“forbidden”). Among types of knowledge which he decreed as haram are the physical and applied sciences, which deal with subjects such as Darwinism, evolution, and rainfall.

The rejection of Western education and Westernisation were the twin pillars which defined the movement. There exists a strand of anti-Western education views in Islamist discourse, but its trenchant manifestations are relatively new. Many prominent leaders of the Islamist movement in other parts of the Muslim world, such as Sayed Qutb (1906-66) and Hassan al-Banna (1906-49) in Egypt and Abu’l-Al’a Mawdudi (1903-79) in Pakistan, were trained in modern secular institutions and not traditional madrassahs (Euben & Zaman 2009: 10).

The aversion to Western education was derived in part from local conditions in northern Nigeria, and in part from the views of Saudi scholars, including Sheikh Bakr Ibn Abu Zaid. Asked what his views on Western education were in the debate with Sheikh Isa Pantami, Mohammed Yusuf responded thus:

There are three perspectives on knowledge in Islam. The first is knowledge which is in line with what the Quran and the Hadith taught. The second perspective is where such knowledge differs with what the Quran and the Hadith contain. The third is a neutral perspective – which neither contradicts nor supports the Quran and Hadith; for as the Prophet said in a Hadith relating to People of the Book – “If they bring to you anything agreeable to the Quran, accept it; but if they bring anything that contradicts Islam, reject it; and if they bring anything that neither contradicts nor supports the Quran, it is your choice to accept or reject it.” Well, this is the perspective I accept. If any form of knowledge is to be pursued for its sake, not following the structure of any government form of education, then I have my own reservations. (CD, Pantami-Yusuf Debate, 2006)

Mallam Yusuf is clear about the colonial origins of Western education. He argues:

Western education is the body of knowledge that came to us through European colonialists, and includes medicine, technology, geography, physics and so on. And of course the English language. They can all be used if they do not clash with the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and we can teach these subjects to our own children in our own schools, so long as they do not contradict Islamic teachings. If they do, then we should discard them. (CD, Pantami-Yusuf Debate, 2006)

There are some subjects, such as geography, geology, and sociology, which Mohammed Yusuf categorically says are forbidden (haram).

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15 This DVD was created in February 2008, and the debate may have taken place in January or February of the same year (Adamu 2012: 22).
I have a book that discusses the knowledge of geography, geology, and sociology. These branches of knowledge are not knowledge but full of unbelief. Even those studying it are aware if they are fair to Allah, except if they haven’t studied Islam. If you have read geography, you’ll know that in geography there is danger. If you have studied Islam, you’ll know, whoever you are, that in sociology there is danger. (Yusuf tape, 30 June 2006)

An unrepentant and fiery Yusuf insists that Western education amounts to unbelief:

We are ready to debate any one on this creed. Western education is destructive. We didn’t say knowledge is bad but that the unbelief inside it is more than its usefulness. I have English books in my possession which I read regularly. I didn’t say English amounts to unbelief but the unbelief contained therein and the polytheism inside. In the process of becoming educated, you become a mushrik [idolater]. This is our only fear … Destruction is destruction, whoever it comes from. Because it is the white man that brought it, does it amount to civilisation? Yes, our own is traditional, as you call it, but yours is ‘shirkasiation’.16 (Yusuf tape, 30 June 2006)

The charge of Kharijism, levelled against them by the local Izala group, was the most painful and apparently distasteful to Boko Haram. The spirited attempt to repudiate this charge was perhaps the main reason that compelled Mohammed Yusuf to write his book Hazih Aqeedatun wa Minhaju Da’awatuna.17 Both the charge and the repudiation did not seriously enter the debates, since most of the debates took place in 2006, three years before the allegations became public knowledge. The allegations of Kharijism emerged in the debates and audio-taped responses in the run-up to the July 2009 eruption of violence in Maiduguri. It is remarkable to note that the charge of Kharijjism was mainly a local affair. However, the ease with which they label other Muslims as unbelievers, the lack of distinction between sin and unbelief, the quarrelsome and predisposition to easily kill for even minor infractions – all these mirror Khariji inclinations.

By early 2009 Mohammed Yusuf had openly attacked the local Izala ulama for hobnobbing with the corrupt and kleptocratic government of Governor Ali Modu Sheriff of Borno State. Yusuf had on numerous occasions addressed Governor Ali Sheriff as taghut and condemned the excesses of the government as un-Islamic and autocratic. The ulama that were patronised by and in the good books of the government were equally chastised for serving the kuffur (non-believing) government. Essentially, for this reason the local Izala, led by Mallam Bashir Mustafa (alias Kashar’ra), dubbed Boko Haram as Kharijite, especially because they easily label any sinner an unbeliever. The characterisation as Kharijites le-

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16 Derived from shirk, the Arabic word for apostasy or unbelief.
17 Translated as “This is our belief and method of call” by A. S. Abdul-Mumini, who has graciously allowed me to use his translations, which are still in progress. Adamu (2012) translates the same work as “This is our manifesto and our path”.

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The repudiation of this charge of Kharijism was the subject of many sermons and a book. Mohammed Yusuf says in the preface to *Aqeedatun*:

> When I saw some people talking about us and our call attempting to relate us to some beliefs – which Allah knows we are innocent of – such as al-Khawarij, Shi’ite, Quraniyun, or some secret groups … I set out to explain our belief and method of call/propagation because this is what explains the way for us and for anyone who wants fairness for himself and for others.

> I have entitled the book “This is Our Belief and Method of Call”, and in it attempted to explain what we believe in regarding Allah, His Angels, Books, Messengers, the Last Day, destiny (good or bad). I explained in it that we are together with Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’a (mainstream Islam) in the principles of belief and method of worship and conduct and Shari’ah. This is social justice: that a person expresses himself and his belief, conduct and method of his predecessors. (Yusuf 2009a: 10)

And he chastised his opponents for the wrong accusations thus:

> It is not fair for someone else, unrelated to him, who has neither heard from him nor read his book or treatise, to relate him to any belief that person wants. This is injustice and it is unfair and Islam prohibits it. (Yusuf 2009a: 10)

In spite of spirited attempts to dispel the accusation of Kharijism, it has stuck. Developments since the killing of Mohammed Yusuf and the targeted killing of Muslim ulama and many others seem to have confirmed Boko Haram’s Kharijite tendencies.

Government service was another interesting area of discourse on which disagreement with the Izala came to the fore. Yusuf likened working for an un-Islamic government not based on Shariah as amounting to unbelief. This was the source of a polemical debate with the Izala, who even though better armed with proofs and evidence could neither convince Mohammed Yusuf nor dissuade his members because of the widespread disenchantment with government. The important issue was not who had better reasoning but the appeal of the message. In this, Mohammed Yusuf had the upper hand because he was not only a gifted demagogue and persuasive debater, but the government was perceived by most citizens to be corrupt and insensitive.

In part because of their puritan views, Boko Haram have perceived Christians and those Muslims who do not share their world view as enemies, and therefore legitimate targets of attack. Boko Haram has been attacking Christians and their places of worship and creating social tension and disharmony between Christians and Muslims in the northern states of Nigeria, and between northerners and southerners. Some southerners perceive Boko Haram as a mechanism for Islam-

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18 The Kharijites (Arabic: Khawarij, sing. Khariji), literally “those who went out”, is a generic term for Muslim dissenters in the early history of Islam. They challenged the authority of Caliph Ali Ibn Abu Talib. They are usually known for their extreme position of declaring other Muslims unbelievers at the slightest transgression and thereby justifying their killing.
ising the country. The leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has also seen the insurgency as a ploy to impose Shariah law and Islam on the country. According to Human Rights Watch (2012: 44), Boko Haram attacked at least 18 churches and killed 127 Christians between 2010 and 2012. These figures may be understated, as a Christian leader told Human Rights Watch that, in Borno State alone, not fewer than 142 Christians were killed between 7 June 2011 and 17 January 2012 in what appears to be a “systematic plan of violence and intimidation” (HRW 2012: 44). The main aim of Boko Haram in killing Christians is to “start a full scale war between the Muslims and the Christians” (ibid. 45). It seems their ploy has worked, as CAN seems to blame Muslims and Muslim leaders for the actions of Boko Haram.

While Boko Haram undoubtedly attack Christians, there are rogue elements acting on their own that are also attacking Christians using Boko Haram-style tactics. The case of Lydia Joseph and the “Miya Barkate Eight” in Bauchi State indicate that some Christian elements also attack churches in the name of Boko Haram, especially in areas with a history of inter-religious violence, either to stir up discontent or to settle scores due to intra-religious disputes. On 29 August 2011, Lydia Joseph was apprehended while trying to burn St. John’s Cathedral in Bauchi.19 Similarly, on 9 January 2012, eight young men, all Christians, were apprehended attempting to bomb the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) at Miya Barkate in Bauchi State.20 This could have successfully passed as a Boko Haram attack, and some Boko Haram “spokesman” might even have claimed responsibility if it had succeeded. In spite of the fact that the perpetrators were caught in the act, Rev. Lawi Pokti, the Bauchi State CAN chairman, absolved his men of responsibility. However, he confirmed that there was an argument within the church over the location of its headquarters between Tilden Fulani and Miya Barkate.21

The national leadership of CAN seems to fuel the crisis. Fortunately, Christian leaders in the North, especially Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah and Bishop Josiah Idowu Fearon, have continuously called for restraint against reprisal attacks. Bishop Kukah condemned the “grand standing, demagoguery, rave and rant” by some religious leaders. He asked rhetorically:

When Christians or Muslims claim self-defense, are they replacing the Commander-in-Chief of [all] the Armed Forces of Nigeria? Do these religious leaders who make such calls have a judiciary to try suspects, or a Barracks/Posts to hold suspects? Do these religious leaders be-

21 Ibid.
lieve they can resolve political and administrative problems of law enforcement and justice? Or are they calling on their people to take the laws into their hands? (Kukah 2012)

Like most issues in Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has been politicised along ethnic, regional, and religious lines. The recent withdrawal of the Catholic Church from CAN may not be unconnected with the open partisanship and inflammatory statements of CAN President Ayo Oritsejafor, who has fanned the embers of hatred rather than seeking solutions. The Catholic Church gave as its reasons for withdrawal the “polarizing statements of some Christian leaders” and the need to “promote Christian unity and peaceful coexistence with Christians and non-Christians alike”, an obvious reference to the quarrelsome leadership of Oritsejafor.22

The dynamics of Islamic radicalisation

The drivers of radicalisation of Islamic groups include both internal and external developments. Although the grievances of Boko Haram are largely local, its major influences have been foreign. The influential scholar that most shaped the thinking of Mohammed Yusuf, as mentioned earlier, was Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah. The basic message of radical Islam, whether in the Middle East, North Africa, or northern Nigeria, is the same: it is the duty of Muslims to revolt against and change apostate rulers and governments in order to help re-establish a proper Islamic state. The main differences among radical groups are in the methods and not the ideals.

Internal factors of Islamic radicalisation in Nigeria go back to the onset of colonial rule, when Islam became the focal point of opposition to the British takeover of the Sokoto Caliphate. British occupation of the caliphate began with the sacking of Bida in 1897 and was completed with the occupation of Sokoto in 1902. By 1903 all emirates had been conquered, even though there were still pockets of resistance. For the leadership of the caliphate there was the problem of how to respond to this new anomalous situation – by resistance, collaboration, or emigration – while for the British the problem was the difficulty of administering an Islamic society on the basis of a secular and non-Islamic ideology.

On the debate as to whether to collaborate or emigrate, the Gwandu jurist Ahmad Ibn Sa’id compared the situation in Sokoto to the Qaramanthian invasion of Mecca in 930 CE and the Mongolian invasion of Baghdad in 1258 CE and concluded that an interim compromise with the colonial state was possible as long as they did not interfere openly with practice of the faith. Collaboration with the British, he posited, did not amount to unbelief “as long as the resident does not

himself become an unbeliever. It is disobedience if done voluntarily, but permissible if done under compulsion” (cited by Al-Hajj 1973: 162; See Adeleye: 1968). Thus, for most of the early colonial period a policy of non-cooperation, known as taqiyya (“dissimulation”), became the main pillar of resistance against colonial rule. After 1906, most emirs who had not been removed had grudgingly accepted their subordination.

In spite of the acquiescence of the emirs, the citizenry still remained sceptical of British intentions, and avoidance remained the preferred policy. This partly accounts for the disdain for Western education. The need to domesticate Islam and administer a Muslim society through indigenous institutions rather than by brute force was the most important consideration in the introduction of the colonial policy of indirect rule. The disdain for Western education is as old as the imposition of colonial rule, but the resort to violence to overturn it is entirely new.

The birth of the Wahhabi inspired Izala in 1978 under Sheikh Mahmud Abubakar Gumi (1922-92) was a major impetus in the radicalisation of Muslims in northern Nigeria. Although not anti-establishment, the Izala became critical of traditional rulers, of corruption in government, and of declining moral values of the society, without calling for a wholesale overthrow of the system.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty and established an Islamic republic in its place in spite of US resistance, became another major source of Islamic radicalisation. It created the impression and instilled in many Muslim youths the possibility and practicability of using Islam as a vehicle for political and social transformation. The 1980s witnessed a proliferation of Iranian revolutionary literature in Nigeria, which inspired the Islamic Movement of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky. The revolutionary ideas of the Islamic Movement derived from Sayed Qutb’s famous jihadi book *Al-Ma’alim fi’l-Tariq*, which has been rendered in English under the title of *Milestones* (1964) and which became a basic primer for its membership. Qutb’s thesis of irreconcilable difference between Islam and jahiliyya (pre-Islamic unbelief) was central to shaping the group’s thought. Many students who were radicalised in the Islamic Movement later on ended up in mainstream Sunni groups.

The introduction of Shariah law, with a full range of criminal law punishments, in Zamfara State and its whirlwind adoption by eleven other northern Nigerian states since 2000 accelerated the pace of radicalisation. The protagonists of Shariah created the impression that it would lead to a qualitative improvement in the lives of the inhabitants of Shariah states. However, the operation of Shariah as an adjunct to, and its subordination to, the secular constitution was anathema to radical Islamists, who now demanded a full complement of Shariah law as against the Zamfara model, which Boko Haram ridiculed and rejected. The ina-
bility of the Shariah states to implement the law in full led to the rejection of the Zamfara model of Shariah by Boko Haram, who insisted on a full Shariah or nothing. The imposition of full Shariah has remained a consistent demand by Boko Haram.

American foreign policy in the Middle East and especially its unalloyed support for Israel, along with the Israeli suppression of Palestinians, are important reasons for the radicalisation of Muslims in northern Nigeria. Nigerian Muslims are conversant with Islamic literature, which continuously condemns these actions. Closely related to this were the 11 September 2001 attacks on US soil and the reactions thereto, which also fed into an existing radicalisation channel. The militants of Kanama and Mohammed Yusuf were all aware of and incensed by the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and the declaration of a ‘global war on terror’. These events and the war on terror were perceived as a war on Muslims and their religion – and this further fed into the radicalisation process (Mohammed 2004).

While these external factors fed into the radicalisation of Muslims, and especially those of fringe Muslim groups in northern Nigeria, the main drivers of radicalisation leading to violent conflicts are primarily internal. The retreating state and declining economic fortunes of the 1980s consequent upon structural adjustment programmes had further pauperised Nigerians. These conditions and the mismanagement of the limited resources and crass display of wealth by the ruling class, in the midst of widespread poverty, are all conducive to anger and frustration, which are expressed in religious terms. The poor existential condition of people in the northern states of Nigeria, in both relative and absolute terms, has been documented (Mohammed et al. 2000). These factors, coupled with a large unemployed youthful population, feed into a vicious circle of poverty.

In times of crisis and uncertainty, Muslim societies naturally react in religious terms. Indeed, Mohammed Yusuf’s evangelism began in the form of a Muslim social movement: catering for orphans, widows, and the vulnerable. The excluded, especially the almajirai (itinerant students) who had flocked in large numbers to the urban areas owing to rural destitution, became a ready pool for recruitment and mobilisation. In difficult times, the vulnerable and excluded can be easily mobilised, especially by a movement such as Boko Haram, which preaches the brotherhood of all Muslims while attacking a system that has evidently excluded them as irreligious. This message has a natural appeal.

Security agencies and the escalation of violence

The metamorphosis of Boko Haram from a dawah to an arms-bearing sect was in part the making of security agencies, which approached the situation as one of ‘law and order’ and responded as such, with disastrous consequences. There was
no attempt to perceive the issues raised by the movement in its broader multi-faceted prism as political, social, and economic. The crisis in Borno State began over a contest for ownership of a place of worship with the Izala at Monguno in December 2008. Boko Haram members had been thrown out of Izala mosques as a result of a complete break with the Izala over the Izala’s inability to dissuade Mohammed Yusuf from his firmly held convictions. Owing to the close association between the two groups up to this period, and because they had worshipped together in the same mosques before then, the ownership of mosques became the subject of bitter disputes. In one such incident while on their way to Monguno to reclaim a mosque from the Izala, 67 Boko Haram members, including Abubakar Shekau, were arrested and locked up at the Maiduguri prison by state authorities, apparently at the instigation of their rivals. Mohammed Yusuf vowed to recover the disputed mosque through due process.23

The security agencies serially mismanaged the crisis from the outset, and in the process pushed the movement to the extreme end of the spectrum. First was the setting up of the joint military operations, code named Operation Flush II, which tried to draw Boko Haram out for a fight by harassing members going to or returning from dawah, as they called their preaching activities. Restriction of movement of motorcycles at night and the attempt to enforce the use of crash helmets were all aimed at achieving this. The mandatory use of crash helmets by motorcycle riders, although a national policy, was not enforced in other places with the same zeal. In fact, the enforcement policy stopped once the movement was crushed in July 2009.24

Second was the onslaught on Boko Haram by Operation Flush II, and the shooting of its members at the Gwange cemetery in June 2009, which precipitated the violence at Maiduguri. Boko Haram members were going to bury their dead, who had died in a car crash, when security agents shot and wounded 17 of them. They were further provoked by being refused access to the wounded in hospital. This action was seen by Boko Haram as a declaration of war (Yusuf 2009b).

Third, the massive onslaught on the sect and the killing of its members and the extrajudicial killing of the sect leadership, including Mohammed Yusuf and other members, further radicalised members. Those who fled either went for further military training or went into hiding without renouncing their beliefs. These extrajudicial killings and the widespread dissemination of the video footage locally

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23 Interview, Masta’a Monguno, 10 October 2010. Mohammed Yusuf vowed to revenge this unlawful act and urged his supporters to use the prison to proselytise.

24 The use of motorcycles has been banned in a number of urban areas, including Maiduguri, since June 2010. This is because of the ease with which Boko Haram used motorcycles as getaway vehicles after targeted assassinations or in planting IEDs.
and its broadcast by the Al Jazeera cable satellite network further enraged members.

Once the sect was militarily crushed and their headquarters, the *Markaz Ibn Taymiyyah*, burnt and razed to the ground, the remainder of the leadership went underground while most members either fled or melted into the local population. The state compelled traditional rulers not to conceal Boko Haram members in their domain and in the process many were identified and handed over to security agencies. However, lack of confidentiality within the security system and Boko Haram’s intelligence network ensured that they got to know who gave information on them to state authorities. The first phase of resurgence was marked by targeted killing of ward and village heads that had collaborated with state security agents, prison officials whom they accused of torturing or poisoning their members in detention, prominent politicians of the ruling All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) government of Borno State, and all security officials.

The successes recorded against security officers in urban warfare and the fear instilled in them and the general public seems to have further emboldened Boko Haram and cowed their opponents. The inability of the state to guarantee the security of citizens – in fact, their failure to defend even their own installations and officers – not only emboldened sect members but had the effect of remobilising passive members into action. Thereafter, they used the cowed civilian population as a shield to perpetrate their activities. Anyone who challenged Boko Haram in the community was killed, and the state had no capacity to defend such people or identify and punish the culprits.

The tactics of Boko Haram and those of the military differed. While Boko Haram was, at least at inception, committed to not harming those who had not antagonised them and alerting people in areas where they intended to fight, the security agencies were known for their brutality in retaliation against the population for the actions of their opponents, especially where the agencies had incurred fatalities. The military Joint Task Force-Operation Restore Order (JTF) functioned like an army of occupation. Unable to distinguish Boko Haram members from unarmed civilians, they resorted to taking vengeance on the whole civilian population. This had the effect of alienating them from the community. In fact, the strategy of Boko Haram was to provoke the military by attacking and killing them, knowing full well that the military would kill defenceless citizens. This tactic has worked very well, such that local communities now openly affirm that Boko Haram, in spite of its excesses, is better than the military. The 19 April 2013 killing of at least 185 unarmed civilians and the burning of over 2,000 houses by the military, after their patrol vehicle was attacked and sustained fatalities at Baga in Kukawa local government area of Borno State, clearly demon-
strate the pattern of military response.\textsuperscript{25} Boko Haram will consciously provoke the military, knowing full well that the military will retaliate against the local population. According to an informant, Boko Haram says: “When we kill the big unbelievers, they will kill the lesser unbelievers.”\textsuperscript{26} The big unbelievers are military personnel, and the lesser unbelievers are the local population: Muslim or Christian.

There are numerous cases of documented atrocities by the JTF, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary dragnet arrests, illegal and arbitrary detentions, arson, rape, and stealing (see Amnesty International 2012; HRW 2012).\textsuperscript{27} The following incidents illustrate the pattern of military response in Maiduguri.

On 9 December 2010 soldiers stormed the Zannari zone of Maiduguri and arrested sixty men shortly after their patrol vehicle was attacked in the area.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, in the Jajiri ward of Maiduguri, Sheriff Bukhari recounts how “soldiers broke into homes waking people up, seizing money and cell phones” and lamented “it is unfortunate that the people deployed to protect us have turned against us”\textsuperscript{29}.

Following a skirmish between Boko Haram and security forces at the Kalari ward of Maiduguri on 9 July 2011, security operatives killed more than forty people and underdeclared the number of those killed as only eight Boko Haram (\textit{Tell}, 26 July 2011). Saudi and Habiba, widows of Mohammed Abdul, recounted how their husband was dragged out of his room and killed in cold blood (\textit{ibid.}). Talatu, widow of Adamu Fulani, said soldiers not only killed her husband in the presence of his children but ransacked his room and stole N 250,000 (\textit{ibid.}). Adamu Abdullahi, a staff member of the University of Maiduguri, was killed in the Kalari incident in spite of his having identified himself to security officials.\textsuperscript{30} In the Budum area of Maiduguri, 23 people were killed, the Budum market was burnt, and parked cars were sprayed with bullets when an IED planted by sect members exploded and injured three soldiers. There were numerous such inci-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26}Interview, Anonymous, Maiduguri, 11 February 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Newspublisher, 27 December 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{30}At least four professors of the University of Maiduguri have been killed by Boko Haram in the last two years: Murtala Mohammed Aliyu (d. 4 November 2011) in Damaturu; Adamu Abdullahi (d. 9 July 2011); Mohammed Shettima Larduma (d. 28 November 2011); and Mohammed Murtala in Maiduguri (d. 31 March 2013). Meanwhile, Dr. Abba Kagu (abducted 26 February 2013) and Dr. Mohammed Mai (abducted 20 April 2013) have been kidnapped and are being held hostage, presumably by Boko Haram.
\end{itemize}
The message and methods of Boko Haram

dents at Dala Alamderi, Bulum-Kuttu, and Baga Road Fish Market. The situation is similar in other settings, such as Damaturu, Potiskum, and Kano.

The Borno Elders and Leaders of Thought pressure group condemned these excesses and called for the withdrawal of troops from Maiduguri, but to no avail. They accused the JTF of “killing innocent young men and raping of married women and young girls by soldiers”.

The JTF not unexpectedly denied all these allegations and insisted that all those “killed were members of the Boko Haram sect”. The JTF, through its spokesman Col. Victor Ebhalome, resorted to cheap blackmail by accusing all those alleging gross violations against them as “sponsors, sympathisers and members of the sect aimed at discrediting the task force so as to have a field day to operate.”

Aminu Sani, chairman of the Borno State branch of the Nigerian Bar Association, condemned the killings and called on the federal government to set up a judicial commission of inquiry to “probe the genocide and extrajudicial killings of innocent civilians”. He also called for troop withdrawal.

Kashim Zannah, chief judge of Borno State, also deplored the extrajudicial killings and all attempts to infringe people’s rights, no matter what the temptation. According to Justice Zannah (2011), “peace cannot be restored by means of injustices through departure from the rule of law and breach of due process”, and he concluded that such actions can lead only to “hunting innocent persons, alienating the citizenry and aggravating the security situation”. He ended rather prophetically, saying that “justice is the only route to enduring peace and security” because “injustice breeds insecurity” (Zannah 2011).

In January 2012 the federal government declared a state of emergency in 15 local government areas of four affected states, which gave security officials extra powers without legal encumbrances. These emergency powers further emboldened the JTF, which had been accused of serious rights abuses. An unintended effect of the new military strategy of amassing troops in the urban areas is the export and escalation of the violence to rural areas where military presence is low. Most areas of northern Borno State are not under effective government control now, as Boko Haram move about and terrorise peasant farmers and herdsmen unhindered. Local government functionaries have all abandoned their duty posts and taken refuge in the state capital owing to insecurity in the outlying provinces. Boko Haram have some toehold in the following ten local government areas of

31 Daily Trust, 15 July 2011.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Peoples Daily, 15 July 2010.
35 The affected local government areas are the following: Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Jere, Ngala, Bama, and Biu in Borno State; Damaturu, Geidam, Potiskum, Gujba, and Bade in Yobe State; Jos North, Jos South, Barkin Ladi, and Riyom in Plateau State; and Suleja in Niger State.
Borno State far from government presence: Marte, Magumeri, Mobbar, Gubio, Guzamala, Abadam, Kukawa, Kaza, Nganzai, and Monguno.  

The security agencies have completely lost the hearts and minds’ war through high-handedness and brutality. The sentiment of the residents of Maiduguri and its environs is echoed by 60-year old Adamu Mohammed of Bulum-Kuttu: “We don’t have problem with Boko Haram; our problem is the police and the military that harass and kill our innocent people. They call every Muslim a Boko Haram”.

Changing tactics and shopping for causes

Boko Haram changed its tactics, remodelled itself, and shopped for causes as the security forces continued to pummel them and seemingly diminished their capacity. Since mid-2010 their modus operandi has changed and they have become unpredictable. Old methods such as the targeted killing of traditional ward and village heads, security officials, prominent politicians, and opposing ulama continued unabated, but new fronts were also opened in the fight. They now targeted media houses and journalists, schools (including teachers and pupils), telecommunication base stations, and, recently, kidnapping of locals and foreigners.

The burning of schools was a new weapon employed by the group. A number of schools were burnt in the July 2009 violence in Maiduguri as symbols of government and Western education, which they abhor, along with police stations and other government buildings. However, the burning of schools in retaliation for the ill treatment of Quranic school teachers and pupils is a new development. The group insist they are attacking schools in retaliation for JTF atrocities. According to its spokesman, Abul Qaqa:

We attacked the schools because security operatives are going to Islamiyyah schools and picking teachers. We are attacking the public schools at night because we don’t want to kill innocent pupils. Unless [Islamic school teachers] are allowed to be, we would be compelled to continue attacking schools.

However, the attack on schools, school teachers, and pupils has forced many schools to close down in Maiduguri since February 2013.

It seems Boko Haram is losing its initial focus as old members are lost and security forces close in on them. As the situation changed on the ground, Boko Haram changed its methods and style. Kidnapping, a style they had rejected and vehemently denied using, now became acceptable. They dissociated themselves

37 Tell, 26 July 2011.
from the kidnapping of Chris MacManus and Franco Lamolinara, two Europeans killed in a botched rescue attempt at Sokoto in March 2012. Up to this period, Boko Haram was not involved in kidnapping. According to its spokesman Abul Qaqa: “(W)e have never been engaged in hostage taking and it is not part of our style, and we never ask for ransom”.\(^{39}\) It seems an affiliate or a splinter group which operates in central and north-western Nigeria, or a criminal gang which is in the business for money, may have been responsible for the kidnappings.

There has been an upsurge in the killing and kidnapping of foreigners by Boko Haram since 2012, indicating a change of tactics arising from desperation. There are numerous such incidents in the north-east of Nigeria. These include the killing of road construction workers and Korean doctors in Borno and Yobe states, the kidnapping and subsequent killing of employees of a construction firm, Setraco, in Jama’are town of Bauchi State, and the kidnap of the French family of Tanguy Moulin-Fournier, his wife, brother and four children at Waza National Park in Northern Cameroon.\(^{40}\) All these indicate both a change of tactics and further splintering of the movement into smaller groups, arising from internal and external developments.

The weakening of Boko Haram positions and the damage done to their capacity in Borno and Yobe states pushed them out to the outlying areas, out of reach of the military. Thus, the kidnapping and killing of foreigners may be another tactic to expose the weakness of the Nigerian state by showing its inability to protect both its citizens and foreigners alike. Besides, the kidnapping of Europeans is newsworthy and adds to their profile in Salafist jihadi circles. The Algerian incident, where foreign oil workers were rescued, albeit with a large number of casualties, seems to have sent signals that kidnapping may be an acceptable weapon among some jihadi groups.

The Ansaru challenge

There has been tension both within the membership of Boko Haram and between it and outsiders over tactics and cruelty by some of its militants against the civilian population. The Kawar Maila killings, where 11 members were slaughtered for informing on their fellow members, and the tensions between members native to Borno, who can easily evade capture by melting into the local population, and non-natives – these indicate cracks within the movement. The issue of targeting non-combatants by Boko Haram has also worried some members. These tensions had been building up for a long time but came to the fore with the Kano attacks of 20 January 2012, when over 180 people lost their lives.


\(^{40}\) The French family was released unharmed and returned to Paris on 19 April 2013.
The formation of *Jama’atul Ansaru Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan* (“Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa”), which event was announced on 26 January 2012, was both “a reaction to the loss of Muslim lives” as well as a desire for change of tactics by a splinter group within Boko Haram. Ansaru is a splinter from the main body of Boko Haram and has its nucleus around north-west and central Nigeria, as distinct from the main body with its main strengths in the north-east epicentre of Boko Haram insurgency.

Ansaru shares the ideology and doctrines of Boko Haram, although there are differences in tactics. First, unlike Boko Haram, even from inception Ansaru committed itself to not harming innocent Muslims except in self-defence. Second, Ansaru condemns the killing of “innocent security operatives”, a group which Boko Haram has attacked serially and with relish since July 2009. Third, Ansaru proclaimed itself the defender of Islamic interests all over West Africa and indeed Africa as a whole, as distinct from Boko Haram’s localisation in the north of Nigeria.

Although Ansaru was newly formed, it had formerly existed and operated under different names. Apparently, it was the same group which had earlier called itself “Al-Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel”, a group which had claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of Chris MacManus and Franco Lamolinara in May 2011. The targeting of foreigners and foreign interests was the main direction of Ansaru’s development. As early as December 2012, the group warned France that it would target its citizens for “its ban on Islamic veil and its ‘major role’ in the planned intervention in Northern Mali”.

Ansaru also claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of seven construction workers in Jama’are in Bauchi State, which it said it had killed in retaliation for the anti-Islamic activities of European nations in Mali and Afghanistan. French military engagement and Nigeria’s deployment of troops to Mali seem to have further excited a section of Boko Haram. This provided them an opportunity to present themselves as regional and global players.

**Conclusion**

The development of radical Islamist ideology in north-eastern Nigeria has drawn its inspiration from both internal and external sources. The external factors include the worldwide resurgence of radical Islam owing to the US global war on terror and the general decline in the living conditions in Muslim-majority countries, coupled with internal economic problems of urban destitution and rural de-

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41 *Vanguard*, 1 February 2012.
42 *ThisDay*, 24 December 2012.
cay in this part of Nigeria. A large pool of the *almajirai* and urban unemployed were conducive to the emergence of Boko Haram.

The state’s inability to manage the crisis at inception and its stoking of the embers of discontent through serial mismanagement, coupled with an all-out military assault, all added to the conflagration. Massive military deployment and tactics akin to that of an army of occupation alienated the civilian population and worsened the state of insecurity. Although the spate of bombings has declined, the theatre of conflict has widened to encompass other outlying urban and rural areas, including Kano and Kaduna. The solution to the challenge posed by Boko Haram lies in an integrated holistic approach to addressing the issues raised. The state must also live up to its role of providing jobs and other basic amenities and guaranteeing the lives and property of the citizenry. The current approach of military force is unlikely to resolve the insurgency. The problem can only be solved through a negotiated settlement with moderate members of the group.

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