Boko Haram

On the verge of defeat or a long term threat?

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Sammanfattning

Boko Haram har bedrivit väpnad kamp mot den nigerianska staten sedan 2009. I början av 2015 kontrollerade man stora delar av delstaten Borno, utropade ett "kalifat" och svor lojalitet till Daesh. Sedan dess har gruppen förlorat merparten av sitt territorium, splittrats i två fraktioner (ledda av Shekau och al-Barnawi) och pressats hårt av den nigerianska försvarsmakten och dess allierade. Trots detta tyder lite på att terrorgruppen är på väg att besegras och risken för att al-Barnawis Daesh-affilierade fraktion återigen växer sig starkt är påtaglig.

Syftet med denna studie är att analysera Boko Harams strategiska uthållighet. Detta görs genom att studera gruppens ledarskap, ideologi och strategi; operativa förmåga; finansiering och logistiska stödfunktioner; propaganda, rekrytering och folkligt stöd; samt externa stöd i syfte att identifiera gruppens styrkor och svagheter. Vidare behandlas de aktörer som bekämpar Boko Haram.

Studien visar att Boko Harams framväxt underlättades av strukturella faktorer, såsom utbredd fattigdom i norra Nigeria, motsättningar mellan kristna och muslimer, misstro mot statsmakten, porösa landsgränser, framväxten av salafistisk islam, samt att den nigerianska försvarsmakten var illa rustad.

Sedan 2015 har säkerhetssektorn stärkts i regionen då den nigerianska försvarsmakten etablerat en brigad i Borno, det regionala samt internationella militära samarbetet förbättrats, samt privata militära företag och civila miliser bidragit med bland annat underrättelseförmågor i kampen mot Boko Haram.

Parallellt med denna utveckling har Boko Harams inflytande minskat. Orsakerna är flera. Bland annat kan noteras att det folkliga stödet till gruppen minskat till följd av hänsynslöst våld mot civila; samt att gruppens operativa förmåga försvagats till följd av försämrade möjligheter att finansiera sig och vinna militära framgångar – faktorer som påverkat möjligheten till nyrekrytering.

I nuläget råder ett slags dödläge, där en av de två fraktionerna (under Shekau) huvudsakligen utför attacker mot civila måltavlor, medan den andra (ledda av al-Barnawi) främst attackerar polis och militära styrkor. På kort sikt förväntas Shekaus fraktion åsamka mest skada, givet sitt urskillningslösa våld mot civila, medan al-Barnawis fraktion utgör det avgjort större hotet mot regeringen på sikt.

Faktorer som kan bli avgörande för konflikten mellan Boko Haram och regeringen är om den nigerianska armén utvecklar förmågan att lokalisera och oskadliggöra fraktionernas ledare; om det internationella samarbetet mot Boko Haram stärks eller försvagas; om de civila miliserna blir ett säkerhetshot mot staten; om andra säkerhetshot tvingar den nigerianska staten att prioritera; om omfattande strider utbryter mellan Boko Harams fraktioner; samt om al-Barnawi lyckas provocera fram ytterligare våld mellan muslimer och kristna i Nigeria.

Nyckelord: Boko Haram; Nigeria; Daesh; terrorism; inbördeskrig; mänskliga rättigheter; Tchadsjön; rebellgruppers strategiska uthållighet.

Summary

Boko Haram has conducted an insurgency against the Nigerian state since 2009. In early 2015, the group controlled large parts of Borno state, declared a caliphate and swore allegiance to Daesh. Since then, it has lost a majority of its territory, splintered into two factions (led by Shekau and al-Barnawi, respectively) and has been badly pressured by the Nigerian defence forces Even so, little suggests that the terrorist group will soon be militarily defeated and the risk that al-Barnawi's Daesh-affiliated faction will again grow stronger is palpable.

The general purpose of this report is to analyse the strategic resilience of Boko Haram. Specifically, the study examines Boko Haram's leadership, ideology and strategy, operational capabilities, financing and logistical support, propaganda and recruitment and external support, in order to identify strengths and weaknesses. The study is based on secondary sources, panel data on terrorist attacks in Nigeria and a field study in Abuja in May 2017.
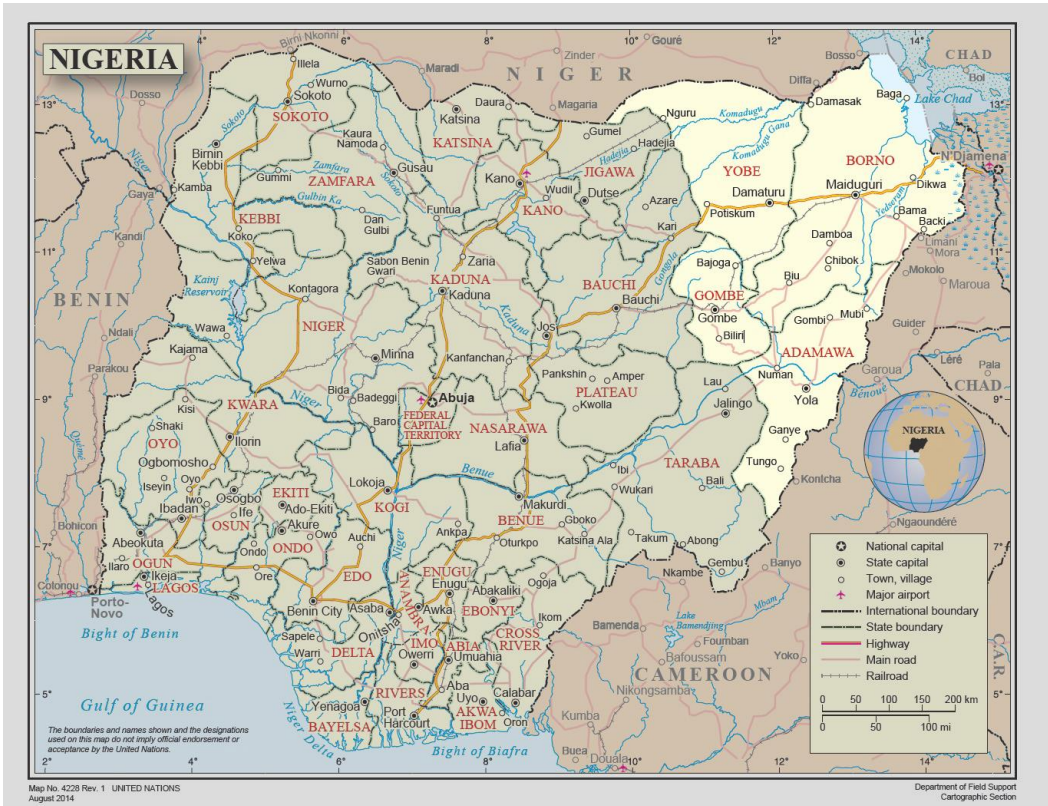
The analysis revealed that the expansion of Boko Haram was facilitated by structural factors, such poverty in northern Nigeria, conflicts between Muslims and Christians, distrust of the state, porous borders, the growth of Salafist Islam and the insufficient ability of the Nigerian defence forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations at the outset of the conflict.

The Nigerian defence forces have strengthened their presence in the north-east since 2015 through the establishment of a brigade. Regional military cooperation has also improved, and private military companies and militias have contributed critical capabilities. Furthermore, the current leadership of Boko Haram has used indiscriminate violence against civilians, hence undermining popular support. The operational capability of the terrorist group has been notably weakened, its ability to finance itself undermined by a regional economic crisis and its recruitment seemingly complicated by military setbacks and in-fighting.

Today, a military stalemate reigns, with a weakened Boko Haram Shekau faction mainly attacking civilian targets and a Boko Haram al-Barnawi faction primarily targeting police and the armed forces. In the short term, the Shekau fraction may possibly cause most harm, given its indiscriminate violence against civilians, while the al-Barnawi fraction undoubtedly poses the greater threat over time.

Factors which would decisively shift the conflict dynamic would be if the Nigerian defence forces were to develop the capability to locate and neutralise the two groups' leaders; if regional or international cooperation against Boko Haram were to be weakened or strengthened; if the militias were to become a threat in their own right; if competing security threats forced the state to prioritise; if large-scale in-fighting were to erupt between the two Boko Haram factions; and if the al-Barnawi fraction were to succeed in provoking a broader conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram; Nigeria; Daesh; terrorism; human rights; resilience.

Source: United Nations, modified by the authors.

Contents

1 Introduction

In 2002, the nucleus of the group that would become Boko Haram began to take shape in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in northern Nigeria. The group was led by Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic self-appointed preacher at a mosque in Maiduguri. While the group initially referred to itself as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* ('People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad') and later *Islamic State in West Africa Province*,[1] it quickly became known simply as *Boko Haram*. The name is based on Yusuf's opposition to Western education and is Hausa for 'Western Education is Forbidden'.[2] While the group was initially not necessarily violent, it was always fundamentalist.[3]

Since Boko Haram began its violent campaign in 2009, it has quickly emerged as the single most active terrorist group in Africa, by one count responsible for 36% of all terrorist attacks with a known perpetrator on the continent in 2010-2015. Hence, Nigeria and particularly its north-eastern regions have suffered, with 29% of all terrorist attacks in Africa during 2010-2015 occurring in the country.[4]

Boko Haram came into the international media spotlight following the Chibok kidnappings in April 2014, when more than 250 schoolgirls were kidnapped in Borno state.[5] While this was a gruelling, watershed moment, it represents only the most visible example of the violence committed by an insurgency that has been very brutal and indiscriminate. Estimates of the number of civilians killed by the group range between 6 000 and 15 000, with more than 2 million displaced by the violence.[6]

Yet, for a terrorist group of its size, Boko Haram remains opaque and its motivations and internal life are largely enigmatic. This study analyses the sources of Boko Haram's apparent resilience. It explores a range of factors which research has found to impact upon the resilience of terrorist groups, including: leadership, ideology, fighting capability, financing and logistical support, propaganda and recruitment and external support. The central aim is to identify and explain factors that are most crucial to the resilience of Boko Haram, but also its key vulnerabilities and factors that may shift the conflict dynamic.

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[1] *International Crisis Group* (2016). "Boko Haram on the Back Foot". Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 120, May 4 2016, footnote 1, p. 2.

[2] Mike Smith (2016). Boko Haram. *Inside Nigeria's Unholy War*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. p. 80-81.

[3] Smith (2016). Boko Haram, 78.

[4] Adriana Lins de Albuquerque (2017). "*Terrorism in Africa. A Quantitative Analysis*". FOI-R--4398--SE, Stockholm: FOI, January 2017, p. 25, figure 9, 19.

[5] Jacob Zenn (2014). "Boko Haram and the kidnapping of the Chibok Schoolgirls" May 29 2014 *Counterterrorism Centre Sentinel* 7(4), pp.1-7.

[6] Kevin Uhrmacher and Mary Beth Sheridan (2016). "The Brutal Toll of Boko Haram's attacks on civilians" *The Washington Post*, April 3 2016.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

This study represents the continuation of research on radicalisation and terrorism in Africa within the African Security project at the Swedish Defence Research Agency. Previous research has analysed e.g. the growth of terrorism in Africa,[7] the growing threat of Al Shabaab in Somalia[8] and Kenya[9] and the military campaign against Daesh in Libya.[10] Studies within the agency's Asian and Middle Eastern Security programme have likewise analysed the resilience of Daesh,[11] Jabhat Fateh al-Sham[12] and Ahrar al-Sham[13] in Iraq and Syria. Sweden has both a humanitarian and military presence and engagement in the Sahel region, and the EU is an important actor in the Boko Haram conflict, wherefore this report will have significant policy relevance.

Drawing on findings from this research, the overarching purpose of this study was to analyse the strategic resilience of Boko Haram. Using an analytical framework developed and applied in some of the aforementioned studies, the aim was to identify strengths and weaknesses that may critically affect the resilience of such terrorist groups. The analysis focused on a set of factors which any insurgent group needs to develop in order to control territory. These include leadership, ideology and strategy, operative capability, financing and logistical support, propaganda and recruitment, and external support. Any given insurgent organisation may have different strengths and weaknesses, thereby rendering specific organisations particularly vulnerable – or resilient – to a particular type of setback. By studying its constituent parts, the aim was also to provide a more nuanced description of how Boko Haram functions. The following research question guided the analysis:

- What organisational characteristics and external factors most critically determine the resilience of Boko Haram?

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[7] Lins de Albuquerque (2017).

[8] Michael Jonsson and Daniel Torbjörnsson (2016) "Resurgent, Reinvented or Simply Resilient? The Growing Threat of al Shabaab in Somalia". *FOI Memo 5913*.

[9] Daniel Torbjörnsson and Michael Jonsson (2016). "Containment or Contagion? Countering al Shabaab Efforts to Sow Discord in Kenya". *FOI Memo 5742*; Daniel Torbjörnsson. 2017. "Explaining the differences in al-Shabaab expansion into Kenya and Ethiopia". *FOI Memo 6061*.

[10] Mikael Eriksson (2015). "A Fratricidal Libya and its Second Civil War: Harvesting Decades of Qaddafi's 'Divide and Rule'". FOI-R--4177--SE. Stockholm: FOI, December 2015.

[11] Michael Jonsson (2016). "Vulnerabilities to the Resilience of Daesh. From 'Remaining and Expanding' to Retreating and Declining". *FOI Memo 5792*.

[12] Erika Holmquist (2016). "What's in a Name? Jabhat al-Nusra's reasons for 'disassociating' from al-Qaeda". *FOI Memo 5802*.

[13] Michael Jonsson (2016). "Biding Its Time: The Strategic Resilience of Ahrar al-Sham*". FOI Memo 5957*.

1.2 Analytical Framework

The study was structured as a within-case study over time, analysing the impact of specific organisational characteristics on the resilience of Boko Haram using process tracing.[14] As resilience – here defined as 'the ability of an insurgent group to exercise military force and social control over time during an armed conflict' – is arguably a multi-causal phenomenon, the study did not seek to identify a *single* determinant.[15] Instead, it analysed organisational characteristics which previous research has found to be critical to the resilience of armed groups, studying how they have impacted upon Boko Haram over time.

For instance, previous research has shown that groups which have a personality cult surrounding its leader are vulnerable to his capture or death, whereas hierarchical organisations have less problems replacing their leader.[16] Furthermore, the ideology of an insurgent group can in and by itself generate significant support or fail to resonate with its audience, thus impacting civilian support and setting boundaries on acceptable behaviour by insurgents.[17]

Insurgent groups also vary drastically in their operative capabilities, depending for instance on fighting force, tactical skills and access to certain weaponry.[18] Financing and logistical support networks can further determine whether an insurgent group can recruit using financial incentives and acquire other types of necessary materiel.[19] Since insurgent groups typically face high attrition rates, continuous recruitment and propaganda are often critical to replenish its ranks.

Lastly, external support can critically affect the long-term viability of an insurgent group.[20] Since these variables are difficult to quantify, they are in this report examined qualitatively. Furthermore, while these factors are analysed separately, it is critical to recognize interaction between them, as military set-backs or restrained financing may lead to difficulties in recruitment, for instance.

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[14] Alexander L.George and Andrew Bennet. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences.* Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 205-232.

[15] Given the wide variety of organisational characteristics of insurgent groups and the wide variety of outcomes, any attempt to identify a single determinant of resilience would arguably quickly be undermined by *equifinality*, i.e. similar outcomes resulting from different sets of causal factors.

[16] Patrick B. Johnston (2012). "Does decapitation work? assessing the effectiveness of leadership targeting in counterinsurgency campaigns". *International Security* 36(4):47-79.

[17] Fransisco Gutierrez Sanin and Elisabeth Jean Woods (2014) "Ideology in Civil War" Journal of Peace Research, 51(2): 213-226.

[18] David Cave (2016) "Strategy and adaptation in counterinsurgency: Lessons for the Australian Defence Force from the defeat of the Tamil Tigers" Australian Army Journal, 13(2):23-45.

[19] Paul Staniland (2010). *Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation and Control in Insurgent Groups*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ph.D Dissertation.

[20] Daniel Byman (2005*). Deadly Connections. States that Sponsor Terrorism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1.3 Sources of Data

Data for the study were initially taken from secondary sources such as academic papers, newspaper reporting, documentaries, books, statistics on terrorist attacks and propaganda by Boko Haram posted online. This was followed by a field study in Abuja in May 2017, during which diplomats, academic researchers, conflict analysts, development personnel and NGOs with a presence in the most conflict-affected areas were interviewed.[21]

When sources differed on specific events or interpretations of trends, the accounts were triangulated against each other using standard criteria for source evaluation.[22] Several of the interviewees requested that they remain anonymous. Therefore, information and/or quotes are not attributed to any one interview and the names of the respondents are not included in the interview list. As anonymity was a precondition for conducting the interviews, the authors deliberately prioritised access to relevant information over traceability of specific data points.

As this report strives to be up to date, certain sections rely on news sources for information on current events. Although this is not ideal due to the risk of bias and/or sensationalist reporting, it is necessary considering the publication delay of academic articles and think tank reports. Furthermore, as established international media outlets have only periodically had extensive reporting from the Boko Haram-conflict, local news sources have been a necessary complement for retrieving information on specific events. Efforts to triangulate has been made where possible.

1.4 Outline of the Study and Delimitations

Chapter 2 provides a brief history of the origins of Boko Haram, including its founder Mohammed Yusuf, its early years in Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria and the subsequent evolution of its area of operation and modus operandi in 2009-2016. In Chapter 3, the leadership of the group is described, including its nominal ideology and main strategic aims. In Chapter 4, the operative capability of the group is analysed, including the size of its fighting force, tactical modus operandi and access to critical weaponry. In Chapter 5, the main sources of financing and logistical support for Boko Haram are described. This is followed in Chapter 6 by an analysis of the propaganda efforts, recruitment networks and popular support for the group. In Chapter 7, the external support for Boko Haram is discussed. Chapter 8 outlines the main countermeasures taken by the Nigerian government and the regional coalition targeting the terrorist organisation. The report concludes

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[21] A list of the interviewed organisations can be found in the Bibliography.
[22] Peter Esaiasson et al. (eds) (2007). *Metodpraktiken. Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad.* Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik, pp. 313-326.

by answering the research questions, outlining the sources of resilience and vulnerabilities (sections 9.1 and 9.2 in Chapter 9) and the strategically decisive external factors (section 9.3).

The focus of this study is on the resilience of Boko Haram and direct measures to combat the group in the short to medium term. Consequently, factors such as regional poverty, corruption, abuses by the security forces and the growing humanitarian crises – which are arguably both causes and consequences of the conflict – are noted, but not analysed in depth. Moreover, the study primarily focuses on Boko Haram in Nigeria, its country of origin and the location of a majority of its attacks, while terrorist activities and regional countermeasures in other countries are described briefly, but not covered in detail.

Lastly, whilst the growth (2010-2014) and decline (2015-present) of Boko Haram need to be explained to understand its current predicament, the emphasis of the analysis is on identifying factors affecting the resilience of the group today and in the near future.

2 The Origins and Evolution of Boko Haram

To a certain degree, the emergence of Boko Haram can be traced back to the historical antecedent of a Muslim state controlling northern Nigeria during the 19th century. In the Muslim majority northern regions, a loose collection of 'emirates', known as the Sokoto Caliphate, were established in the early 19th century. Initially created by Dan Fodio, an educated travelling holy man well-versed in the Quran, the Sokoto Caliphate lasted for nearly a century.[23] In the early 20th century, the Sokoto Caliphate was defeated by a British colonial force and northern and southern parts of Nigeria were amalgamated, creating the outlines of the country that exists today.[24]

To some extent, the historical example of an Islamic state spanning most of today's northern Nigeria still matters, as the Sokoto Caliphate and the example set by Dan Fodio were sometimes cited by Mohamed Yusuf, Boko Haram's founder. Boko Haram has also made use of the legacy of the Islamic Kanem-Bornu Empire – of which north-eastern Nigeria formed part during pre-colonial times – in their narrative.[25] Likewise, the fault-line between the Muslim-majority north and the Christian-majority south, and especially the resistance to Western education seen as a legacy imposed by colonisation, are part of the root causes explaining the origins of Boko Haram.[26]

There is today a host of structural factors which create a high risk for internal turmoil in Nigeria. Amongst its 170 million inhabitants, Nigeria is estimated to have up to 50 million young people who are either unemployed or underemployed, creating a potential time-bomb. Poverty is widespread, with 63% of Nigerians living on less than $1 dollar a day in 2010, and is particularly pronounced in the northern regions.[27] Meanwhile, mismanagement and corruption have reached legendary proportions within the Nigerian state, particularly in the oil sector.[28] Beyond this, the country is home to hundreds of ethnic groups and there are multiple fault-lines concerning religion, political representation and economic interests.

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[23] Smith (2016), 32-37.

[24] Smith (2016), 44-53.

[25] Smith (2016), 81; Atta Barkindo (2014). "Boko Haram: Ideology, Ethnicity and Identity". *The Centre on Religion and Geopolitics*. Retrieved from: http://www.religionandgeopolitics.org/boko-haram/boko-haram-ideology-ethnicity-and-identity. accessed on 14 May 2017.

[26] Amy Pate (2014). *Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options.* Department of Defense and the Office of University Programs, Department of Homeland Security. College Park MD: Start, January 2015; Persson (2014) 15-16.

[27] Persson (2014), 15-16.

[28] Smith (2016), 61.

Consequently, beyond Boko Haram, there are numerous other causes of intermittent violence, including the currently dormant Niger Delta uprisings, violence between herders and farmers and large-scale violent riots.[29]

That said, the situation in northern Nigeria is particularly prone to unrest and violence, partly due to historical legacies. While Christian missionaries began spreading Western education in southern Nigeria early in the 20th century, their access to northern Nigeria was more limited, although existent.[30] Over time, the southern civil servants were sent to the north, which created fears amongst northerners that their region would be dominated by rival ethnic groups. With independence in 1960, a federal system with three regions – north, west and east – was locked in place.[31] In 1966, an attempted coup by mainly Igbo officers – the ethnic group dominating in eastern Nigeria – sparked a countercoup by northern officers and many Igbos in northern Nigeria were killed. As a consequence, south-eastern Nigeria attempted to secede, sparking the Biafran war. The conflict lasted for three years, led to the death of an estimated 1-3 million people and ended with Nigeria remaining a unitary state.[32]

During Nigeria's subsequent tumultuous experience with independence and fledgling democracy, three consecutive military rulers in 1983-1998 were northerners. However, this did little for further development in the region.[33] To this day, political and economic marginalisation are repeatedly identified as structural causes of discontent and public unrest in northern Nigeria. Together with the often repressive state responses, this has fundamentally eroded trust in the state.[34]

2.1 From Radical to Violent

While the rise of Boko Haram was facilitated by historical antecedents and widespread poverty, its precise ideology was shaped in part by the rise of Salafi Islam and in part by the idiosyncratic world-view of its founder.

Boko Haram was formally formed in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in north-eastern Nigeria.[35] Yusuf, who was 32 at the time and had no formal Western education, was Kanuri, which is the largest ethnic group in Borno state.[36] He was initially a follower of the Izala movement, a radical but non-violent movement, and many of the early members of Boko Haram were

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[29] Smith (2016), 72-73. Persson (2014), 12.
[30] Smith (2016), 60-62.
[31] Smith (2016), 63-64.
[32] Smith (2016), 66-67.
[33] Smith (2016), 71.
[34] Pate (2014), 10-11.
[35] Pate (2014), 11.
[36] Smith (2016), 74.

reportedly drawn from the same group. Yusuf was also personally mentored by Sheikh Jafar Adam, a Salafi but non-violent religious leader based in Kano.[37] Over time, however, Yusuf became increasingly radical and broke with Adam around 2003 over religious disagreements. Around the same time, he was also expelled from the Indimi mosque in Maiduguri, reportedly because he had attempted to convince other worshippers that Western education must be forbidden and that Muslims should not accept the Nigerian state.[38]

While it was not initially violent, Yusuf's group early earned the moniker 'the Nigerian Taliban' due to its fundamentalist beliefs. Over time, the group earned the nick-name 'Boko Haram" (Hausa for 'Western Education is Forbidden'). This was due to Yusuf's belief that such training was introduced by colonial-era missionaries as a vehicle for converting locals to Christianity and that many Western beliefs contradict the Quran.[39] This includes the rejection of the belief that the world is round.[40] However, like other Salafi movements, Boko Haram had no qualms about using Western technology to its own advantage, including posting propaganda videos online.

The growing influence of Salafi ideology, which is more fundamentalist than the Sufi Islam that formerly dominated in Nigeria, thus clearly influenced the early thinking of Yusuf. That said, it is important to note that Yusuf embraced his most radical beliefs in direct contravention of advice from his earlier religious mentors. After failing to convince Yusuf to abandon his hostility to the Nigerian state, Adam would publicly criticise Yusuf as a religious dilettante misleading his followers, with potentially dangerous consequences:

> You are not a prophet. You have not yet proven your faith or moral character to your neighbours. If it took Prophet Muhammad 23 years preaching Islam, for how many years have you preached before you decided to judge Muslims as unbelievers because they have Western education or because they work for government? You did not have sufficient religious knowledge, or even enough general knowledge.[41]

Perhaps not surprisingly, Yusuf did not take well to having his religious authority challenged, and in 2007 Adam was murdered while leading dawn prayers. The same faith befell other religious leaders who similarly criticised Boko Haram.[42]

While some researchers have referred to Yusuf as a "reluctant fighter", even in the early years of Boko Haram, there were violent incidents and increasingly militant rhetoric. Around 2003 or 2004, a group of radical Islamists set up a settlement near Kanamma in Yobe state, which they called "Afghanistan". Following numerous

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[37] Pate (2014), 11; Smith (2016), 74.
[38] Smith (2016), 77-80.
[39] Smith (2016), 79-82.
[40] Joe Boyle (2009). "Nigeria's Taliban' Enigma". *BBC News, 31 July 2009.*
[41] Cited in Smith (2016), 88.
[42] Smith (2016), 90.

skirmishes, reportedly caused by local resource disputes, the Nigerian army conducted an operation to dismantle the camp in September 2004, reportedly killing 27 of its inhabitants.[43] However, accounts differ dramatically regarding the size of the camp and whether Yusuf was personally involved or simply acquainted with some of the residents.[44]

During this period, Yusuf's speeches grew increasingly militant, peppered with predictions that the Nigerian state would violently oppress the movement. In a typical speech to his followers, he argued that "arresting you, beating you, killing you or killing someone else, torching the whole lot of you ablaze […] should not make you abandon your religion". Concluding his speech, he added ominously that "[o]nce Islam is insulted, just go and fish out the leader of those people and slaughter him. All the individuals involved in the insult should be killed".[45]

However, prior to 2009 Boko Haram did not seek to overthrow the government by violent means. Although sporadic violence occurred, the bulk of the group's activities were peaceful.[46] However, there were signs that Boko Haram was arming itself, and tensions between the state and Boko Haram grew as time passed.[47]

2.2 The Battle for Maiduguri 2009

In 2009, the violence that Yusuf had been predicting for years finally erupted. On 11 June, a Boko Haram member was arrested for failing to wear a motorcycle helmet. As other Boko Haram members attempted to free him, the police opened fire, wounding 18. The response from Yusuf was a furious speech, which amounted to a call for armed jihad.[48]

On 26 July 2009, some 70 Boko Haram fighters attacked a police station and a mosque belonging to the Izala movement. Fighting back, the police conducted a raid on a shantytown in Bauchi where Boko Haram members were believed to live, resulting in 55 deaths and over 200 persons being detained. Interviewed about the events, Yusuf said that "we are ready to fight to the death".[49] The next day, a series of assaults targeted primarily police offices and facilities in Maiduguri, with eyewitnesses describing the situation as a war. Simultaneously, violence broke out in four states: Kano, Bauchi, Yobe and Borno. On 28 July, security forces attacked the Boko Haram mosque and headquarters, using six tanks to reduce it to rubble. There were also widespread allegations of extrajudicial executions accompanying

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[43] Pate (2014), 12.
[44] Smith (2016), 77-78.
[45] Cited in Smith (2016), 91-91
[46] *International Crisis Group* (2014). "Curbing violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram insurgency". Africa Report No. 216, 9-10.
[47] International Crisis Group (2014), 10.
[48] Smith (2016), 92-94.
[49] Smith (2016), 94-95.

the raids, some of which were caught on camera. In three days, 800 people were killed.[50] On 30 July Yusuf was arrested and, after being interrogated in front of TV cameras, was reportedly killed by a local police officer.[51]

2.3 The Rise and Fall of the Caliphate

Following the violence in Maiduguri in 2009, the situation in Borno state temporarily stabilised. Yet, shortly before the first anniversary of the Maiduguri clashes in 2010, audio and video-clips featuring Abubakar Shekau – Yusuf's former deputy and the new leader of Boko Haram – began circulating, and individual assassinations of security forces personnel occurred.

In September 2010, Boko Haram members armed with AK47s and homemade bombs attacked a prison in Bauchi and freed 700 prisoners, including 150 Boko Haram members.[52] On Christmas Eve the same year, ten bombs targeted churches and markets busy with Christmas shopping, in Maiduguri but also Jos, an ethnically mixed and volatile city hundreds of miles away. The attacks in Jos in particular seemed deliberately designed to ignite the latent potential for large-scale, religiously motivated violence.[53]

Under the leadership of Shekau, Boko Haram developed into an increasingly violent and ruthless terrorist group, swiftly expanding its number of attacks and civilian targets. Between 2009 and 2012, Boko Haram grew from a regional threat amongst many into the foremost security challenge in Nigeria.

While databases on terrorist attacks have several possible sources of error,[54] describing the insurgency numerically can nonetheless illustrate the exponential growth of the violent campaign.

According to the Global Terrorism Database (GDT), Nigeria experienced 3123 terrorist incidents in 2009-2016, of which 726 were executed by unknown perpetrators. Of the 2397 terrorist incidents with known perpetrators in Nigeria, 1811 (or 75%) were conducted by Boko Haram. These attacks have claimed 11 749 non-terrorist fatalities[55]. The number of attacks and fatalities also grew exponentially; of the 11 749 non-terrorist fatalities Boko Haram caused in 2009-2016, 8119 (or 73%) occurred in 2014-2015 alone. In 2016, the number of fatalities as well as incidents decreased dramatically. Although data for 2017 has

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[50] Smith (2016), 96-98.

[51] Smith (2016), 94.

[52] Smith (2016), 106-107.

[53] Smith (2016), 109.

[54] More generally, given the challenge of accurately collecting and coding data on violent events in remote parts of Nigeria with limited media coverage, the precise numbers should thus be treated with some caution, and may plausibly under-report the number of fatalities.

[55] Fatalities not including any Boko Haram members who may have died during attacks.

not been made available by GTD in time for inclusion in this report, data from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) suggests that Boko Haram has been more active in 2017 compared to 2016. ACLED has registered 164 incidents of remote violence[56] and violence against civilians between 1 January and 4 November of 2017, resulting in 843 fatalities.[57] However, these numbers are not comparable to the GTD data. Figure 2.1 presents the number of incidents and fatalities between 2009 and 2016, drawing on GTD data with calculations by the authors.

As illustrated by the diagram, in 2012-2014 Boko Haram swiftly expanded its number of attacks and their fatality. During this period, the group inflicted a number of humiliating tactical defeats on the Nigerian armed forces. For example, in December 2013 hundreds of Boko Haram fighters overran the air force base in Maiduguri.[58]

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Non-terrorist fatalities	215	71	2012	1096	1290	4766	3353	465
Terrorist incidents	10	17	125	423	231	435	401	166

Axis Title
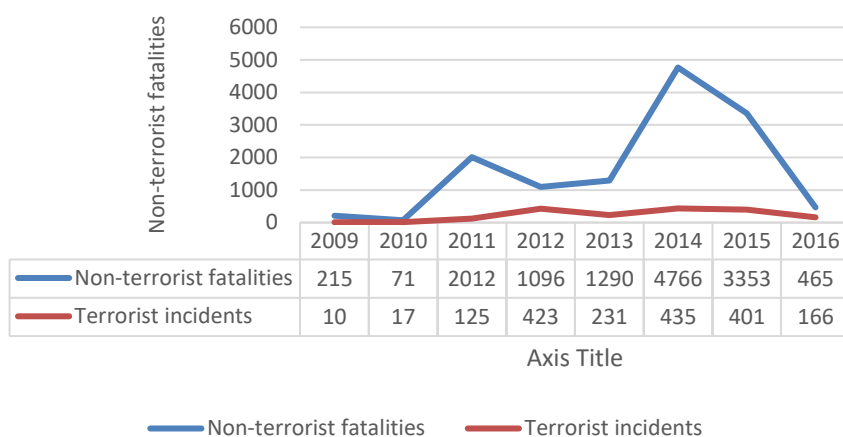
Figure 1: Terrorist incidents and fatalities caused by Boko Haram, 2009-2016.[59] Source: Global Terrorism Database, calculations by the authors.

Estimations regarding the amount of territory held by Boko Haram in early 2015 suggest that the group controlled roughly half of Borno State, as well as parts of

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[56] Remote violence refers to incidents in which the means for engaging in conflict did not require the physical presence of the perpetrator. For instance, this includes bombings, IED attacks, drone activity, mortar and missile attacks, etc.

[57] Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2017). "Realtime 2017 All Africa File (updated 4th November 2017". Available at: https://www.acleddata.com/data/realtime-data/. Accessed on 13 November 2017.

[58] International Crisis Group (2016).

[59] Please note that the fatalities count here excludes terrorist fatalities.

Yobe and Adamawa.[60] Since 2015, however, Boko Haram has lost close to all territory, and may be hard pressed to recover as an insurgent group controlling sizable territory over prolonged periods of time. In March 2015, Shekau swore allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and attempted to re-brand his group as Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).[61] Only weeks later, the group lost control over Gwoza, its 'capital' in south-east Borno state. A year later, its operations had been retreated from Adamawa, Yobe and Gombe states to north-eastern Borno.[62] By December 2016, Boko Haram was reported from its main base in the Mandara mountains, signalling yet another tactical set-back.[63]

This weakening of Boko Haram has been the direct result of a more ambitious, coordinated government response, begun in early 2015. This has involved acquisition of military materiel and capabilities which are crucial to counterinsurgency campaigns (including Mi-35M combat helicopters from Russia[64] and T-72 Tanks from Czech Republic[65]); improved cross-border collaboration amongst the Lake Chad countries in the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF); the support of local vigilante groups dubbed the Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF); a more offensive posture by the Nigerian Armed Forces (including moving the operations base to Maiduguri from Abuja); and internal improvements to logistics, wage payments and rotation of active troops.[66] Signals intelligence (SIGINT) and image intelligence (IMINT) provided by U.S. drones have presumably also played an important role.[67] Somewhat controversially, private military companies have also reportedly been crucial in putting Boko Haram on its back foot. While the long-term viability of this strategy and its constituent parts can be debated, its short-term efficiency is clearly evident from

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[60] Lauren Ploch Blanchard (2016). "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions". *Congressional Research Service.* 4.

[61] Freedom C. Onuhoa (2016). "Split in ISIS-aligned Boko Haram group". Al Jazeera, October 27 2016.

[62] International Crisis Group (2016), 2.

[63] Ahmed Kingini "Man purporting to be Boko Haram leader denies Sambisa forest defeat" *Reuters*, December 29 2016.

[64] Oscar Nkala (2017). "Nigerian Air Force takes delivery of two Mi-35M attack helicopters". *Defence Web,* 12 January 2017. Available at: http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46413, accessed on 1 November 2017.

[65] *Defence Web* (2015). "Nigeria receiving T-72s and other weapons from Czech Republic". 2 February 2015. Available at: http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37790:nigeria-receiving-t-72s-and-other-weapons-from-czech-republic&catid=50:Land&Itemid=105, accessed on 1 November 2017.

[66] International Crisis Group (2016), 6-7.

[67] International Crisis Group (2016), 9.

the swift decline and retreat of Boko Haram. Adapting its strategy, Boko Haram has increased its use of women and children to attack soft targets.[68]

In August 2016, Daesh appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the new leader of ISWAP following internal strife, but Shekau refused to step down and vowed to continue the insurgency. Al-Barnawi is a former spokesperson for Boko Haram and believed to be the son of its founder Muhammed Yusuf. Following his appointment, al-Barnawi criticised Shekau for targeting ordinary civilians and promised to target primarily Christians, sparking a propaganda war between himself and Shekau.[69] This was not the first time that Boko Haram experienced fractionalization. Perhaps most notably, a splinter group called Ansaru emerged in January 2012, stating Shekau's targeting of civilians as a reason for splintering. Ansaru has stayed relatively lethargic since 2013, when the French launched Operation Serval aimed at retaking northern Mali from Islamist groups. The operation reportedly cut Ansaru's supply routes and pushed it to re-enter into allegiance with Shekau.[70]

While the full implications of the split in 2016 remain open to interpretation for the time being, the al-Barnawi fraction reportedly operates in northern Borno state, including borders with Niger, Chad and Cameroon, while the Shekau fraction operates mainly central and southern Borno and northern Cameroon.[71] The two factions also pursue quite distinct modus operandi, with the Shekau faction mainly attacking "soft" civilian targets and reportedly acting without much ideological or strategic guidance. The al-Barnawi faction, by contrast, is better organized, attacks mainly police and military targets, emphasize treating Muslim civilians better, and conduct complex operations, including the kidnapping of a large oil exploration team in July 2017.[72]

As shown by this chapter, there are historical antecedents and structural factors that partly explain the initial rise of Boko Haram. Most notably, these include the Sokoto caliphate, the imposition of Western education by the colonial power, poverty in northern Nigeria, conflicts between Muslims and Christians, distrust of the state, porous borders, the growth of Salafist Islam. Last but not least, the seemingly indiscriminate response by the Nigerian Defense Forces to the initial rise of Boko Haram arguably escalated the conflict dramatically. That said, such historical and structural factors tell us little about why Boko Haram expanded until late 2014 and has shrunk decisively since then, nor does it enable an analysis of the likely trajectory of the conflict moving forward. To understand this, one must

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[68] International Crisis Group (2016), 1.
[69] Fulan Nasrullah (2016). "African Jihadists Split over Islamic State Ties*". IHS Jane's Intelligence Review* 28:11.
[70] International Crisis Group (2014).
[71] Onuhoa (2016).
[72] Alexis Akwagyriam "Boko Haram wing tied to IS marks resurgence by kidnapping oil workers" *Reuters*, August 2 2017.

analyse what has occurred inside Boko Haram during this period (analysed in chapters 3-7) and the evolving Nigerian counterinsurgency campaign (described in chapter 8).

3 Leadership, Strategy and ideology

The organisational structure and precise leadership of Boko Haram remain opaque and the few studies that exist offer partly contradictory accounts. The group has managed to keep a closed lid on much of its internal affairs, including the exact composition of its organisational structure and modes of planning and leading operations. Organisational complexity and the group's tactics have ensured a high degree of operational security. Contact surfaces between individual cells are kept to a minimum and sightings of the leadership are rare, which has contributed to the image of the Boko Haram leadership (Shekau in particular, as being elusive).[73]

Even so, the central role played by Shekau and the growing internal strife his leadership has engendered is plainly visible. With a handful of examples of senior members of Boko Haram having been killed by the group itself, it is clear that Shekau is determined to maintain a firm grip on power. This, together with the increasingly fratricidal targeting of Muslim civilians, arguably caused the splintering of the group. Furthermore, the personalised leadership style of Shekau implies that his death would likely cause major upheaval, or even the complete cessation of fighting, inside his fraction. The al-Barnawi fraction, by contrast, is less dependent on any single individual and has a more elaborate long-term strategy.

3.1 Leadership

Abubakar Shekau took control over Boko Haram in July 2010 after the group's founder, Mohammed Yusuf, was killed in police custody in 2009.[74] Shekau had previously served as Yusuf's deputy.[75] To aid his decision making, the leader has a council of elders – a Shura council. The exact number of council members and their identities are not known. Estimates claim that the council had 6-8 members prior to the split into two factions in August 2016,[76] but other estimates suggests

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[73] Stratfor (2014). "Nigeria: Examining Boko Haram". Retrieved from: https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/nigeria-examining-boko-haram, accessed on 28 August 2017.

[74] Corina Simonelli et al. (2014). "Boko Haram Recent Attacks*". Department of Defense and the Office of University Programs*, Department of Homeland Security. College Park MD: Start, May 2014.

[75] Pate (2015)*,* 13.

[76] Barkindo, Atta (2016). "Understanding Boko Haram's factional Structure*". IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor* 16:6; Bodansky, Yossef (2014). "Boko Haram – A Serious Threat". Institut für Strategie- Politik- und Wirtschaftsberatung (ISPSW). *ISPSW Strategy Series* no. 275. P.4.

there may have been as many as 30.[77] The council members uphold minimal contact with each other, reportedly communicating mainly through couriers.[78]

The operational structure is highly decentralised, as regional and sub-regional commanders run day-to-day operations in their respective areas of responsibility.[79] It is likely that regional and sub-regional cells operate without knowledge of each other's identities or of the overarching strategic direction of the central command. Direct communication between the top leadership and the local cells is kept to an absolute minimum, and individual area commanders enjoy a large degree of autonomy, as long as their actions do not contradict the wishes of leaders.[80]

Dissidents are not tolerated, as illustrated by the Shekau's habit of regularly ordering the execution of those who do not follow orders or attempt to defect.[81] As late as December last year, he ordered the killing of Abu Zinnira, who was a leading spokesperson of Boko Haram.[82] It is likely that the recent advances by Nigerian security forces and the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) have further weakened the central leadership's control over individual cells, as they are now spread out and fragmented.[83]

This decentralised structure, with limited contact between central leaders and cells and between the cells themselves, entails some advantages for Boko Haram. These include making it difficult for the Nigerian state to find the central leadership. However, decentralisation of power is also likely to pose operational and loyalty problems for the leadership. As a result of loss of territorial control and thereby a decreased capability to control its troops, coordinated large-scale operations are likely to be more difficult to conduct now than previously. This would mean that operations which demand coordination between several units, such as massing troops to overrun a government outpost, would be decidedly more difficult to execute.

In short, Boko Haram has clearly chosen survival over effectiveness and coherence, as it has sacrificed its possibilities of coordination and communication for secrecy.[84] Furthermore, the risk of fractionalisation may increase, as the individual cells have very little contact with those to whom they answer.

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[77] Stratfor (2014).
[78] Stratfor (2014).
[79] Bodansky (2014), 4.
[80] Simonelli et.al. (2014).
[81] Pate (2015), 16.
[82] *The Street Journal* (2017). "Boko Haram Leader, Shekau kills spokesman for disloyalty as it ambushes military, kills 7". February 24 2017.
[83] International Crisis Group (2016a), 5.
[84] Frisch, Ethan (2011). "Insurgencies are organizations too: Organizational structure and the effectiveness of insurgent strategy". *Peace and Conflict Review* 6:1, 3.

It is not yet clear what this means for the resilience of the group as, if further fractionalisation is avoided, the decentralised structure and harsh secrecy may ensure its survival. However, the military effectiveness of Boko Haram, measured as the capability to take and hold territory, is likely to be severely hampered by the lack of coordination between cells. The implication is that the current leadership structure adds to the resilience of Boko Haram as a network and terrorist organisation, as cells can operate independently and in secrecy. However, it decreases its resilience as a rebel group with current territorial ambitions, as it is designed to facilitate asymmetrical warfare rather than regular military operations.

Following the split within Boko Haram in August 2016, close observers in Nigeria are convinced that the Shekau faction is considerably weaker than the al-Barnawi faction and that it is the latter that should be the long-term concern. Much of the top and mid-level leadership reportedly chose to take al-Barnawi's side and it is not clear how much of Shekau's former complex network remains intact.[85]

Perhaps the most influential Boko Haram member after Shekau and al-Barnawi is Mamman Nur.[86] The Borno-born jihadist is well-connected within the global jihadi network and is said to have spent time with both AQIM and Al Shabaab in the past. Nur was the mastermind behind the 2011 bombings of the UN headquarters in Abuja, and is widely believed to have been Boko Haram's go-between in its relationship with other jihadi groups in the region and beyond. Mamman Nur is currently loyal to the al-Barnawi faction.[87] This implies that should al-Barnawi seek to establish further contacts with other regional terrorist organisations, Nur could feasibly act as a well-connected go-between .

The implications of the split are too early to assess in terms of leadership, but if it is true that most of the leadership structure is loyal to al-Barnawi, the resilience of the Shekau faction would be lower and there may not be any clear replacement for Shekau should he be injured or killed. Such an event may spark mass desertions or a merging of the two jihadi groups. Al-Barnawi, on the other hand, appears to have several strengths connected to the leadership, as he can utilise his alleged blood relationship to Yusuf, who was a relatively popular figure, and he has retained the support of Daesh, while he has followers with vast connections among jihadists worldwide.[88]

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[85] Fulan (2016). Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[86] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[87] Jacob Zenn (2014). "Leadership analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria". *Combatting Terrorism Centre Sentinel* 7:2; Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[88] Alexis Akwagyriam "Boko Haram wing tied to IS marks resurgence by kidnapping oil workers" *Reuters*, August 2 2017.

3.2 Analysis of Ideology and Strategic Aims

Boko Haram's founder, Mohammed Yusuf, was a trained Salafist and follower of Ibn Taymiyya, a 14th century theological scholar who propagated a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam[89] and called for jihad against rulers who did not follow or enforce the Islamic judicial system, i.e. sharia law.[90] Although Yusuf specialised in a collection of hadiths that emphasise the authority of militant jihad, Boko Haram under Yusuf was more focused on da'wa – proselytising and conversion by peaceful means. The Boko Haram launch of a holy war by means of violence happened after his death, most likely instigated by Abubakar Shekau but also influenced by the indiscriminate operation of the government against the organisation in Maiduguri in 2009.[91]

Although the two different Boko Haram-factions have the same end goal – the establishment of an Islamic state in northern Nigeria – they seemingly differ in one key ideological component that also translates into different strategic directions.

Abubakar Shekau believes that he has the authority for pronouncing others apostates, thereby making them legitimate targets.[92] In other words, Shekau views everyone who does not follow his particular interpretation of Islam as non-Muslim, and therefore enemies. In practice, this belief has allowed Shekau to focus his efforts on attacking and killing civilians, while still retaining his status as an Islamic Imam. It is this view and its implications that have given Boko Haram its reputation as particularly brutal and which have led to the many rifts between Shekau and other armed jihadi groups.[93]

Al-Barnawi, on the other hand, does not see himself as having the right to decide who is a Muslim and who is not, and has vowed to leave civilian Muslims on the sidelines of his insurgency.[94] If al-Barnawi keeps his word, his faction will instead focus its violence towards security forces and Christian targets.

In terms of resilience, there is a difference in the long-term and short-term between the two factions. Short-term, Shekau's ideology may permit him to do more damage and to sustain his group through predation. As suicide bombings against civilian targets and attacking and looting villages are within his faction's repertoire, its potential for destruction is still large in the coming months. However, as this high level of brutality risks further alienating the people of the Lake Chad area, the long-term prognosis is not in favour of Shekau. It will be

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[89] *Counter Extremism Project* (2017). "Boko Haram". Retrieved from: https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/boko-haram, accessed on 16 May 2017
[90] Pate (2015), 13-14.
[91] Pate (2015), 13.
[92] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505
[93] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505
[94] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

difficult to sustain his insurgency when the level of support has decreased to near zero. At this point, it is difficult to see a clear strategic line in the actions of Shekau's faction, other than urgently trying to illustrate relevance and ensuring survival after the loss of territory and the exclusion from Daesh.[95]

Al-Barnawi, on the other hand, may have the potential to reignite popular support for the insurgency, due to his less brutal modus operandi. As civilians are caught between Shekau's security forces and vigilantes, who are notorious for their human rights abuses, and al-Barnawi, who is making it his business not to harm Muslim civilians, he may seem like the least bad option.

If al-Barnawi can gain enough support to allow him to tax villages without the threat of violence, the group may have the potential to sustain itself long-term.[96] Furthermore, as most of the main leaders have chosen to stick with the al-Barnawi faction, its potential for successfully implementing a disciplined long-term strategy is arguably higher. Moreover, the less erratic behaviour of the al-Barnawi faction gives it a greater chance of remaining in alliance with Daesh and other jihadi groups, which gives it a possibility to receive financial and logistical support. On the other hand, attacking security forces is more dangerous and may produce more casualties than targeting civilians, which in turn imposes greater demands on this fraction to ensure skilful tactical operations and a reliable supply of trained recruits, weaponry and presumably financing, in order to successfully execute this strategy over time.

Hence, while ideology and strategy contribute to the deadliness of Shekau's faction in the short term, it may also be herald its long-term demise. Moreover, while al-Barnawi may not be as dangerous to the people of north-eastern Nigeria as Shekau at this point, his ideology and access to experienced advisors may increase the likelihood of his faction's long-term survival and continuation of conflict. The ideologies of the two Boko Haram factions therefore entail both strengths and weaknesses, depending on the time frame. Nonetheless, the information at hand points towards Boko Haram al-Barnawi as the more resilient faction.

To sum up, the two factions differ significantly in terms of leadership and strategy. Al-Barnawi has seemingly managed to keep a cadre of leaders by his side, creating redundancy and thereby resilience. The Shekau-faction, on the other hand, does not have a known deputy, indicating that the group is rather dependent on Shekau. His capture or death may mean that his faction quickly loses relevance. Shekau's violent strategy gives his faction flexibility in the short term, but if al-Barnawi's less vicious strategy can aid him to regain support among the population, his faction is likely to constitute a more potent long-term threat.

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[95] International Crisis Group (2016a), 4.
[96] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

4 Operative Capabilities

Before the start of 2015, Boko Haram was a considerable threat even in head-to-head battle with the Nigerian military. Since the Nigerian state launched an offensive in early 2015, during which considerable swathes of territory were retaken, the trajectory for Boko Haram's fighting capabilities has been pointing downwards. Adaptable as the insurgency is, it has refocused on asymmetrical warfare. Al-Barnawi is hitting military installations and convoys in surprise attacks and Shekau is deploying suicide bombers to target civilians. Today in 2017 Boko Haram's ability to take and hold territory and to stage large-scale and complex attacks has decreased.

4.1 Fighting Force

Estimates of the number of personnel that Boko Haram has at its disposal differ greatly between different sources. By mid-2014, the Cameroon's Ministry of Defence claimed that Boko Haram had an estimated 15 000 to 20 000 members,[97] while other analysts have put the number somewhat lower, at above 9000.[98] A close observer in Abuja estimated the number of Boko Haram fighters at around 6000 in May 2017, whereof 5000 are currently under the command of the al-Barnawi faction, leaving Shekau's group at 1000 strong.[99] While others declined to offer exact estimates, there seems to be fairly clear consensus among close observers that the al-Barnawi faction is considerably larger and more operatively capable in terms of being able to attack the security forces.

Respondents also estimated that close to 4000 captured or surrendered jihadists are in detention, although there are suspicions among them that the number is considerably higher.[100] Given reports alleging indiscriminate sweeps by security forces following Boko Haram attacks, it is however fully possible that this number includes a sizable proportion of individuals with tenuous or no connection whatsoever to Boko Haram.[101]

As can be observed from the above range of estimates, the exact number of Boko Haram members is unknown at this point. That said, it seems clear that the fighting

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[97] Cited in Jakob Zenn (2014). "Boko Haram: recruitment, financing and arms trafficking in the Lake Chad region". *Combatting Terrorism Centre Sentinel* 7:10.

[98] Farouk Chothia (2015) "Boko Haram crisis: How have Nigeria's militants become so strong?" *BBC News*, January 26 2015.

[99] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[100] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[101] *Amnesty International* (2015). "Stars on their shoulders, blood on their hands – War crimes committed by the Nigerian military", 4-6.

force of Boko Haram has declined considerably since its peak in late 2014 and early 2015.

Since the government offensive was launched in early 2015 there have been frequent reports of Boko Haram militants surrendering in Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon, indicating that the group's members are feeling the pressure.[102] As late as July 2017, as an offensive was ongoing against the Sambisa Forest – a notorious stronghold of Boko Haram – the Nigerian Chief of Army Staff claimed that 700 Boko Haram fighters had surrendered to army personnel.[103] As it may be fair to assume that recruitment has slowed as a result of the group being on the back foot, it is likely that the numbers available to the Boko Haram factions are declining.

4.2 Weaponry and Tactical Abilities

Boko Haram is a highly adaptive insurgent group with a wide repertoire of tactics and methods at hand. Between the years 2010-2011, attacks on high-value targets – such as local officials, civil servants, chiefs, religious leaders, police offices, military bases and non-cooperative traders – was the preferred modus operandi. Gradually, however, the group grew more violent as it moved on to target entire communities, with a particular focus on those that did not openly support Shekau's band of insurgents.[104]

Boko Haram propaganda videos portraying assaults on military outposts suggest low levels of military training among the fighters. Assault formations and the amateurish use of their weapons shed doubt on the group's abilities at the lowest level. However, events on the ground and reports of members training in Libya and Somalia point towards higher military knowledge among the leadership.[105]

For instance, Boko Haram was previously highly capable of conducting coordinated attacks, in fact more so than other jihadist groups.[106] Over 40 per cent of the group's terror attacks up until 2015 were part of a coordinated series of violent events.[107] However, proficiency in conducting the types of complex attacks for which it became notorious during its peak has clearly declined.

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[102] Emma Farge (2016). "Hundreds of Boko Haram fighters surrender in Chad". *Reuters,* November 12 2016; *Premium Times* (2016). "240 Boko Haram terrorists surrender – Nigerian military". November 1 2016.

[103] *Premium Times* (2017). "700 Boko Haram Insurgents Surrender – Army Chief, Buratai". July 3 2017.

[104] *International Crisis Group* (2014).

[105] Pate (2015), 22; Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[106] Pate (2015), 18.

[107] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2016). Global Terrorism Database [Entire GTD Dataset].

Notable attacks include spectacular simultaneous assaults on an airbase and a military barracks in Maiduguri in December 2013. Around 200 Boko Haram fighters used rocket launchers and assault rifles to destroy close to all buildings and five aircraft within the two compounds. Later that same month, the group conducted a similar attack, as several hundred fighters stormed a military compound in the town of Bama in Borno state, killing a large number of soldiers and their wives and children, before burning the barracks to the ground.

Perhaps the most solid evidence of the coordination skills of the Boko Haram leadership was the attacks carried out on security agencies in Kano almost a year earlier in 2012, when a series of coordinated bombings and armed assaults killed at least 185 people over the course of a day. Apart from these assaults, Boko Haram has carried out a number of high-profile bombings, including that on the UN headquarters in Abuja in 2011 and that on St Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla that same year.[108]

Between the summer months of 2014 and the government offensive starting in early 2015, Boko Haram showed that it had the capacity to seize and hold towns and villages. As the pressure mounted, however, the group reverted back to the hit-and-run tactics for which it has become notorious. The terrain of north-eastern Nigeria – specifically Boko Haram's strongholds in the Sambisa Forest, the Mandara Mountains and the marshlands that surround Lake Chad – is not far from ideal for insurgencies, as the military has noticeable difficulties operating in the harsh terrain without the local knowledge that is possessed within the ranks of Boko Haram.[109] Boko Haram therefore has a strong comparative advantage, as the combination of the difficult terrain and members' familiarity with it greatly facilitates evasive actions and beating back regular military forces.

The tactics and weapons used in Boko Haram attacks are also diverse and adaptive. The group has access to a broad arsenal of military-grade weapons, many of which they have acquired by raiding and capturing military installations.[110] Moreover, there have reportedly been instances where disgruntled soldiers have sold weapons to Boko Haram for a quick profit.[111] On occasion the group has used simple means in its attacks, such as vehicles or melee weapons.

More commonly, however, Boko Haram uses explosives such as landmines, vehicle-borne or personnel-borne IEDs, to hit both military and civilian targets. Moreover, more conventional assaults using firearms, vehicle-mounted heavy machine guns, RPGs and heavy artillery are also common.[112] The group has access to technical vehicles – pick-up trucks that facilitate quick movement in difficult

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[108] ICG (2014), 16-18.
[109] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505
[110] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505
[111] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505
[112] GTD dataset 2016.

terrain – and armoured vehicles, often with machine guns mounted on them. Reportedly, however, many of these have been destroyed or recaptured by the Nigerian army as it has increased pressure on the group during the past few years.[113]

In the past, Boko Haram has proved to be capable of large-scale and spectacular attacks on military targets and on targets of high symbolic value. However, large-scale and highly coordinated attacks such as that on the Maiduguri airbase or the attacks in Kano in 2012 have been few and far between in recent years, since government forces stepped up their efforts to quell the insurgency. Reports that the group has lost much of its vehicle fleet and its ability to beat the military in head-on combat mean that both its factions may have a difficult time upholding their technological level in the long run, as plundering military installations may no longer be a viable way to get arms.

In terms of the IED threat, Boko Haram's IEDs have so far been ineffective for the most part, indicating that its access to bomb-making materials and proper training is lacking.[114] Therefore, resource depletion may provide a good opportunity in the fight against Boko Haram, as its capability to sustain its arsenal seems limited, at least in terms of heavy equipment. Boko Haram is highly adaptable, however, not least illustrated by the increased use of women and children as suicide bombers once young men started raising suspicion.[115]

Boko Haram's capability to stage large-scale attacks has clearly decreased since 2015, while the government has increased its presence in the north-east. Recent attacks are of relatively small scale, as Shekau has concentrated on soft targets, and most events that have been confirmed as involving the al-Barnawi faction are attacks on military posts and convoys, none of which has been near the scale or complexity of those of 2013.[116]

Although this is without doubt a positive development, it does not mean that one can discount Boko Haram as a military force. It may, at the moment, have limited military capability, but as has been made evident by e.g. the resurgence of Al Shabaab in Somalia,[117] there is a risk that Boko Haram will 'wait out the storm' and come back revitalised if pressure decreases. However, unlike Al Shabaab, Boko Haram cannot simply wait for an external intervention to draw down or end, as its main opponent is the Nigerian security forces. Close observers are, in this regard, more worried about the potential capabilities of al-Barnawi's faction, as he

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[113] ICG (2016), 2-3.
[114] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505
[115] ICG (2016), 1; Hilary Matfess and Jason Warner (2017). "Exploding stereotypes: The unexpected operational and demographic characteristics of Boko Haram's suicide bombers". *Combatting Terrorism Center (CTC).*
[116] Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2017). [Realtime 2017 All Africa File, updated 2nd September 2017].
[117] Jonsson & Torbjörnsson (2016).

has proven capable of successfully attacking hard targets.[118] A particularly troubling development would be if the al-Barnawi faction were able once again to expand its area of operations beyond Borno state, as this could force the security forces to spread themselves too thin, thus decreasing pressure on the core of the group.

The Shekau-faction, however, has not displayed any significant fighting ability and it's preference for attacking soft targets using suicide bombers may indicate self-awareness in that regard. The Shekau-faction is also smaller in size and may therefore be a limited threat to security forces going forward, albeit still a considerable source of fear for the civilian population.

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[118] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

5 Financing and Logistical Support

Regional poverty has arguably served as an important driver of the insurgency, crucially lowering the 'alternative costs' of would-be recruits to Boko Haram. The group has also exploited this is in its recruitment efforts, for instance by offering business loans to individuals and forcing them to join the group when they are unable to repay the money owed.[119]

In its early days, militias formed by local politicians to intimidate political opponents – and abandoned post-election – may have facilitated Boko Haram recruitment. Allegations of more direct funding by local politicians have repeatedly surfaced, but have never been proven.[120] Early on, Boko Haram may also have benefited from 'seed money' from Al Qaeda Core (AQC). According to a Boko Haram spokesman, during Yusuf's stay in Saudi Arabia in 2004 and 2005, he secured further financial support from AQC.[121]

Since then, Boko Haram has established a mainly self-funded and locally based funding model, with income derived primarily from criminal activities.[122] Running a comparatively low-cost insurgency, and with seemingly limited to non-existent dependence on external sponsors, has meant that the financial tools available to cut off its funding are limited. Even so, following government crack-downs on sectors of the economy thought to benefit Boko Haram, both the Shekau and al-Barnawi factions are showing signs of running low on funds.[123] While funding to Boko Haram cannot feasibly be cut off entirely, it has clearly been limited, impacting the resilience of both factions.

5.1 Main Sources of Revenue and Expenditure

In 2015, one analyst estimated Boko Haram's annual income at around $10 million, with the group running a low-cost insurgency manned mainly by young people from rural regions.[124] While comprehensive analyses of the financing of Boko Haram are comparatively scarce, available evidence suggests that the group

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[119] Mercy Corps (2016). "Gifts and graft. How Boko Haram uses financial services for recruitment and support". September 2016, 2.

[120] Smith (2016), 84-87; *Deutsche Welle* (2014) "Who is financing Boko Haram?" February 9 2014.

[121] Terrence McCoy (2014). "This is how Boko Haram funds its evil", *Washington Post*, June 6 2014.

[122] Financial Action Task Force- The Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (FATF-GIABA) (2016). "Terrorist financing in West and Central Africa" Paris, October 2016, 10-17.

[123] United Nations Security Council (2017). "Fourth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat", S/2017/97, February 2017.

[124] Chothia (2015).

is predominantly self-funded, mainly through illegal activities in the Lake Chad region. Prominent sources of funding have included, in rough order of importance: kidnappings, robberies, extortion, looting and commercial activities.[125] Like several other Islamist groups, Boko Haram has engaged extensively in kidnapping for ransom. In 2013-2014, the group reportedly received an estimated $11 million in ransom to release captives in five different incidents in northern Cameroon alone.[126] Kidnappings have likewise allowed the group to extract concessions and millions of dollars in ransom in Nigeria.[127] Analysts also estimate that bank robberies have netted the group $6 million in total.[128] Looting and extortion have reportedly been major sources of income for the group, especially early during its offensive.[129] Amongst its more idiosyncratic sources of income, Boko Haram has also relied on cattle/livestock rustling in northern Nigeria and Cameroon. This has led Nigerian and Cameroonian authorities to close down markets suspected of selling stolen cattle linked to the group.[130]

While Boko Haram has been less evidently strategic about how to acquire its funding than for instance Daesh in Syria and Iraq, it has shown some signs of adapting its behaviour to secure logistical and financial support. The group's attempts to control Cameroonian border towns such as Fotokol, Amehide and Kolofata are thought to be motivated in part by a need to secure supply lines into Nigeria for weapons smuggled from Chad and Libya.[131]

5.2 Government Countermeasures

In attempts to cut off terrorist financing, Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon have ordered a variety of bans on motorbike taxi services, rural markets, the sale of fuel and trade in a variety of local commodities, including fish, cattle and dried meat.[132] However, as is often the case, measures adopted to combat the financing of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region have also had significant adverse consequences for the already impoverished local population.

That said, several indicators suggest that funding for the group has decreased significantly. According to a UN Security Council report, the financing of Boko Haram is under pressure, with both factions unable to pay fighters any salaries, many attacks motivated by a need to loot provisions and defections reportedly

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[125] Pate (2015), 22-24; United Nations Security Council (2017).
[126] International Crisis Group (2016), p. 5, footnote 16; For further examples of kidnappings for ransom, see Zenn (2014).
[127] McCoy (2014).
[128] McCoy (2014).
[129] FATF-GIABA (2016), 10-11.
[130] FATF-GIABA (2016), 12-13.
[131] Zenn (2014).
[132] International Crisis Group (2016), 4.

occurring as a result of lack of resources.[133] Illicit trade has become riskier, the legal economy has swiftly declined and the group has moved from 'taxing' or exacting tribute from civilians to raiding communities.[134] In isolated instances, some Boko Haram fighters have surrendered due to starvation,[135] and killed or captured fighters show clear signs of malnutrition. This decrease in Boko Haram funding is frequently attributed to a combination of the Nigerian offensive and efforts by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to reduce the territory in which Boko Haram is able to freely operate and fund-raise.[136] None of this is to suggest that Boko Haram has been deprived of all its funding. It does illustrate, however, that the weakening of the group has also limited it's funding, making a quick recovery more difficult.

5.3 Impact on Resilience

In spite of a funding model primarily based on self-funding from local revenue streams, the financing of Boko Haram has decreased significantly since its peak in late 2014 and early 2015.[137] This also seems to be impacting both factions of Boko Haram, in that they cannot rely on wage payments to recruit and retain fighters, and may be suffering defections as a consequence.[138]

In the available literature, it does not appear that the group has had any major state or co-religionist benefactor, although it may have received limited support from other terrorist groups. Hence, in the current situation, it is not clear how the group could be able to again expand its financing rapidly in the short term. Support for the al-Barnawi faction from Daesh in Iraq and Syria is of course a possibility but seems unlikely, given that the Daesh group is under intense military and financial pressure.[139] That said, the comparatively low financing requirements of Boko Haram mean that even fairly limited incomes (i.e. in the millions of dollars) could have a significant impact on its resilience. Hence, while both factions of Boko Haram are currently under financial strain, it cannot be assumed that this will inevitably remain the case indefinitely. For instance, while the Nigerian government have denied paying any ransom to secure the release of 82 of the Chibok girls in May 2017, the BBC reported that the girls were released in return

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[133] Conor Gaffey (2017) "Boko Haram Factions 'Cannot pay fighters' salaries' UN Report" *Newsweek*, February 8 2017.

[134] International Crisis Group (2016), 5.

[135] Conor Gaffey (2016) "Boko Haram, 76 starving members surrender to Nigerian military", *Newsweek,* March 3 2016.

[136] FATF-GIABA, 6.

[137] International Crisis Group (2016), 5-6.

[138] Gaffey (2016).

[139] United Nations Security Council (2017).

for five Boko Haram commandeers and a cash payment of 2 million euros.[140] If true, this would be a significant cash infusion to the cash-strapped Shekau faction. In the medium to long term however, the ability to finance either faction of Boko Haram remains limited, hence weakening the long-term resilience of the group.

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[140] Alastair Leithead and Stephanie Hegarty (2017) "The faith of the Chibok girls" BBC, May 19 2017.

6 Strategic Communication, Recruitment and Popular Support

The Boko Haram insurgency has been bloody, and it has taken a large toll on the communities in north-eastern Nigeria. It has created a humanitarian crisis, with a large part of the population being internally displaced. Farmers have not been able to work their fields for much of the conflict, adding famine to the sources of misery.[141] Boko Haram under the leadership of Shekau has terrorized the population for around six years, decreasing the relatively sizable support that Yusuf managed to mobilize for the movement. This has made Shekau dependent on forced recruitment, further tarnishing Boko Haram's reputation.

Al-Barnawi has used his propaganda platforms to distance himself and his faction from Shekau's targeting of civilians. The question is if this can reverse the dropping support and facilitate recruitment going forward. Although Al-Barnawi has a capable media wing, it has seemingly had a limited effect thus far.

This chapter analyses Boko Haram's messaging and propaganda, recruitment methods, popular support and how these factors affect the resilience of the movement.

6.1 Message and Propaganda Platforms

Messaging and propaganda are vital for Boko Haram's ability to recruit new members, create popular support and lure financiers.[142] Since its formation, Boko Haram has undergone a change in terms of channels it uses and what messages it chooses to spread.

The primary messaging goal for Boko Haram is likely to be recruitment. The group's media releases frequently include appeals for the public to join the jihadi struggle. In addition, such propaganda is used to undermine the government and strengthen the population's view of the group as a governing entity and capable military force. It is also likely that Boko Haram's videos and statements include messages to external groups – such as Daesh core – as well as hard-to-reach followers.[143]

Specifically, two events have generated major changes in Boko Haram's media strategy since the birth of the group: 1. the initiation of the insurgency, 2. the pledge of allegiance to Daesh. Before the group went underground, its "public

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[141] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[142] Mahmood, Omar S. (2017). "More than propaganda – a review of Boko Harams public messages". *Institute for Security Studies*. West Africa Report no.20, 23-24.

[143] Mahmood, (2017).

awareness department" used the distribution of cassettes and flyers, as well as public sermons and press briefings at its headquarters in Maiduguri, in order to spread its message, which to a large degree consisted of religious content and criticism of the corruption of the Nigerian state.[144]

After the death of Yusuf and the start of the insurgency, it became increasingly difficult for the group to uphold the open relationship it had previously enjoyed with the media. Instead, Boko Haram devised a strategy that would better suit the state of insurgency, sending audio and video messages to journalists via anonymous mobile phones, e-mail addresses and couriers.[145] For a short period, the group held teleconferences, but after one influential spokesman – Abul Qaqa – was killed in September 2012 as a result, and several others were arrested, it was deemed too unsafe to continue.[146]

During the period 2013 to 2015, video messages were the main outlet for the group. The videos mainly contained Shekau (figuring in 69 per cent of all messaging during the period[147]) surrounded by masked fighters, AK 47 in hand, while holding long speeches, often in a manner that made outside viewers question the leader's sanity. Alternatively, the videos, shot with poor quality and skill, depicted seemingly chaotic attacks by Boko Haram fighters, followed by a display of the loot generated from the attacks.[148] Furthermore, the videos often had threatening content, such as executions and other forms of punishments, to scare the population from cooperating with the government.[149] Claiming attacks appears, however, to be the most common purpose of the group's propaganda.[150]

A new shift became apparent in the beginning of 2015, when Boko Haram started publishing its propaganda productions online, on media outlets such as Youtube[151] and Twitter.[152] Although the websites are relatively fast at removing such content, it is generally online long enough for journalists to spot it. Boko Haram's early online publications were promoted by Daesh and it became evident that the groups

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[144] Abubakar, A. (2016). "Communicating violence: The media strategies of Boko Haram". In: M. Bunce, S. Franks & C. Paterson (Eds.), *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century: From the "Heart of Darkness" to "Africa Rising".* UK: Routledge, pp. 200-210.

[145] Abubakar (2016), 204-205; Freedom C. Onuoha (2016). "Boko Haram's recruitment and radicalization methods in Nigeria: An exposé". *South East Journal of Political Science,* 2:1, 181-203.

[146] Abubakar (2016), 205.

[147] Mahmood (2017), 7.

[148] See for instance: Sahara TV (2015). "Boko Haram releases new propaganda video". YouTube video, 7.31 min. Posted [October 2015]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D7JsPWtFJ8.

[149] Abubakar (2016); Mahmood (2017), 3.

[150] Mahmood (2017), 9.

[151] Onuoha (2016), 196; Abubakar. (2016), 207.

[152] *BBC Monitoring* (2015). "Is Islamic State shaping Boko Haram media?" March 4 2015; Mahmood (2017), 6.

had grown closer to each other.[153] Not surprisingly, Boko Haram publicly announced its allegiance to al-Baghdadi in early March 2015.[154]

It appears that the allegiance was not only symbolic, as the sophistication of Boko Haram's videos increased sharply in early 2015.[155] Previously, the videos had been grainy, poorly shot and with content that did not always depict the group's tactical abilities in a flattering light. Now, the videos – produced by the new propaganda outlet *Media Office of the West Africa Province* (MOWAP)[156] – became more and more sophisticated, skilfully edited with high quality intros containing advanced graphics, much like videos produced by Daesh. Moreover, the videos from then onwards are seemingly shot with much better equipment.[157] Beginning with the pledge of allegiance, Shekau started figuring less in the group's productions, and less focus was given to localised issues or grievances. Instead, the videos emphasised displays of strength and motivational speeches.[158]

While Hausa – the dominant local language of north-eastern Nigeria – was the primary language used in the propaganda early on, the use of Arabic has increased over time.[159] It is likely that this signals a gradual shift towards a widened target group than merely northern Nigerians. However, it seems that Boko Haram has not been able to attract foreign fighters on the same scale as other jihadist groups, as its membership is dominated by people from the Lake Chad area.[160]

It is evident that the split has led to the al-Barnawi faction retaining access to the better skilled media producers. Videos released by al-Barnawi still bear the signs of competent media producers, and still resemble the videos released by Daesh in Iraq and Syria.[161] Shekau, on the other hand, has seemingly reverted back to low tech productions, similar to those from before Boko Haram swore allegiance to Daesh. For instance, a video released in August 2017 was an almost 40 minute long speech by Shekau, and it is void of any advanced graphics or motivational footage, aside from an animated black flag in the top right corner of the frame.[162]

Technological advancements in the past decade have transformed the way in which groups such as Boko Haram can safely reach a broad target group world-wide.

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[153] Abubakar (2016), 206-207.

[154] *BBC News* (2015). "Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State. March 7 2015.

[155] BBC Monitoring (2015).

[156] Mahmood (2017), 17-18.

[157] Abubakar (2016), 207.

[158] Mahmood (2017), 18.

[159] Mahmood (2017), 7.

[160] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[161] Samson Toromade (2017). "Al-Barnawi predicts rival factional leader's defeat". *Pulse Nigeria.* 8 August 2017.

[162] See for instance: Sahara TV. "Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau has released a video taunting Presidents Buhari and Buratai". YouTube video, 36.18 min. Posted [August 2017]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D7JsPWtFJ8.

Since the costs and risk of producing propaganda have declined significantly over the years that Boko Haram has been active, it is difficult to think of a scenario where the capability of either faction to spread media publications would entirely cease.

In spite of its fairly sophisticated propaganda, the group has had fairly limited success in attracting foreign fighters or sponsored – certainly compared with Daesh, but also in comparison with for instance Al Shabaab in 2010-2014. The importance of Boko Haram propaganda for attracting local recruits is difficult to distinguish with any precision, but according to studies based on interviews with defectors, there are few indications that propaganda played a major role in convincing a large number of fighters to join.[163] As such, while both factions remain able to produce and disseminate propaganda, to date this seems to have had a limited impact on the group as a fighting unit.

6.2 Recruitment

Insurgencies are personnel-demanding, and an insurgent group's ability to replenish its supply of fighters is imperative to its resilience. Boko Haram uses a wide array of methods to recruit personnel. Enticement, coercion and a combination of the two are all within the group's repertoire.[164] Fighters who choose to join the group voluntarily may do so for ideological, religious or social reasons, but many likely join due to the economic incentives that Boko Haram has put in place. Northern Nigeria is badly struck by poverty and high unemployment, factors that may push uneducated and unskilled youths – Boko Haram's primary target demographic – towards a fairly stable income in the ranks of Boko Haram.[165]

Studies attempting to explain the reasons that young Nigerians choose to join Boko Haram show that a vast set of variables act to push and pull youths towards the group. There is great diversity regarding *who* joins. Recruits are seemingly men and women of different ages, from different ethnicities and different situations in terms of employment and financial strength.

When the lives that the recruits are leaving behind are diverse, the reasons for joining are likely to be just as assorted. Economic factors, particularly poverty in conjunction with promises of loans and support for the recruits' businesses, were seemingly an important lure for Boko Haram.

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[163] Mercy Corps (2016). "Motivations and empty promises – voices of former Boko Haram combatants and Nigerian youth".
[164] Onuoha (2016).
[165] Pate (2015), 16-17; Onuoha (2016), 189-190; Mercy Corps (2016), 13.

Moreover, a lack of trust in the Nigerian state is seemingly a powerful push factor for joining the group. Excess force and harsh tactics utilised by security forces have served to alienate and antagonise many Muslim Nigerians from the state.

Furthermore, the country's widespread corruption problem successfully feeds into the narrative of Boko Haram, which claims that the state's secularity contributes to the high level of corruption.[166]

Influence from friends and relatives and religious and ideological reasons have also been found to be important for joining in the jihadi struggle.[167]

Reports that examine which factors Nigerian citizens, teachers, security officials, preachers etc. *perceive* as the most important drivers of recruitment into Boko Haram provide the bulk of knowledge on this subject. Economic factors – such as poverty and unemployment – are widely viewed as the most common reason for joining Boko Haram in Nigeria. Other factors include limited theological knowledge among youths, illiteracy, lack of parental guidance during childhood and the desire to belong to a movement or group.[168]

A common method that Boko Haram utilises to recruit members is community infiltration is through community infection. Boko Haram recruiters have been known to infiltrate communities in order to identify, befriend and radicalise those who are most psychologically and financially vulnerable.[169]

Other commonly used methods include open propagation and preaching, economic enticement through loans or payments, recruitment of friends and relatives of members and jail breaks – where the group, besides freeing imprisoned members, seeks to recruit fleeing prisoners. Forced recruitment is also widely used.[170]

During raids on villages and towns, the group has routinely kidnapped individuals and later coerced them into fighting or by other means supporting the group.[171] In some cases, the distinction between forced and voluntary recruitment is difficult to make, as several former Boko Haram fighters claim that at the time of joining, they saw Boko Haram as the least bad option given their circumstances.[172] Moreover, Boko Haram can trap new recruits by gradually entangling them in the

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[166] Onuoha, Freedom (2014). "Why do youth join Boko Haram?" *United States Institute of Peace.* Special Report 348:6, 4-7; Mercy Corps (2016).

[167] Mercy Corps (2016), 12-15.

[168] Anneli Botha et al. (2017). "Understanding Nigerian citizens' perspectives on Boko Haram". *Institute for Security Studies (ISS)*. ISS Monograph number 196; Ewi, M and U. Salifu (2016). "Money talks – A key reason youths join Boko Haram". *Institute for Security Studies (ISS).* Policy Brief 98.

[169] Onuoha (2016), 190-191.

[170] Onuoha (2016), 190-191.

[171] Pate (2015), 16-17.

[172] Mercy Corps (2016), 11-12.

group's activities so that they find themselves at a point where they 'know too much' not to join.[173]

Boko Haram mainly draws its fighters from the Kanuri population, which is the dominant ethnic group in the area around Lake Chad, including north-eastern Nigeria.[174] However, the group does receive recruits from other ethnicities, despite Kanuri fighters reportedly being favoured within its ranks, for instance by not being selected for suicide missions.[175] Boko Haram has reportedly also utilised foreign fighters, particularly of the Tuareg community.[176]

Much points towards Boko Haram recruitment being largely dependent on its ability to provide economic incentives, and subsequently economic gain, for its recruits. This may be seen as a significant vulnerability for the group's ability to reinforce its ranks, as its territorial control is diminishing and the northern Nigerian economy is drying up as a result of the insurgency.[177] Reports of defections in the hundreds in the Lake Chad region after Boko Haram lost territory in late 2016 and early 2017[178] mean that reinforcements are badly needed.

Economic factors are, however, not the sole driver of Boko Haram recruitment. Therefore, one cannot expect recruitment to Boko Haram to completely cease if its funds run out. Although it may be difficult for the group to once again threaten the territorial control of the Nigerian state and its neighbours, less personnel-demanding tactics such as terror attacks can be just as devastating. Considering that resentment towards the Nigerian state and fear of Nigerian security forces are deeply entrenched in parts of the population of northern Nigeria, recruitment will likely continue, albeit at a lower rate. Providing narratives that effectively counter Boko Haram propaganda has proven effective to deter people from joining,[179] which indicates that religious leaders are vital in exposing the hypocrisy of the Boko Haram movement and thereby preventing recruitment for religious reasons.

In terms of differences between the two factions, Shekau may through his violent means have tarnished the Boko Haram trademark for some time. This has seemingly hampered voluntary recruitment significantly,[180] meaning that it is probably dependent on coercion to refill its ranks. However, if al-Barnawi

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[173] Onuoha (2016), 190-191.
[174] *BBC* (2016). "Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist Group?". November 24 2016.
[175] Barkindo (2014).
[176] Pate (2015), 17.
[177] International Crisis Group (2016a), 4.
[178] *Reuters News* (2016). "Hundreds of Boko Haram fighters surrender". November 13 2016; David Oputah (2017). "20 More Boko Haram Fighters Surrender in Niger". *The Will Nigeria,* January 6 2017; Abdulkareem Haruna and Agency Report (2016). "After losing Sambisa, Boko Haram fighters surrender to Niger Republic authorities". *Premium Times Nigeria,* December 28 2016.
[179] Mercy Corps (2016), 17.
[180] United Nations Security Council (2017).

succeeds in regaining popular support by offering a consistently distinct model for the insurgency, he may be able to re-spark recruitment for the al-Barnawi faction.

6.3 Popular Support

At the end of 2016, John Campbell from the Council on Foreign Relations labelled the issue of popular support for Boko Haram in northern Nigeria as a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma".[181] This quote certainly applies on two levels, as the degree of popular support for Boko Haram is unknown and as any support that the group may have at this point is difficult to understand. Campbell claims, however, that there must be some support from the population, as otherwise Boko Haram would not be able to operate.[182]

Under Yusuf's leadership, support was largely obtained through Yusuf's charismatically delivered criticism of the Nigerian government and his ability to frame existing grievances in religious terms.[183] Ethnicity has also been utilised to mobilise support – in particular the Kanuri ethnic identity, to which both Yusuf and Shekau belong.[184] The government's crack-down on the group in 2009 was heavy-handed and ultimately led to the capture and death of Yusuf, which seemed to reinforce the existing grievances among the population of Nigeria's north-east, and thereby also the support for the Boko Haram movement.[185]

However, popular support for Boko Haram has decreased significantly since its peak, as Shekau does not match his predecessor's appeal with his impulsive and incoherent utterances, which do not compare favourably to the eloquence and charisma of his predecessor. Moreover, Shekau's use of indiscriminate violence has further served to alienate large swathes of the northern population from Boko Haram's cause.

As the group took a more *takfirist* turn, viewing Muslims who do not openly support it as infidels and legitimate targets, Boko Haram's claim to protect and further the wellbeing of Muslim communities has fallen apart. Instead of the genuine support that Boko Haram seemed to enjoy in its infancy, the group under

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[181] J. Campbell (2016). "Popular support of Nigeria's Boko Haram". *Council on Foreign Relations.* Retrieved from http://blogs.cfr.org/campbell/2016/10/06/popular-support-of-nigerias-boko-haram/. Accessed on 19 June 2017.

[182] Campbell (2016).

[183] Omar S. Mahmood (2016). "Will changes in Boko Haram leadership revive local support?". *Institute for Security Studies (ISS).* Retrieved from: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/will-changes-in-boko-haram-leadership-revive-local-support. Accessed June 10 2017.

[184] Barkindo (2014); there may be ethnic dimensions affecting both recruitment and popular support for Boko Haram, but due to temporal constraints the authors have not explored that factor in detail.

[185] Mahmood (2016).

Shekau has instead relied on incentives and coercion to garner followers and recruits.[186]

The decreased support may be illustrated by the emergence of a large number of anti-Boko Haram self-defence militias, collectively known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF; see section 8.3). It is believed that the first militias were formed in early 2013, and since then civilian vigilantism has spread rapidly throughout the Lake Chad region. Their numbers now far exceed the estimated numbers available to Boko Haram.[187]

Unfortunately, the recently formed al-Barnawi faction may hold some potential in reviving support among the population, as it has vowed to cease the targeting of Muslim civilians to instead focus its efforts on Christian targets, security forces and militias. If al-Barnawi makes good on these promises, his faction may appeal to those who still hold a strong resentment against the state and the Christian south, but have been alienated by Shekau's indiscriminate killing spree. However, as the al-Barnawi faction, much like the Shekau faction, is dependent on food and supplies to sustain its fighting, it may be forced into predation. Alternatively, al-Barnawi may have to turn to taxation, which is not unproblematic as rural areas in the north-east have so far been outside the reach of the government taxation system, meaning that it may be difficult to keep communities supportive while taking some of their livelihoods.[188]

In short, popular support has been waning for Boko Haram since civilians became legitimate targets for the group. While the Shekau faction may have limited opportunity to regain what has been lost, it is possible that the al-Barnawi faction can use its less vicious image to gain popularity. However, this is dependent on its ability to find non-predatory funding. The current rate of recruitment is unclear, although Shekau's reliance on forced recruitment may offer a hint. An increase in support for al-Barnawi can potentially make it easier to for his faction to grow, however.

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[186] Mahmood (2016).

[187] International Crisis Group (2017). "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram". Africa Report No 244.

[188] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

7 External Support

There are no clear signs of any state supporting Boko Haram financially or logistically. There are indications that Boko Haram's late leader, Mohammed Yusuf, may have had connections to Saudi Arabia. For example, Yusuf reportedly took refuge in Saudi Arabia during the government crackdown on his movement in 2004. Furthermore, there are reports that others from the Boko Haram leadership have spent time there, for instance to hold meetings with Al Qaeda representatives. Saudi Arabia also facilitated talks between a faction of Boko Haram and the Nigerian government in 2012 – indicative of some form of diplomatic relations between Boko Haram and the Arabian kingdom. However, neither of these events prove that Saudi Arabia has in any way aided the insurgency actively. [189]

Although Boko Haram has seemingly been relatively isolated as an armed group, it has been in cooperative relationships with both groups that are under the Al Qaeda umbrella and with the Daesh archipelagic caliphate. Before Shekau shifted towards Daesh in his search for allies among global jihadists, there were confirmed links between Boko Haram and Al Qaeda – specifically the Mali-based Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).[190] Perhaps more surprising due to geographical distance are the reports of Boko Haram members training with Al Shabaab in Somalia.[191]

Throughout 2012 and 2013, there were frequent reports of Boko Haram fighters reinforcing their ideological counterparts in Mali. Boko Haram fighters reportedly frequently used Niger to transit to Mali, for instance to assist in capturing Menaka in Mali's Gao region. Furthermore, General Carter Ham of the U.S. Africa Command said in 2012 that Boko Haram insurgents were training in camps in Northern Mali and that it was likely that the group was receiving support in the form of money and explosives from AQIM. Boko Haram's media releases in 2012 also suggested ties between the Nigerian group and Al Qaeda, as they featured Shekau paying homage to fallen Al Qaeda profiles and cited Quran suras that have been the backbone of Al Qaeda's religious justification.[192]

However, as Shekau became increasingly brutal, AQIM reportedly rejected him in late 2012, and was instead facilitator of the formation of the Boko Haram faction named Ansaru – which had strong connections to AQIM, for instance illustrated by their preference for kidnappings. These ties were severed when France began

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[189] Jakob Zenn (2013). "Boko Haram's international connections". *Combating Terrorism Centre Sentinel*, 6:1.

[190] Zenn (2013).

[191] Stratfor (2014).

[192] Zenn (2013).

its military offensive in Mali in 2013 and parts of Ansaru seemingly reintegrated with Shekau.[193]

In August 2016, Shekau broke loose from ISWAP after the Daesh leadership in the Middle East had side-lined him as the leader. Although Shekau stated that he was still loyal to the Daesh umbrella, in-fighting has been reported which makes it reasonable to assume that there are no more ties between the Shekau faction and Daesh.[194]

Prior to Boko Haram's fractionalisation, the most obvious support came in the form of propaganda and media expertise (see section 6.1). However, reports have emerged that supply shipments from Daesh in Libya bound for Boko Haram have been intercepted by border patrols, for instance in Chad on 7 April 2016.[195]

Furthermore, Brigadier General Donald Bolduc – commander of U.S. Special Operations in Africa – claims to have seen tactical shifts in Boko Haram's behavioural pattern after the group officially joined Daesh, which indicates exchanges in tactical know-how.[196] Although there is a shortage of evidence, the fact that the central Daesh leadership themselves appointed al-Barnawi as the new ISWAP leader suggests that they were planning on continuing their support for West African jihad through him. Details pertaining to the nature of that support, beyond media production, is unclear at this point. However, a leaked intelligence report from the spring of 2017 claims that increased cooperation between al-Barnawi's faction and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) – originally an offshoot from The Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa – has been noted.[197] ISGS has taken responsibility for at least two attacks in Burkina Faso and one attempted jailbreak in Niamey, Niger.[198]

Moreover, Daesh has come under severe pressure in Iraq and Syria[199], while it has been driven from its stronghold of Sirte in Libya.[200] Its trajectory as a real and global threat in the long run is thus on the turn. Close observers are therefore worried that the al-Barnawi faction may turn to opportunism and shift back

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[193] Zenn (2014).

[194] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[195] Helene Cooper (2016). "Boko Haram and ISIS are Collaborating more, U.S. military says". *The New York Times*, April 20 2016.

[196] Atta Barkindo (2016). "Boko Haram-IS connection: Local and regional implications". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis,* 8:6, 3-8.

[197] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[198] Jason Warner (2017). "Sub-Saharan africa's three "new" islamic state affiliates". *Combating Terrorism Centre Sentinel,* 10:1.

[199] Jason Burke (2017). "Rise and fall of Isis: its dream of a caliphate is over, so what now?". *The Guardian,* 21 October 2017.

[200] Alia Brahimi and Jason Pack (2017). "Strategic Lessons from the Ejection of ISIS from Sirte". *The Atlantic Council,* 16 May 2017. Retrieved from: http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/strategic-lessons-from-the-ejection-of-isis-from-sirte. Accessed on 7 November 2017.

towards a cooperative relationship with Al Qaeda, with whom interaction may seem easier at this point considering its strong presence in the Sahel region.[201] This seems even more likely considering that several influential leaders under al-Barnawi have strong historical ties with different Al Qaeda-affiliated groups such as Al Shabaab and AQIM. In particular, Mamman Nur – who was responsible for the bombing of UN headquarters in Abuja in 2011 – has a vast web of connections in the jihadi sphere, which may facilitate cooperation with groups outside the Lake Chad area.[202]

Apart from states and other armed groups, accusations of influential politicians and community leaders supporting Boko Haram have been reported.[203] Furthermore, reports suggest that fundraising organisations such as the World Islamic Call Society and the Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust have funnelled money to Boko Haram in the past.[204] However, these allegations have been difficult to verify in the literature and interviews.

In sum, at the moment the Shekau faction has seemingly burnt all its bridges with other jihadi groups, under both the Daesh and Al Qaeda umbrella. The al-Barnawi faction was however, with all but certainty still in allegiance with al-Baghdadi's Daesh. Although the support in the media arena seems to still be benefiting al-Barnawi, the extent of operational, logistical or financial support that his faction is receiving at this point is unclear and with Daesh being on the back foot it is likely that its priorities lies elsewhere. Therefore, at this time external support is likely not a major strength of either of the Boko Haram factions. That said, the al-Barnawi faction certainly has the potential to deepen its cooperation with Al Qaeda-affiliated groups in the Sahel.

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[201] Interviews. Abuja. 170501-170505
[202] Zenn (2014).
[203] Stratfor (2014); Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.
[204] Stratfor (2014).

8 Government Countermeasures

Fighting capability and resilience can never be assessed in absolute terms, but must rather measured against the capabilities of one's opponent in a given geographical context. Therefore, this chapter outlines strengths and weaknesses of the coalition of forces combating Boko Haram, focusing primarily on actors inside Nigeria. Surrounding countries are mainly addressed as contributors to the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

8.1 Nigerian Armed Forces

Lack of political will

Considering that Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with a relatively large economy, and that it was under military rule for 33 years during the post-independence era, it is relatively weak in military terms. Since the transition to democratic rule, corruption, lack of political will and competency, successive internal security crises and poor civil-military relations have slowly but surely hollowed out the fighting capabilities of what should be the leading military power of the region.[205]

Olusegun Obasanjo, who was the first elected President after the return to democratic rule in 1999, had an extensive reform agenda for the Defence Forces, including a major modernisation and streamlining process, but its implementation was never close to fulfilling its ambition and the necessary funding was never released. In fact, the Nigerian defence budget remained fairly static between 2000 and 2007. Obasanjo's successor, Umaru Yar'Adua, was preoccupied with the security crisis in the Niger Delta and military reform was therefore not prioritised. [206]

Goodluck Jonathan, who took over the reins after Yar'Adua's death in 2010, had a more ambitious agenda, at least initially. Jonathan and his defence minister had plans to improve cooperation between different defence and security agencies, increase deployment to support the police in tumultuous areas and improve the capacity for Nigeria to produce its own weapons and equipment. However, the President sacked his defence minister in 2012 and did not appoint a successor until 15 months later, despite the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency.

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[205] International Crisis Group (2016b). "Nigeria: The challenge of military reform". *Africa Report* No. 237, 3.
[206] ICG (2016b), 4-7.

It was under Jonathan that the Boko Haram insurgency escalated to the grave crisis it became. Consequently, he has since been accused of neglecting the conflict.[207] The insurgency also shifted the focus from the long to the short term, forcing military reforms and modernisation to give way to more pressing issues. During the years that Goodluck Jonathan was in charge, the capabilities of the Nigerian defence forces arguably fell to an all-time low.[208]

Current President – and former Major General and military dictator 1983-1985 – Muhammadu Buhari has a more determined approach to defeating Boko Haram. Even prior to his inauguration, the President had a promising and achievable strategy for dealing with the crisis in the north-east. Besides socioeconomic actions, he emphasised the fact that Boko Haram is primarily a Nigerian problem and not, as his predecessor claimed, a front in the global war on terror. Despite accepting his country's role as the main party responsible for the fight ahead, he advocated increased cooperation with the other nations around Lake Chad.[209] In fact, one of his first official actions was to visit neighbouring countries in order to improve collaboration.[210] Furthermore, Buhari chose to visit Maiduguri early during his term, which was a symbolically strong statement as Nigerian Presidents are not known to travel extensively within the country.[211]

Another measure that was taken shortly after Buhari took power – in fact, it was presented during his inauguration speech – was to permanently station the military command and control centre in Maiduguri, which clearly signalled that combatting Boko Haram was made a top priority for the Nigerian army.[212] The rationale behind this decision is several-fold.

First, the move aimed to centralise operations close to the front, in order to streamline the decision-making process. Moreover, as the 7th Infantry Division had shown low morale, with desertions and mutinies as a result, the move was intended to combat the perceived detachment that soldiers felt between them and their commanders in Abuja. Lastly, having officers with decision-making mandates in the north-east was envisioned to facilitate coordination with the Multinational Joint Task Force and neighbouring countries.[213] Collectively, these measures have created a belief that Buhari is taking the Boko Haram-insurgency more seriously

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[207] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505

[208] ICG (2016b), 7-8.

[209] John Campbell (2015). "Buhari's strategy for stopping Boko Haram". *Council of Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from: https://www.cfr.org/blog/buharis-strategy-stopping-boko-haram, accessed on 10 September 2017.

[210] Sylvain Andzongo (2015). "Nigeria's Buhari in Cameroon seeks closer partnership against Boko Haram". *Reuters News,* July 29 2015.; *Vanguard Nigeria* (2015). "Buhari to visit Chad, Niger, Wednesday, for Boko Haram talks". *Vanguard Nigeria.* June 1 2015.

[211] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505

[212] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505

[213] Tomi Oladipo (2015). "Will moving army to Maiduguri help Nigeria against Boko Haram?" *BBC,* June 9 2015.

than his predecessor, and there is little doubt that the Nigerian Army has become more effective since the regime change.[214] However, two years is a short period of time in the context, as military capacity building is a time consuming endeavour.

While the military has been more successful in the north-east since Buhari took the reins, the President's recent absence due to sickness has created some worry that the military's ascent up the list of priorities may be falling, in tandem with his gradual detachment from everyday politics. The vice-President, Yemi Osinbajo, is now acting President and, while he is described as a capable and pragmatic individual, he does not have the military background and, being a southerner, does not have the personal relationship with the north that Buhari has.[215] However, there have not been any clear signs that Osinbajo is taking a different military strategy to that of Buhari.[216]

Corruption and criminality

According to *International Crisis Group* (ICG), the lack of political will and civilian oversight of the Nigerian defence forces is a major "dimension of distress"[217]. For example, the lack of political interest in military matters has led to a deficit in oversight, a task which is constitutionally given to the National Assembly. This has in turn exacerbated corruption within the military.

Corruption is now a large inhibitor of military efficiency and permeates the entire organisation. The procurement process is notorious for facilitating embezzlement. Government-to-government arrangements are rare, as officials and high-ranking officers have a preference for using rent-seeking middle men with whom they organise purchases at inflated prices and split the gains. Moreover, there are regular reports of phantom procurements of equipment that does not exist and is never delivered, although recorded as such. On top of this, payroll fraud and embezzlement of funds that are earmarked for e.g. renovations are common. Perhaps even more alarming are the frequent reports of military personnel being involved in organised crime and selling military equipment to insurgents.[218] Although it is difficult to trace how much of Boko Haram's weapons arsenal that come from illegal sales from the military and how much that has been acquired through attacks on army installations, it is likely that corruption of this sort undermines the state's fight against the insurgents.[219]

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[214] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[215] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[216] Duku Joel and Blessing Olaifa (2017). "Osinbajo orders more push in war against Boko Haram". *The Nation,* July 31 2017.

[217] International Crisis Group (2016b), 9.

[218] International Crisis Group (2016b), 9-13.

[219] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

Weapons and equipment

The arsenal of equipment available to the Nigerian military is outdated and poorly maintained. For example, 2013 and 2014 the army units that were fighting Boko Haram experienced a large number of desertions, in which a lack of serviceable equipment was reportedly a major factor.[220] Among them were 54 soldiers from the 111th Special Forces Battalion, who alleged that they chose to desert due to a lack of proper weapons and ammunition to outgun the superior fire power of Boko Haram. The deserters were sentenced to death.[221] Although measures have been taken to fill equipment deficits, making the situation for deployed units notably better now than three years ago, critical insufficiencies remain a reality.[222]

In counterinsurgency operations, especially in the difficult terrain that dominates the north-eastern parts of Nigeria, surveillance with thermal cameras and night vision as well as fire power from the air have proven effective. However, the Nigerian military is lacking serviceable drones[223] and it does not yet have access to airplanes that are especially apt at close air support (CAS) apart from the Alpha Jet, which is lacking in advanced targeting systems.[224] In January of 2017, two Mi-35M attack helicopters were delivered to Nigeria from Russia. The helicopters may prove useful in supporting army operations as CAS-aircraft are lacking.[225]

Procurement of quality weapons has been difficult due to the poor human rights record of the Nigerian army. For instance, since 2015 Nigeria has tried to purchase 12 dedicated CAS airplanes from the United States (the Brazilian-manufactured *A-29 Super Tucano*), but the sale was put on hold by the Obama administration due to human rights concerns. It took until the summer of 2017 before the deal could move forward.[226] Although a delivery date has not yet been set, the light bombers may prove decisive in supporting the army's efforts of taking out remaining Boko Haram cells and finding insurgent camps in remote areas.

Personnel

For Nigeria's size and population, its armed forces are relatively small in terms of personnel. The ratio of military and paramilitary personnel to civilians is roughly

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[220] International Crisis Group (2016b), 13-14; Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

[221] Kevin Sieff (2015). "The Nigerian military is so broken, its soldiers are refusing to fight". *The Washington Post,* May 10 2015.

[222] International Crisis Group (2016b), 21-22.

[223] International Crisis Group (2016b), 13-14.

[224] Valerie Insinna (2017). "US approves A-29 Super Tucano sale to Nigeria". *Defense News.* August 3 2017; Fittarelli, Alberto (2017). "Tracking the Nigerian Armed Forces' COIN offensive in North-East Nigeria". *Bellingcat*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/africa/2017/02/20/tracking-nigerian-armed-forces-coin-offensive-north-east-nigeria/>, accessed on 12 September 2017.

[225] Nkala (2017).

[226] Insinna (2017).

1:1000, which is considerably lower than that of all its neighbours.[227] The army, which is the branch that is most involved in the counterinsurgency efforts, consists of around 100,000 soldiers and officers, which is less than half the projected need for meeting the many security challenges that Nigeria has to face.[228] Considering that official numbers are likely to include so-called 'ghost soldiers' who do not exist other than on personnel lists (a common form of salary embezzlement), the number may be even smaller in reality.[229] This deficit of military personnel is the result of systematic neglect of the manpower planning process, as Nigeria has not taken important parameters such as discharges, desertions, casualties or analysis of potential future threats into account. Therefore, there are significant gaps in manpower throughout the military structure.[230] Considering that the Boko Haram insurgency is but one of many security challenges that Nigeria is facing now and in the years ahead, this is a troubling situation.

Reportedly, the recruitment process for the Nigerian military has not been able to provide the quality needed either. Although enlistment is conditioned with minimum educational requirements, documents are often forged, and many recruits are illiterate. This makes them difficult to train.[231]

The formal institutions regarding training are rather well-developed, with annual training directives issued from the headquarters. Despite this, training has declined in recent years, partly due to a lack of qualified instructors. Doctrines for training are also more focused on conventional inter-state warfare and peacekeeping, rather than adapted to the real security threats that are currently confronting the country. Training regimes are therefore inadequate for preparing recruits for counterinsurgency, which means that recruits are thrown into battle situations that they are not trained to handle.[232]

The above-mentioned concerns have been further exacerbated by the crises in recent years in the Niger delta, the north-east and central north. Furthermore, the army has been tasked with assisting the federal police in other areas, since they do not seem to be able to handle internal tensions. In fact, in 2015, the military was deployed in joint efforts with the police in 32 out of 36 Nigerian states. Recruitment and training has therefore had to be accelerated.[233]

In short, the Nigerian armed forces do not seem to be adequate in numbers or size, training, equipment or capabilities for handling the many fronts on which they are

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[227] International Crisis Group (2016b), 15-16.
[228] International Crisis Group (2016b), 15-16.
[229] Salem Solomon (2017). "Report: Corruption in Nigerian Military Benefits Boko Haram". *Voice of America News,* 19 May 2017.
[230] International Crisis Group (2016b), 15-16.
[231] International Crisis Group (2016b), 15-16.
[232] International Crisis Group (2016b), 15-16.
[233] International Crisis Group (2016b), 15-16.

engaged. This has become particularity clear when it comes to the fight against Boko Haram.

Lack of legitimacy

The Nigerian armed forces are struggling to keep hearts and minds on their side in both north-eastern Nigeria and elsewhere.[234] The Nigerian security forces often seem dismally ill-prepared to execute the kind of restrained, intelligence-led operations typically believed necessary to root out terrorist organisations without victimising civilians. There have been frequent reports of Nigerian soldiers responding to attacks against military outposts or convoys by indiscriminately rounding up nearby civilians, accusing them of collaborating with Boko Haram. This leaves civilians squeezed between the nihilistic Boko Haram and abusive Nigerian security forces. This lack of trust inevitably affects operations, as distrust of the state may radicalise people who would otherwise not have sympathised with the terrorist group.[235] Moreover, it also affects the army's possibilities to collect information from the population and restricts the kind of support the Nigerian security forces can receive, since many allies are restricted by law from training units suspected of serious human rights abuses.

In 2015, Amnesty International released a report mapping human rights abuses that occurred during military operations in the north-east during 2013 and 2014. Amnesty accuses the Nigerian military of extrajudicial killings, countless cases of torture, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. Furthermore, the report states that at least 7000 men died in detention between 2011 and 2014 due to starvation, thirst, disease or torture.[236]

One of the most serious events occurred in Maiduguri in 2014 after Boko Haram had attacked a military detention centre – the Giwa Barracks – and managed to release the prisoners inside. The military were able to recapture a large proportion of these detainees and reportedly shot over 640 escapees after they had been incapacitated.[237] In Baga in Borno state in April 2016, Nigerian soldiers allegedly responded to the killing of a soldier by opening fire and torching homes, leaving 180-220 people dead and over 2000 homes destroyed. The Nigerian defence ministry has denied the accusations, blaming the event on Boko Haram members dressed in stolen uniforms, thereby confusing civilians.[238]

The army is not alone in inadvertently victimising the civilian population, as also the air force has a poor record when it comes to targeting precision and

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[234] International Crisis Group (2016b), 17.
[235] Smith (2016), 148-150.
[236] Amnesty International (2015).
[237] Amnesty International (2015), 3.
[238] Smith (2016), 151-152.

consideration of possible civilian casualties. One event in particular caught the media's attention in January 2017 when the town of Rann, acting as a refugee camp, was bombed by a Nigerian fighter jet, leaving over 100 civilians dead. While the Nigerian government accepted responsibility for the occurrence, it claimed that it was an accident and that the air strike was intended to hit a gathering of insurgents nearby.[239] As long as collateral damage and deliberate targeting of civilians are recurring events in Nigeria, any attempts to win the trust of the population of the north-east are likely to fail and Boko Haram is likely to keep some support as a perceived lesser of two evils.

The fight against Boko Haram

In the beginning of 2015, when the presidency was still held by Goodluck Jonathan, the Nigerian armed forces disclosed that they were preparing for a major offensive against Boko Haram. At the time, Boko Haram held large swathes of territory in the three north-easternmost states of Nigeria, including several cities and major towns. Initially, the army – in particular the 7th Infantry Division – carried out the bulk of the fighting, but since at least early 2016 the air force has been involved, particularly with Alpha jets, which are light attack/training aircraft with basic air support capabilities.

With the support of the Chadian and Cameroonian forces (including airstrikes), South African mercenaries and Western intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) efforts, the Nigerian Army managed to gain back territory with speed.

By the end of 2015, President Buhari, who had continued the offensive initiated by Goodluck Jonathan, declared that Boko Haram was "technically defeated". Buhari had promised to fully defeat Boko Haram by New Year's Eve 2015, which proved to be far from true, even though the group had been significantly weakened by then.[240] Fighting continued throughout 2016, by the end of which Buhari claimed that the army had cleared Sambisa forest, including Camp Zero, which was considered the headquarters of the Shekau faction.[241]

The Nigerian military's increased resolve in the fight against Boko Haram has clearly borne fruit as the insurgent group is currently on the back foot and significantly weakened. However, in order for Nigeria to take full control of its north-eastern states, it is likely that it has to increase its military capacity. As the

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[239] Kevin Sieff (2017). "Nigerian military 'mistake' kills at least 50 in attack on safe-haven town". *The Washington Post*. January 17 2017; *BBC News* (2017). "Nigeria air strike dead 'rises to 115' in Rann". January 24 2017.

[240] *BBC News* (2015). "Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants 'technically defeated' – Buhari". December 24 2015.

[241] *Al Jazeera* (2016). "Buhari: Last Boko Haram base taken in Sambisa Forest". December 24 2016.

above mentioned hinders to capacity building are largely structural, it may be difficult to achieve in the short term.

8.2 Multinational Joint Task Force

Boko Haram has frequently made use of borders in order to evade government forces in the Lake Chad area, which has made military cooperation between the affected countries a necessity. The Lake Chad Basin Commission[242] (LCBC), with support from Benin, therefore decided to mandate and adapt the already existing Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to combat the Boko Haram insurgency.[243]

The creation of the MNJTF was decided as early as 1994 (although it was not operational until four years later), as Nigeria, Niger and Chad sought jointly to counter organised crime and banditry in the border areas around Lake Chad. The task force failed to reach any substantial relevance until its framework was reconstructed to better suit the fight against a large and capable foe, such as Boko Haram. Although its mandate had been revised to include fighting Boko Haram in 2012, the actual reform of the MNJTF only started in 2014. After several delays, the contingents and the command headquarters are now officially deployed and operational, albeit with somewhat unclear capacity.[244]

The force strength of the MNJTF was estimated to be 10,000 as of June 2016, which matches the number of personnel that the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council has authorised. Although it is difficult to verify whether the official number matches the actual number on the ground, the MNJTF is officially up and running and all contingents are operational. Nigeria's contingent is the largest, followed by Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin.[245]

The MNJTF operates under the authority of the LCBC, whose Executive Secretary acts as its Head of Mission. The LCBC is also responsible for political oversight of the task force. Due to a lack of operational capacity and experience, however, the LCBC is not particularly involved in the day-to day operations on the ground. Instead, the AU provides support in areas such as administrative and financial management, logistics and infrastructure. The AU also has a strategic support cell for the MNJTF at the Peace and Security Department of the AU Commission in Addis Ababa, and a support team at the Operational Headquarters (HQ) in N'Djamena. The European Union (EU) is a significant financial contributor to the MNJTF. The EU has devoted 50 million euros to the MNJTF, earmarked for

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[242] The LCBC consists of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon.
[243] William Assanvo et al. (2016). "West Africa Report – Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram". *Institute for Security Studies (ISS)*, West Africa Report, Issue 19, 6.
[244] Assanvo et al. (2016), 9-11.
[245] Assanvo et al. (2016), 9.

logistical and material aid, as well as for covering some of its human resources costs.[246]

The HQ – whose task is to coordinate the different sector forces – is multinational and consists of personnel from all troop-contributing countries. The Force Commander of the MNJTF is from Nigeria, and the seat will remain Nigerian for the duration of the mission.[247]

Each troop contributor except Benin is responsible for a sector in its own territory, although the force has agreed upon a *right of pursuit* policy, meaning that patrols can move across borders to pursue Boko Haram fighters.[248]

Despite its late deployment, the MNJTF claims to have made an impact on the security situation on the ground.[249] For instance, during the first five months of 2016 the force had reportedly contributed to killing or capturing over 1000 Boko Haram members and had dismantled over 30 training camps and bomb-making facilities. Moreover, over 4500 of Boko Haram's hostages had been freed by MNJTF forces.[250]

However, it is difficult to assess the exact effectiveness of the task force, as it is not always possible to distinguish between operations conducted under national flags and those that are led from the N'Djamena HQ. For instance, Nigerian troops who are officially part of the MNJTF are seemingly instead taking their orders from the Nigerian military. It is clear that there are challenges left to make the coalition force work according to initial ambitions. For instance, the MNJTF is still incomplete as only the military pillar is in place, while the police and civilian components are lacking.[251] Nevertheless, any level of increased cross-border cooperation is undoubtedly an additional threat for Boko Haram's resilience, as it impedes its ability to evade pursuing forces. According to close observers, increased intelligence sharing among affected countries is one of the most fruitful effects of the cooperation framework.[252]

Although military coordination was one of the primary reasons for the establishment of the MNJTF, the participating countries are still reluctant to cooperate within its framework as they are largely still favouring national action or bilateral cooperation, in part because it is faster than the process of planning

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[246] Assanvo et al. (2016), 7.

[247] Assanvo et al. (2016), 7.

[248] Assanvo et al. (2016), 7.

[249] Wendyam Aristide Sawadogo (2017). "Can the joint task force against Boko Haram stay the course". *Institute of Strategic Studies Africa.* Retrieved from: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-joint-task-force-against-boko-haram-stay-the-course, accessed on 12 April 2017

[250] Assanvi et al. (2016), 11-12.

[251] Assanvi et al. (2016), 11-12.

[252] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505

military operations within a multinational framework.[253] Nonetheless, the establishment and activation of the MNJTF is a sign of an increased will to cooperate towards common goals within the region, which is a large step forward indeed, considering historical tensions between the states around Lake Chad.

8.3 CJTF – Vigilantes

The area around Lake Chad has a long history of community mobilisation against violent threats such as banditry, slave raiding, cattle rustling and conflict. Thus, it is not surprising that vigilantism plays a large role in the current fight against Boko Haram. Vigilante groups started forming in Maiduguri in 2013 as people who had become tired of both Boko Haram and government forces violence started hunting suspected Boko Haram members and setting up checkpoints throughout the city. By doing this, they hoped to overpower Boko Haram cells inside Maiduguri. Furthermore, as young men were facing suspicion from security forces in Maiduguri, joining an anti Boko Haram militia could aid in easing that mistrust.

The original vigilante group in Maiduguri, which took the name Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), had amassed around 500 vigilantes by June 2013. Since then, the CJTF has become an collective name for self-defence militias all over the Nigerian northeast and it has grown immensely both in terms of manpower and capability. Estimates claim that there are around 26,000 vigilantes in Borno state alone. Self-defence militias have also appeared elsewhere in the Lake Chad region, including Cameroon, Chad and the Nigerian states surrounding Borno. [254]

Shortly after the creation of the CJTF, the Nigerian army realised the potential advantages of having the vigilantes on its side, as they could provide much needed knowledge of the local terrain and people, as well as useful intelligence and manpower. The army therefore quickly offered support to organise, train, equip and spread the CJTF, and it has since become a paramilitary force with detachments throughout Borno State and elsewhere, with strong ties to the Nigerian military and local political leaders.[255]

Vigilante groups in different areas of the Lake Chad region have different tasks, ranging from simply keeping checkpoints to intelligence, patrolling, performing arrests of suspected Boko Haram members and defending newly liberated areas from being retaken. Furthermore, the Nigerian army frequently integrates CJTF members on long-range patrols or offensive operations, in order to take advantage of their knowledge of the local terrain, culture and language.[256] As many of the soldiers and officers of the Nigerian 7th Division are from southern Nigeria, the

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[253] Assanvo et al. (2016), 12.
[254] International Crisis Group (2017), 2-6.
[255] International Crisis Group (2017), 4-8.
[256] International Crisis Group (2017), 12.

vigilantes generally have a better sense of what deviates from 'normal' and can therefore be helpful in detecting potential threats.[257]

All affected states have been fairly cautious in arming the vigilantes, with Chad being a possible exception as it relies more on local traditional security structures in general. Despite this, the arsenal available to CJTF members has developed from the initial use of sticks and cutlasses. As the CJTF expanded from Maiduguri into rural areas, traditional weapons such as bows and spears were used. In Adamawa state, for instance, many of the vigilantes are hunters and therefore carry rifles. On occasion, the army lends automatic rifles to CJTF members to be used for specific operations. There have also been reports of CJTF members purchasing firearms privately or making simple rifles themselves.[258]

Although the civilian vigilantes have undoubtedly been instrumental in pushing back Boko Haram, their growth in numbers and capability does not come without risks. Several close observers have expressed concern over the long-term implications of the CJTF's existence. Some even go so far as to label the vigilantes as "the next big crisis for Nigeria", with the motivation that some of the vigilantes have received special forces training from South African mercenaries, making them a capable foe should they turn against the state.[259]

Furthermore, while the CJTF is still useful in the fight against Boko Haram, it is already having a negative impact. Reported violations include extortion – by threatening to report innocent victims as insurgents should they refuse to provide e.g. money, sex or ownership of a business. The use of child soldiers has also been reported as well as grossly violent acts such as burning suspected Boko Haram supporters alive, a practice that vigilantes are apparently readily willing to admit on record.[260] For example, Amnesty International has reported torture and extrajudicial executions at the hands of vigilantes[261] and sexual violence committed by CJTF members is not uncommon.[262]

Not all reports regarding the vigilantes' relationship with communities are negative. Some say that the fact that the vigilantes are from the local communities makes them less prone to abusing civilians than security forces are, and that the CJTF contributes to keeping the frequency of abuses down.[263] A development professional active in Borno State said during an interview that the CJTF are more disciplined than the police when it comes to human rights abuses.[264] It is clear that

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[257] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.
[258] International Crisis Group (2017), 11.
[259] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.
[260] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.
[261] Amnesty International (2015), 2.
[262] International Crisis Group (2017), 15.
[263] International Crisis Group (2017), 15.
[264] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

the emergence of the CJTF has done good, but also harm. Which one outweighs the other remains an unanswered question.

Opinions differ on whether the CJTF has played out its role or whether it is still needed in the fight ahead.[265] Either way, dismantling the vigilante groups will not be an easy task. One main reason for this is that members of the vigilante groups, as well as civilians who support them, are now targets of Boko Haram retribution. Therefore, CJTF members are understandably reluctant to agree to disarmament.[266] A high-ranking CJTF member in Maiduguri points out that:

> Boko Haram has declared war on us and even if we stop hunting them down, they will still come after us, so we have to fight to the finish.[267]

Although there are ongoing discussions on possible plans of action regarding the CJTF in Nigeria, with possible integration into the military and disarmament demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes being on the agenda, there is no clear solution. It appears, however, as if the CJTF will remain. With this there are concerns over a future potential politicisation of the vigilante groups, as resource-strong candidates for local elections may use them in their bid for power. If this happens, it would certainly not be the first time in north-eastern Nigeria or in Nigeria as a whole.[268] Moreover, as the economy in Borno and neighbouring states has deteriorated significantly as a result of the insurgency, there is a risk that some CJTF groupings will turn to banditry and predation as a means of survival, as government support wanes and their claim for economic support from the population loses legitimacy.

Given that the CJTF will play a role in the operations ahead, its implications for Boko Haram's potential resilience may be significant. As the CJTF are used somewhat as 'local guides' for the army during military operations, they cancel out some of the advantage that Boko Haram has in terms of knowledge of the local terrain. Furthermore, as there is resentment and distrust of the state among the population of the north-east, the CJTF's role as an intermediary between security forces and the people may indeed increase the flow of information reaching the army.

Moreover, since the CJTF members originate from the local communities which they aim to protect, they make it more difficult for Boko Haram to infiltrate cities, towns or villages, as they are likely to be spotted by vigilantes. In a similar manner, vigilantes are more likely than army personnel to identify community members with unexplained absences on a regular basis. Naturally, this makes it more

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[265] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.
[266] *IRIN* (2013). "Civilian vigilante groups increase dangers in northeastern Nigeria". December 12 2013.
[267] *IRIN* (2013).
[268] International Crisis Group (2017), 18-19.

difficult for Boko Haram to conduct an underground terror war when its capabilities as a regular rebel force have diminished.

Lastly, the combined forces of the different CJTF groupings outnumber all credible estimations of Boko Haram force strength, making vigilantes a significant obstacle to Boko Haram's territorial ambitions. The CJTF is therefore a pivotal resource in breaking down the resilience of Boko Haram.

8.4 External Support

8.4.1 Private Military Companies (PMC)

Although the Nigerian state is undoubtedly reluctant to admit the employment of mercenaries in its fight against Boko Haram, there are numerous reports and accounts pointing towards South African private military companies having a pivotal impact on the turn of the tide that took place in early 2015.[269]

Nigeria's Chief of Intelligence admitted in March 2015, at the end of Goodluck Jonathan's term that South African PMCs had been employed to train Nigerian troops, but their involvement in offensive operations has been continuously denied by the government. However, there are strong suggestions that South African PMCs – in particular a company called Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP)[270] – has had a serious impact on the battlefield by carrying out offensive operations of their own. Reportedly, the mercenaries were on the ground primarily as President Jonathan sought to make a final push before elections in 2015, which coincides with a major turning point in the conflict, as several areas were liberated from Shekau's control.[271]

The PMCs, which consisted of battle-hardened South African veterans who are experts in bush warfare, reportedly had access to armoured personnel carriers, attack helicopters and night vision equipment, which aided them in taking out fleeing Boko Haram cells by a technique suitably named "relentless pursuit". The tactic aims to exhaust the enemy by conducting hit-and-run assaults until the enemy decides to withdraw from the area. Thereafter, likely escape routes are

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[269] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505; David Smith (2015). "South Africa's ageing white mercenaries who helped turn tide on Boko Haram". *The Guardian*. April 14 2015; John Campbell (2015). "Nigeria rehires South African mercenaries?" *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from: www.cfr.org/blog/nigeria-rehires-south-african-mercenaries; Colin Freeman (2015). "South African mercenaries' secret war on Boko Haram". *The Telegraph*. May 10 2015.; Adam Nossiter (2015). "Mercenaries join Nigeria's military campaign against Boko Haram". *The New York Times*. March 13 2015.

[270] David Pfotenhauer (2016). "The Case for Private Contractors in Northern Nigeria". *African Defence Review,* 27 January 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.africandefence.net/case-for-pmcs-in-nigeria/, accessed on 7 November 2017.

[271] Nossiter (2015).

identified and personnel are relocated by helicopter to cut them off, gradually demoralising and exhausting the insurgents.[272] The mercenaries reportedly conducted offensive operations at night, driving Boko Haram insurgents from villages under their control. In the morning, the Nigerian army would move in and claim victory.[273]

Although perhaps irrelevant for the resilience of Boko Haram going forward, as there are few reports of mercenaries being involved in fighting in northern Nigeria at present, the fact that PMCs played a large role in the government's successful push against Boko Haram may force a re-evaluation of the capabilities of the state forces. If the bulk of battle victories during early 2015 were really the work of mercenaries, the strength of the army may be overrated. On the other hand, Nigeria has proven willing to call for help in the past, and may do so again if it finds itself once again on the back foot.

8.4.2 Western Nations

Although both Western states and the Nigerian government have labelled the Boko Haram insurgency as primarily an internal problem with spill over effects that affect Nigeria's neighbours, there is some Western military involvement in the Lake Chad area. France, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union are providing training, advisors and technical support to the MNJTF. This includes intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), which involves the provision of drones with advanced information-gathering capabilities.[274]

Since the bombing of the internally displaced people (IDP) camp in Borno in January 2017, western nations are reportedly reluctant to support or share information with the Nigerian military. As government forces, including the air force, have shown little regard for collateral damage, the ISR teams are afraid that sharing their information may lead to the killing of civilians. Western nations such as the UK have officially, however, provided Nigeria with support of a less controversial nature, such as training and equipment for counter-IED activities, tracking and mobile medical facilities.[275]

Considering Nigeria's self-image as a West African big power, it is reluctant, at least overtly, to accept military support. The multinational cooperation taking place between the countries around Lake Chad was a necessary step, but it would be a larger one to accept foreign ground troops having a larger presence on Nigerian soil. At the same time, as long as reports of human rights violations at

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[272] Freeman (2015).
[273] Nossiter (2015).
[274] Karimi et al. (2014). "War on Boko Haram: African, Western nations unify in hunt for Nigerian girls". *CNN.* May 17 2014.; Philippe Wojazer (2015). "France to increase West Africa troops to support Boko Haram fight". *Reuters.* March 11 2015.
[275] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

the hands of Nigerian security forces continue to be recorded, there will be reluctance to trade among potential providers of qualified military support. Although unlikely, if the Nigerian human rights record were to improve and its willingness to accept aid were to increase, the provision of qualified intelligence resources and e.g. American or French special operations forces could potentially reduce Boko Haram's resilience significantly.

9 Conclusions: The Resilience of Boko Haram

Since 2015, Boko Haram has been strategically weakened as an insurgent organisation, having lost territorial control, fighters, operative capability and popular appeal.[276] Keeping in mind the human suffering and large-scale chaos wrought by Islamic State since 2014 in Syria and Iraq, rolling back Boko Haram is a notable military achievement by the Nigerian armed forces and the MNJTF, aided by private military contractors and the CJTF.

That said, current trends should not be extrapolated to confidently predict the demise of Boko Haram. This may still occur, but recent history offers notable examples of terrorist groups that have escaped near-defeat to become highly capable fighting forces again, as illustrated by the resurgence of Islamic State between 2011-2015 (previously Al Qaeda in Iraq), Al Shabaab in Somalia from 2010 and Boko Haram in 2010-2015. However, given the split of Boko Haram into two competing factions, any study of the resilience of the group today must analyse these groups separately. This is particularly so given that they have chosen distinct modus operandi and have differing strengths and weaknesses.

9.1 Sources of Resilience

This study has shown that the expansion of Boko Haram was facilitated by structural factors, such as poverty in northern Nigeria, conflicts between Muslims and Christians, distrust of the state, porous borders, the growth of Salafist Islam and the insufficient ability of the Nigerian defence forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations.

Beyond this, there are also several agent-based factors that explain the expansion of the group. Boko Haram had a charismatic founder, expanded while being non-violent, has demonstrated some strong operational capabilities (notably IED manufacturing), generated sizable incomes relative to costs and received limited support from other terrorist organisations.

The Shekau faction

Today, the two successor groups still exhibit notable sources of resilience. For instance, Shekau has maintained his position over a long period of time, in spite of evident strife within the leadership, and has managed to lead his faction without being detected and apprehended. Given the personalised leadership style,

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[276] International Crisis Group (2016a), 4.

neutralising Shekau seems key, but the fact that he has evaded capture in spite of presumed signals intelligence (SIGINT) support from foreign partners suggests that effective counter-measures have been put in place.[277]

Furthermore, the takfiri and idiosyncratic 'ideology' pursued by the Shekau faction may be alienating large segments of the civilian population, but also permits a broad repertoire of brutal acts and impose few constraints. This includes predation on civilians, forced recruitment, kidnappings and use of minors as suicide bombers against civilian targets. While it is difficult to see these methods translating into broad social support over time, the ruthlessness of Shekau makes his group tactically flexible and able to cause a lot of damage with limited means in the short term.

Along similar lines, this means that the group will likely be able to finance itself and the supply of recruits will not dry up as long as there are civilians to extort. Furthermore, the faction does not seem to have large financing requirements, as its tactics have adapted to asymmetrical warfare by simple means and its state-building ambitions currently seem non-existent, hence generating few costs.

The al-Barnawi faction

By contrast, the al-Barnawi faction presents a more formidable threat in the long term, but faces a number of short-term obstacles to achieving its strategic aims. Seemingly more capable of strategic long-term thinking, this faction is aiming to rebuild the legitimacy squandered by Shekau, with the appointment of Yusuf's son a case in point. By targeting mainly the security forces and Christians, pledging to treat Muslim civilians better and eschewing forced recruitment, the faction may potentially rebuild voluntary support.

As the al-Barnawi faction is seemingly less brutal to civilians and appears to not be firmly based on Kanuri identity, the faction has the potential to build a broader support base, consisting of Salafists from throughout the north. Given that al-Barnawi seems to have been able to lure away a large segment of the crucial local field commanders from Shekau, his faction also presumably has a better ability to expand its geographical area of operations. The faction has stronger operative capability than that of Shekau, and close observers report that it is worryingly capable of attacking even 'hard' targets.[278]

For what it is worth, the faction also has support from Daesh in producing and disseminating its propaganda, as well as tactical and technical support via electronic means. Given the central role that Mamman Nur seemingly played in contacts with other Islamist terrorist groups, it is also possible that the faction may

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[277] Conor Gaffey "War on Boko Haram: Nigeria is hunting Africa's most wanted terrorist, but will killing him end the conflict?" *Newsweek* July 29 2017.

[278] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

be able to rekindle such cooperation. In the recent past, this has included collaboration with Al Shabaab and AQIM, before Shekau pledged loyalty to al-Baghdadi. Given the strong presence of Al Qaeda-affiliated groups in Nigeria's vicinity, a shift towards Al Qaeda may potentially further boost the resilience of the al-Barnawi faction.

9.2 Sources of vulnerability

Insurgent resilience does not exist in a vacuum, but must be measured relative to the opponent the group is confronting. As such, both Boko Haram factions are currently facing an uphill battle, as the coalition combatting them has gradually improved its capabilities. As noted previously, the Nigerian defence forces have been strengthened and have established a brigade in Borno, regional and international military cooperation has improved and private military companies and militias have contributed critical capabilities.

Furthermore, the current leadership of Boko Haram has used indiscriminate violence against civilians and other group members alike, hence undermining popular support and ultimately resulting in the splintering of the group. The operational capability of both factions has been notably weakened, their possibility to finance themselves undermined by a regional economic crisis and recruitment seemingly complicated by military setbacks and in-fighting.

The Shekau faction

On balance, a number of factors suggest that the long-term resilience of the Shekau faction may prove limited. First and foremost, given the personality cult around Shekau himself, it is highly unclear what would happen if he were to be captured or killed. There may be no appointed successor, as Shekau has continuously undermined or even killed perceived competitors within the group. This creates a potential for internal power struggles over who would replace Shekau as the leader. Furthermore, given the extensive forced recruitment to the faction, it is quite possible that the removal of Shekau would generate large-scale defections. Alternatively, remaining fighters from Shekau's faction could potentially join al-Barnawi, which would strengthen that faction notably.

Secondly, over time, the ruthless 'ideology' and conduct of the Shekau-led group implies that popular support is likely to continue to diminish. Likewise, internal purges have already led to a split in Boko Haram and cohesion will most likely not improve unless crucial aspects of its conduct change, which seems unlikely as long as Shekau maintains leadership of his faction. Hence, the Shekau faction may survive as something akin to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), but will most likely not re-emerge as a viable challenge to the Nigerian state, since it is simply too unpopular.

Thirdly, the Shekau faction seems to have lost core mid-level commanders during the split of the organisation. If true, this implies that its ability to conduct complex operations far away from its core area of operations – as it did in Abuja, Kaduna and Jos previously – has likely been significantly compromised. Furthermore, this would imply that the faction has lost control over combatants loyal to renegade mid-level commanders, with sources suggesting the faction has shrunk dramatically in manpower.

Lastly, the group seems to be experiencing difficulty in acquiring weaponry, equipment and funding compared with just a couple of years ago. This is partly the result of an economic crisis in the north, blanket government crackdowns on economic activities from which Boko Haram was reportedly benefiting and occasional operations against weapon deliveries intended for the group by the MNJTF. However, it is also a consequence of geographical isolation of the group – pinned close to the Cameroonian border – and its isolation from outside support following the split with Daesh.

The Al-Barnawi Faction

Al-Barnawi still has connections with other armed groups under the Daesh umbrella. Even so, geographical isolation and increased cross-border cooperation between the Lake Chad countries means that weapons procurement may be difficult for this faction too. Other forms of cooperation, such as access to foreign training camps, may also be difficult at this point.

In terms of financing, the al-Barnawi faction is more dependent on voluntary taxation and financial support than the Shekau faction, as predation may damage its reputation and potential for popular support in the long term. Therefore, the sustainability of the al-Barnawi campaign is dependent on whether or not the group can dissociate itself from the grim reputation of Shekau. Even if this proves possible, the poor state of the economy in the north-east and the pressure coming from the combined forces of the region's states on vital means of funding may eventually force al-Barnawi either to predate or to go 'out of business'.

Lastly, while the al-Barnawi faction may benefit long term from its less indiscriminate modus operandi, it may also decrease its destructive potential in the short term. Focusing primarily on hard targets is more difficult and will likely entail larger losses than targeting civilians would.

9.3 Strategically Decisive Factors

Today, a military stalemate reigns between Boko Haram and the NDF. In the short term, the Shekau fraction may possibly cause most harm, given its indiscriminate violence against civilians, while the al-Barnawi fraction poses the greater threat over time. Going forward, there are a number of factors that have been identified

as strategically decisive insofar that they may change the battlefield dynamics significantly.

For instance, swift procurement of close air-support (CAS) airplanes could potentially accelerate the military campaign against both factions, as it would facilitate locating and remotely targeting insurgents in hard-to-reach areas of the Lake Chad region. Reversely, if insurgents manage to obtain man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) capable of threatening low-flying attack helicopters or airplanes, this may instead increase the destructive power of the insurgents and obstruct the air force's efforts to support army operations.

Another development about which interviewees expressed concerns was the potential for al-Barnawi to exploit existing conflicts elsewhere in central and northern parts of Nigeria. Conflicts over water and grazing lands between nomadic and stationary farmers rival the deadliness of the Boko Haram insurgency. These conflicts have not yet been framed as Muslim vs. Christian, but there is a risk that they may be exploited – particularly by the al-Barnawi faction - by giving them a religious narrative, as they already overlap with religious tensions.[279]

What the future holds for Daesh will be highly impactful for the conflict in the Lake Chad area. If Daesh's decline on the African continent and elsewhere continues, its support for al-Barnawi is likely to decrease. In turn, this may decrease the destructive power and resilience of the al-Barnawi faction. On the other hand, if Daesh succeeds in re-establishing itself elsewhere in Africa after the fall of Sirte, support may increase. However, considering that the al-Barnawi faction has a well-connected leadership, a shift towards an alliance with Al Qaeda may be possible following a continued Daesh decline. That may present greater dangers than the affiliation to Daesh ever did, given that Al Qaeda has a strong presence in Africa in general and the Sahel in particular.

Although intra-jihadi fighting has already been recorded, an escalation of the conflict between the Shekau and al-Barnawi factions could potentially weaken both groups and thereby the insurgency's resilience. [280] Although al-Barnawi may be expected to outlast Shekau in such a conflict, it would likely weaken his own group while also turning the attention of the bulk of Nigerian forces and the MNJTF towards him.

Although the Boko Haram insurgency is the most high-profile crisis currently facing Nigeria, the country has many security challenges, affecting several federal states. The Nigerian military is at the moment able to prioritise counterinsurgency efforts in Borno and its surrounding states, but there is potential for escalation elsewhere that may force the Nigerian state to divert its attention to other regions.

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[279] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505; Mikailu, Naziru (2016). "Making sense of Nigeria's Fulani-farmer conflict". *BBC News*. May 5 2016.

[280] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

For instance, the above-mentioned farmer-herder conflicts are a major security threat in their own right, and piracy and insurgency in the Niger Delta are still a nuisance, with the potential for escalation.[281]

Perhaps the most worrying threat, however, is the risk that the Nigerian state may lose control over the CJTF. If any of these security threats occur or grow in intensity, they risk diverting resources away from the Boko Haram insurgency, increasing the resilience of the two factions.

The MNJTF is still operationally in its infancy and a development of the framework leading to deepened interstate cooperation could be devastating for Boko Haram. If the MNJTF could effectively prevent insurgents moving across borders to evade government offensives, this could potentially reduce Boko Haram's resilience drastically. A similar effect may be anticipated if the Nigerian government, or the MNJTF, could secure more Western military support. However, unless the Nigerian security forces drastically improve their human rights record, more support from Western governments apart from training or non-lethal equipment is unlikely.

President Buhari's health is another insecurity that may drastically affect the dynamics on the ground. The fact that Buhari is a northerner has likely affected the increased priority that has been given to the Boko Haram insurgency, and his background as a military commander has meant increased focus on building military capability. If Buhari's health forces him to abdicate his position, the attention given to the fight against Boko Haram is not guaranteed to persist. Moreover, a process to appoint a replacement may reignite the existing North-South divide.[282]

In conclusion, the Shekau and al-Barnawi factions are currently much weaker than Boko Haram was at its apex in early 2015. That said, both factions remain potent security threats and particularly the al-Barnawi-faction could potentially expand again in the future. With the attack against an oil exploration party, the faction demonstrated its capability to conduct complex attacks. And just as structural factors originally facilitated the rise of Boko Haram, events beyond its control – escalating conflicts elsewhere in Nigeria, a weakening of the MNJTF, or a shift in the presidency – could allow one of its successor groups to again establish itself as major security threat in northern Nigeria and beyond.

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[281] Simon Allison (2016). "Boko Haram may not be Nigeria's biggest threat". *Institute for Security Studies.* Retrieved from: https://issafrica.org/amp/iss-today/boko-haram-may-not-be-nigerias-biggest-threat, accessed on 15 November 2017.
[282] Interviews, Abuja, 170501-170505.

10 List of Acronyms

AQC	Al Qaeda Core
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb
AU	African Union
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
CAS	Close air support
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
HQ	Headquarters
IED	Improvised explosive device
ISR	Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMINT	Image intelligence
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
JTF	Joint Taskforce
LCBC	The Lake Chad Basin Commission
LGA	Local Government Area
MANPADS	Man-portable air-defence system
MOWAP	Media Office of the West Africa Province
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
NGO	Non-government organisation
PMC	Private military companies
SIGINT	Signals intelligence
STTEP	Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection
UN	United Nations

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List of Interviews

A total of 13 interviews were conducted during a field trip to Abuja, Nigeria, between 1 and 5 May 2017. Several of the interviewees requested that they remain anonymous. Representatives from the following organisations were interviewed:

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- European External Action Service (EEAS).
- The Nigerian National Defence College (NDC).
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- The British High Commission in Nigeria.
- The Department for International Development (DFID).
- The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).
- The NEEM Foundation.

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Boko Haram has conducted an insurgency against the Nigerian state since 2009. In early 2015, the group controlled large parts of Borno state, declared a caliphate and swore allegiance to Daesh. Since then, it has lost a majority of its territory, splintered into two factions (led by Shekau and al-Barnawi, respectively) and has been badly pressured by the Nigerian defence forces Even so, little suggests that the terrorist group will soon be militarily defeated and the risk that al-Barnawi's Daesh-affiliated faction will again grow stronger is palpable.

The general purpose of this report is to analyse the strategic resilience of Boko Haram. Specifically, the study examines Boko Haram's leadership, ideology and strategy, operational capabilities, financing and logistical support, propaganda and recruitment and external support, in order to identify strengths and weaknesses. The study is based on secondary sources, panel data on terrorist attacks in Nigeria and a field study in Abuja in May 2017.