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The Geopolitics of Boko Haram and Nigeria's 'War on Terror'

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Abstract

The April 2014 kidnapping of the schoolgirls at Chibok, north-eastern Nigeria has dramatically raised the international profile of the group known as Boko Haram. The kidnapping has led to calls for international assistance, the #bringbackourgirls Twitter campaign, and in late May 2014 the United Nations Security Council added Boko Haram to its list of al-Qaeda associated groups run by their Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee (UNSC 2014). This article provides a historical and conceptual background to these recent events. In the first section it gives a brief history of Boko Haram, situating it as an organisation and providing a discussion of northern Nigerian politics, with a specific focus on the 2012 attacks on Kano. In the second main section it discusses the biopolitical and geopolitical aspects of the situation, especially looking at the territorial and health issues. In the final section it relates the situation in Nigeria to the wider 'war on terror'.

Boko Haram: A Brief History of its Operations

Boko Haram is a Sunni Islamist group, seeking to have Sharia (Islamic law) imposed in the north of Nigeria, and, in some accounts to have a separate Islamic state (see Idowu 2013). While partial Sharia has existed in the northern states as a result of public pressure, beginning in 1999 following the example of Zamfara state, and implemented between 2000 and 2003 across a number of states (Olaniyi 2011; Warner 2012; Cook 2011), Boko Haram see this as incomplete and inadequate. The group are sometimes characterised as Salafist, a strand emphasising the *Salaf*, ancestors, as models of contemporary practice, and often seen as an especially strict, literalist movement (Loimeier 2012, 152 n. 30; see Anonymous 2012; Agbibo 2013a). It is important to recognise that the fracturing of Islam in Northern Nigeria, with the declining power of the Sufi Brotherhoods has contributed to the rise of the group (Lubeck 2011). Boko Haram's base is in the north-eastern states of Yobe and Borno. This is close to Niger, Cameroon and Chad, and the "country's porous borders" are helpful to the group in terms of movement of people and arms (Aghedo and Osumah 2012, 863; Onuoha 2013). They have also smuggled objects and people through tunnels, especially in Borno state (Onuoha 2013, 6).



Figure 1: Sharia in Nigeria

The name of the group is contested. The group’s full, formal name is “Jamā’atu Ahlis Sunnah Lādda’awatih wal-Jihad, or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad” (Davis 2012; UNSC 2014). That name is sometimes abbreviated as JASLWJ (Ploch 2012, 10) or JAS. The group has been given a variety of names, including “Ahlusunna wai’jama’ah hijra and... the ‘Nigerian Taliban’ and ‘Yusufiyah’ sect” (Aghedo and Osumah 2012, 858); Yusufiyah (movement of Yusof); or simply Al-Sunna wal Jamma (Onapajo and Uzodike 2012; Watts 2009). The Boko Haram base in Kannama (Yobe State, near the Niger border) was known locally as ‘Afghanistan’ (Ifeka 2010, 41; Pham 2012, 2; Elkaim 2012, 13). This article uses ‘Boko Haram’ simply because that is the most familiar name. ‘Boko’ is frequently taken to mean ‘book’ (Adesoji 2011, 106) or ‘book learning’ (Pham 2012, 2) but this is disputed by linguists, with claims that it is a word that initially meant fake but has come to be associated with the Latin alphabet as opposed to the Arabic, and from that to mean education (Newman 2013); or that there is no Hausa root to the word (Manfredi 2014). ‘Haram’ means forbidden, or sacrilege rather than sinful. The name is therefore frequently glossed as ‘Western Education is forbidden’, but it has a wider resonance of Western values or civilization, or those who take Western money and do not act charitably towards the normal people. ‘Yan boko’ is a phrase used to describe “the elite created by the policy of indirect rule used by the British to colonize Nigeria—the people who have had their heads turned away from Allah by easy money and corrupting Western values”. Such people are thus seen as “spiritually and morally corrupt, lacking in religious piety, and guilty of criminally enriching oneself rather than dedicating oneself to the Muslim *umma* (community)”

(Walker 2012, 7; see Cook 2011, 11-12). 'Westernisation is forbidden' would be closer to the sense. Some of their rejection of modern science has led to fantastic claims: that the earth is flat, that it was created in days not over millennia, that rain is not caused by evaporation, etc. (see Anonymous 2012, 125; Oyeniyi 2014, 79-80). Yet as Walker notes "Boko Haram, as a group, clearly does not utterly reject the modern world out of hand. The group's use of mobile phones, video cameras, DVDs, YouTube, chemical explosives, automatic weapons, and cars shows it is more than prepared to use the fruits of Western education when it suits them" (Walker 2012, 7).

The group has been operating since around 2007, when Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam was assassinated in a mosque in Kano. He has criticised the hard-line Islam of Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, who had established a mosque in Maiduguri. It was this mosque, and Yusuf's teaching, which had been characterised by its neighbours as 'Boko Haram'. The group's message spread beyond Borno state into neighbouring areas including Yobe and Bauchi, and the split from the more moderate northern Islamic establishment was cemented by the assassination of Sheikh Adam (Walker 2012, 3-4; see Oyeniyi 2014). The group's origins have been related to the 'Maitatsine' uprisings of the 1980s, named after the preacher Muhammed Marwa, whose nickname was Maitatsine, 'the one who damns', after his critical speeches (Adesoji 2011). The flashpoint in 2009 is much disputed, with one predominant story being about police stopping them for refusing to wear motorcycle helmets (see Last 2009). This initial encounter between supporters of Yusuf and the police led to attacks on police stations. The group and the police fought pitched battles, and led to the death of the group's leader Yusuf in police custody, and several members imprisoned. Many people were executed—tied up and shot in the back of the head—and many others died in firefights. There are reports of police using machine guns inside of mosques (Ifeka 2010, 42). The so-called 'Boko Haram riots' of 26-30 July 2009 in the states of Bauchi, Kano, Yobe, and Borno immediately followed the attack on the group's hideout in the Dutsen Tenshin area of Bauchi. Estimates of deaths in these protests, the riots and the crackdown range from over 700 (Adesoji 2011; Ifeka 2010) to between 1,000 and 1,400 (Ogunrotifa 2013, 49).

Many of the group's followers left Nigeria at this time, and there are various reports of them ending up in Niger, Mali or Algeria. This is one of the sources of the recurrent stories of links to other Islamic groups in the Sahel. It has been suggested that Yusuf's former deputy Abubaker Shekau—wounded but seemingly not killed in 2009—moved to northern Cameroon at this time (Walker 2012, 4-5). Since that date the group's operations have been diverse, initially in the geographical area they were most closely associated with, and then developing from it. There have been reports that some of their members came from Chad, and spoke Arabic rather than a tribal language (Ifeka 2010, 40), but also suggestions that there may be different groups in different cities, loosely affiliated like a franchise (Last 2012, 1-2). The group certainly needs to be understood as one group among many in the north of Nigeria.

In June 2010 the leader of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Abu Mousab Abdel Wadoud, "announced that his group would provide support, weapons, and

training to Boko Haram” (Elkaim 2012, 17; on this group, see Pham 2011; Forest 2011). A Boko Haram video appeared shortly afterwards, stating that the group was continuing under the leadership of Shekau, and that future attacks would include Western targets as well as Nigerian ones. ‘Shekau’ now may be a *nom de guerre* by any number of figures, no longer referring to a single person (Zenn 2014). In September 2010 Boko Haram freed several prisoners from a jail in Bauchi: possibly over 700 in total, including 150 of its own members (ICG 2010, 18; see US State Department 2010, 22; Cook 2011, 12). It launched new attacks on the city of Jos and on the Mogadishu barracks in the capital of Abuja. In October 2010, posters appeared across northern Nigeria telling people not to support security forces looking for Boko Haram, signed by AQIM, and also telling Muslims who broke Sharia that they would also be killed (US State Department 2010, 22; Maiangwa et. al. 2012, 47-8).

On 16 June 2011, the police headquarters in the capital Abuja was bombed, leading to a city-wide curfew. This attack used a vehicle with a bomb inside driven into the police headquarters, following the convoy of the Inspector General of the Police Force. The vehicle was stopped, but the driver was able to detonate the bomb and kill two people and destroy several vehicles (US State Department 2011, 25; Pham 2012, 4). The group’s strategies had previously included remote detonation of bombs and shootings, but the suicide bombing in 2011 was a new development, previously unknown in the country (Waldek and Jayasekara 2011, 174; Aghedo and Osumah 2012, 858; Elkaim 2012, 18), leading to Nigerian claims that the group must be making use of people from Niger or other African states, because no Nigerian would do this (see Last 2012, 2). In August 2011 the United Nations building in Abuja was bombed in another suicide bombing. Videos of the attacker were released, tying the events to the killing of Osama bin Laden a few months before. This was a building that also housed other Western agencies. Twenty-five people were killed and over 80 wounded.

Boko Haram has financed its operations through crime, possibly from funds raised from AQIM kidnappings, and certainly supplemented with bank raids, robberies of convoys and businesses, car-jacking and other criminal activities (Barrett 2012, 723; Davis 2012; Walker 2012; Waldek and Jayasekara 2011). Boko Haram gets many of its guns from the police, often by raiding remote police stations, or from the army, sometimes buying them directly from soldiers or security guards (Last 2009). Smaller scale attacks are common, especially on people who are engaging in activities that they find *haram*—gambling, drinking, prostitution and so on. They often arrive on motorbike or three-wheeled taxi for a quick getaway, shooting or throwing bombs at their targets. Some of their bombs are tiny, small enough to be contained in a soft-drinks can. The group have claimed responsibility for numerous further attacks, many of which are further from their northeast bases. These included an attack on a military base in Kaduna, and many in the highly contested city of Jos, in Plateau state, which is on the rough border between Christian and Muslim populations, and in a state that has not adopted Sharia. Suicide bombs are becoming much more frequent. There have been various attacks on churches, including on Easter and Christmas days. These attacks are part of a wider attempt to get Christians to leave

the north of the country. In December 2011, and again in May 2013, a state of emergency was declared in the northeast of Nigeria. The latter remains in force at the time of writing.

The 20th January 2012 Kano Attacks

On Friday 20th January 2012, after morning prayers, a series of attacks were launched by Boko Haram against the northern city of Kano. Initial reports were of the freeing of prisoners in police stations, which were subsequently bombed. A number of government buildings including passport offices and two immigration centres, several police stations, and the headquarters of the State Security Service (SSS) were targeted. There were also some attacks on churches. Several of these attacks were with bombs, but there were also firefights between Boko Haram members and the Nigerian police and security forces. Several unexploded car bombs and smaller explosives were found in the city after the attacks were over.

Kano is a very large (499 sq km), sprawling city. The city is the north of the country, much of which still exists as a semi-nomadic, pastoralist society (see Maconachie 2007). While it is an ancient city, its population has increased dramatically in the last fifty years, from only a quarter of a million in 1961 to over 3 million today (Hills 2012, 49; ICG 2010, 22). Kano has few high-rise buildings – much of the accommodation is in a series of gated compounds, and informal settlements. 95% of the population are Muslim, mostly Sunni, and mainly from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group (Hills 2012, 49). Hausa is the main language, with English widely spoken. There is an unequal distribution of wealth; and limited access to basic services and infrastructure (see Hills 2012, 49).

The January 2012 attacks were carried out by a number of groups of Boko Haram members. Walker suggests that there were “three groups of gunmen and suicide bombers” (2012 6), but there were likely to be more, especially as they were able to free some of their members from prison in the initial actions. The group used military tactics of securing areas before launching attacks, setting up their own roadblocks and other means of establishing control. Territorial strategies were therefore used in an urban setting; something akin to military counter-terrorist actions. Estimates of deaths vary widely - most put the number at between 150-200 (Walker 2012, 6; Ploch 2012, 12), but people who were in the city that day put the number much higher, certainly several hundred, perhaps around a thousand. The discrepancy is partly due to the uneven nature of the Nigerian media (see Themnér and Wallenstein 2010, 530). Most stated figures come from the numbers of bodies at a morgue, but bodies were taken to more than one, yet no sources seem to aggregate the data. One doctor from Murtala Mohammed hospital in Kano, put the figure at 178 from his own hospital and the one at Nasarawa, but said that this was not the whole total: “There could be more, because some bodies have not yet come in and others were collected early” (quoted in Oboh 2012). There were also bodies not taken to morgues, but taken by or released to family members who buried them quickly; and because the morgues were quickly overwhelmed, bodies were piled up outside or in other locations, often uncounted. Some of the deaths were not people

killed by Boko Haram but by the police and security services, often in indiscriminate reprisals. There are therefore reasons why they do not want the full magnitude of the day's events to become known. The security services have used mass graves before: in the 1980s following the Maitatsine riots an estimated 4,000 bodies were dumped outside Kano's western wall (Last 2012, 1). Shortly after the attacks, a fifteen minute video was posted to YouTube of Shekau, or a possible stand-in, discussing the actions, and Boko Haram put out a statement:

In the name of Allah, Peace and Mercy! We are the group called 'forbidden' that is Boko Haram but we love to call ourselves Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Liddaawati wal Jihad. This message is to all inhabitants of Kano State especially the security agencies, those arresting our brothers and telling the media they are arresting thieves or armed robbers. These are our brothers they are arresting. We don't have the right to attack those who don't attack us but our war is with the government fighting Muslims, its security agencies and Christians (under C. A. N.), those killing Muslims and even eating their flesh and all those helping security agents even if they are Muslims. Anybody who becomes an accomplice to arresting our brothers should wait for our visit... Message from Leader Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Liddaawati wal Jihad. Imam Abu Muhammad Abubakar Bin Muhammad (Shekau) (quoted in SaharaReporters 2012).

Kano has changed since the 2012 attacks, with a much stronger security presence, and many Christians moving south. Ironically, before these attacks it was seen as relatively stable city, with good policing systems and not the distrust found in other northern cities (Hills 2012). Since early 2012 a number of aid agencies or foreign government workers have relocated to Abuja or elsewhere in the country. Boko Haram have often started their attacks with men on motorbikes – easier to manoeuvre through road-blocks and Nigeria's traffic, and quick to use for escape afterwards. Many of the 20th January Kano attacks were launched in this way. This led to increased police and military presence in the city, with riders forced to dismount and wheel bikes through checkpoints. Motorbikes have been banned entirely within the city of Maidugari in Borno state for some years. Following the assassination attempt on the Emir of Kano in January 2013, Kano imposed a ban on passengers on motorcycles—something that has had a dramatic effect on the economy of many people, as motorbikes are used as a cheap taxi ride, with drivers using this to pay for fuel.

The Biopolitics and Geopolitics of Nigeria's 'War on Terror'

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with an estimated 150 million population: roughly 50% Muslim, 40% Christian and the rest indigenous religions such as animism. A straight-forward geography of Nigeria would point to the Muslim north and the Christian south, and the linkage of this to the northern and southern protectorates of British colonial rule, but there are complications to this along tribal, religious, political and economic grounds (BBC News 2012). Nigerians frequently talk of six regions in the country – north-east, north-central, north-west, south-east,

south-west and south-south. The conflict between Islam and Western power dates back to the nineteenth century with the British colonial administration and the Sokoto Caliphate (Agbiboa 2014; see Last 1967; Falola 2009). However the Sokoto Caliphate, geographically linked to modern north-western Nigeria, was a rival to the Kanem-Bornu empire in the north-east (Elkaim 2012), which indicates the problems of a simple north-south, Muslim-Christian divide. Since it won independence in 1960 Nigeria has seen periodic outbursts of violence. Secession demands are not new, with the war with the self-declared Biafran Republic between 1967 and 1970. Biafra comprised nine states in the south-east, from Bayelsa in the west to Cross River in the east, and Enugu in the north; and with Enugu as capital. This was one of the first struggles in Africa to test the terms of the Cairo Declaration of the Organization of African Unity in 1964 which stated that “the borders of African states, on the day of their independence, constitute a tangible reality” (OAU 1964; see Korbprobst 2002). This adoption of *uti possidetis* in international law, following an earlier precedent in South America, has since been a key norm in politics, used in the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia into their constituent republics (see Lalonde 2002).

Nigeria is a nation-state with enormous inequalities of wealth. Many states within the Federation have absolute poverty levels above 70%, with many of those located in the northeast (Osumah 2013). In part this is due to geographical issues—the oil is concentrated in the south, as are the main international trade opportunities; the north is on the edge of the Sahel and frequently suffers from droughts and famines. The drought of the 1970s to 1980s led to widespread desertification and destroyed the pastoral livelihoods of the Fulani people (see Watts 2013). Other problems concern the class, tribal and generational relations in the country (see Ifeka 2010; Ogunrotifa 2013; Rogers 2012). The economy in the north has largely collapsed, and there are large number of unemployed youth (Lubeck 2011; Lubeck et. al. 2007). As le Billon noted in 2005, “over the past 30 years, more than \$350bn worth of oil has come out of the Nigerian ground, but the percentage of Nigerians surviving on less than \$1 a day has risen from 36% to 70%” (2005, 24). For a country that has per capita income of \$2,700 and 7% growth in GDP (Johnson 2011), this is a staggering figure, and unrest unsurprising (see Agbiboa 2013b; Yusuf 2013).

Western, especially US, markets looked to Nigeria in the first decade of this century as a safer source of crude oil compared to the Middle East (Ifeka 2010, 31). Watts has described the situation as “living within the oil assemblage that is contemporary Nigeria” (2009b, n.p.). His analysis is also helpful in pointing to a range of what he calls “governable spaces” that question Nigeria itself, ones that “generated forms of rule, conduct and imagining at cross purposes with one another, antithetical to the very idea of a developed modern nation-state that oil represented” (2004, 61). The state has been dominated by the military for most of the period since independence, with elections of civilian governments often characterized by violence between sides and corruption. But the concentration of power is profoundly even, and local and regional rulers or *oga*, big men, exercise considerable force in economic and political matters.

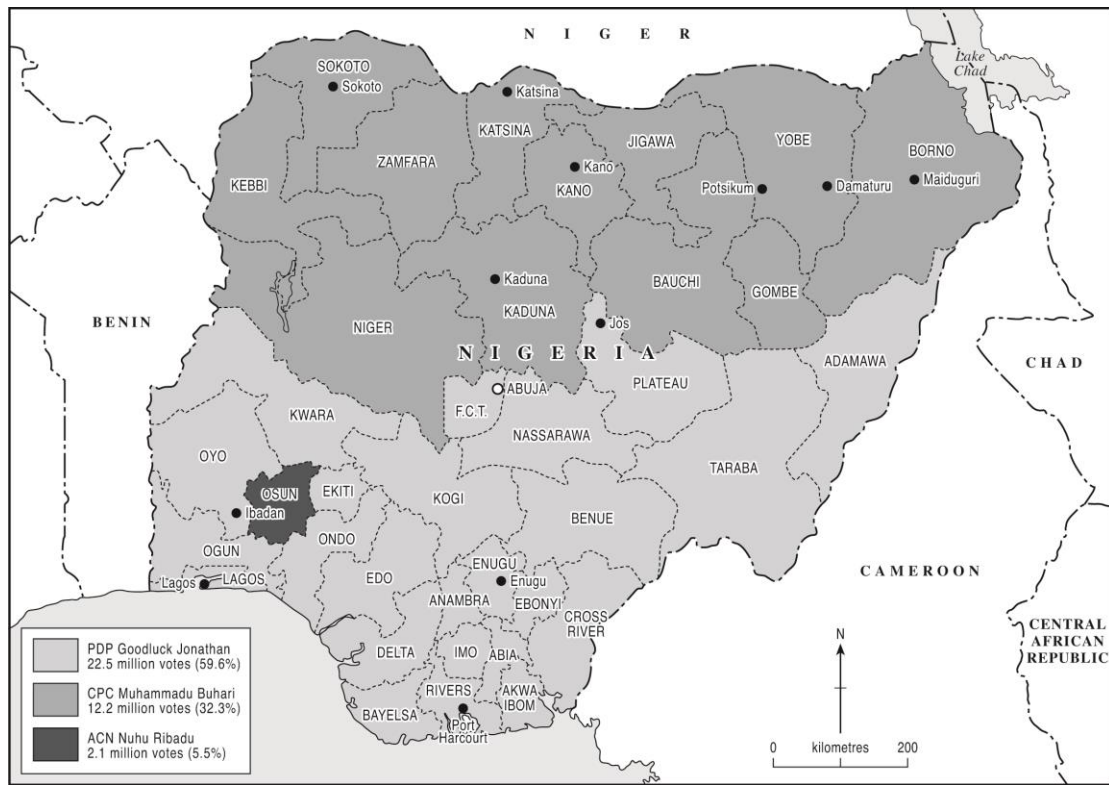


Figure 2: 2011 Election results (compare with map of Sharia law in Figure 1)

Nigeria’s constitution has a long-standing commitment to using the military for the purpose on maintaining its territorial integrity, outlining its purpose as.

Defending Nigeria from external aggression, maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders from violation on land, sea and air, suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President (1979 s.179, 1989 s.215, 1999 s.218 in Omede 2011, 92).

The international legal notion of ‘territorial integrity’ has been under considerable pressure since the advent of humanitarian intervention and especially the ‘war on terror’. Generally the maintenance of existing territorial settlements (territorial preservation) has been privileged over the rights of states within their territory (territorial sovereignty) (see Elden 2009, Ch. 5). However keeping this in balance is difficult, with the Russian annexation of Crimea showing that challenges to one may well lead to pressure on the other. There are parallels today with the Islamic State in Iraq, exercising control of extensive areas within Iraqi territory, and having implications for Syria and the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq. The Nigerian state is seeking to keep both territory and sovereignty within its control, but there are US and UK special-forces operating within the country, as well as a number of military and security advisors, showing its power is already compromised. The Federal Government is struggling to gain ascendancy, with President Goodluck Jonathan even claimed that Boko Haram has infiltrated politics and the military, and has

denounced some of his northern rivals for having links to the group (quoted in Warner 2012).

This may well be a relatively standard part of Nigerian politics—blaming problems on your political enemies—and it is certainly easier than addressing the root source of the issues (see Walker 2012, 7-8). The Nigerian government, sometimes with the support of the media, have blamed a bewildering range of things on Boko Haram, from bank robberies and kidnappings, to post-election violence, to “global warming and HIV/AIDS... anything to deflect scrutiny from their own malfeasance, culpability and venality” (Hansen and Aliyu Musa 2013, 10). Boko Haram sometimes claims responsibility, sometimes not, and there are not obvious spokesmen who can be relied upon to validate attribution. Some criminals have claimed to be Boko Haram to harass or exploit small businesses in the north, something people fear reporting or ignoring. It has got to the point where anyone with a gun in northeast Nigeria is seen as part of Boko Haram, which means that a wide number of simple criminal activities are seen as part of the group’s operations.

The Nigerian state response to Boko Haram has been heavy handed, with extra-judicial killings and reports of door-to-door raids in Boko Haram strongholds such as the city of Maiduguri (see Aghedo and Osumah 2012; Walker 2012; Ojo 2010). The July 2009 raids were codenamed ‘Operation Flush’. Property of suspected members was confiscated and passed to local rulers and others to try to build alliances with the security forces. Apparently 20% of the Nigerian state’s budget is committed to security (Last 2012, 3). Since the State of Emergency communication including mobile phone networks has been limited and large areas in the north are effectively out of bounds for Westerners and Nigerian media. Journalists have also been targeted by the group (Popoola 2012), which means accurate reporting is very limited (though see Council on Foreign Relations 2014). The Joint Task Force, a military unit of the Federal government, mainly comprising of soldiers from the south, is much hated as an occupation force: the Security Services have killed many more than Boko Haram (Last 2012, 2). There are various reports of police and military atrocities following attacks, which often produce more supporters for the group being targeted. These have included burning houses, indiscriminate killings and harassment. The military presence is strong in other parts of the country, including in Abuja with checkpoints, armed guards at strategic locations such as entrances to the embassy district of Maitama, and private security firms providing protection to compounds. These are clear instances of Hills’s claim that “securing territory is probably the key aspect of security provision in cities...” (Hills 2009, 55).

It serves the Nigerian government’s interests to suggest that the disparate groups in the north, including AQIM and the group responsible for the kidnapping of Europeans, are all linked to Boko Haram. Nigeria’s involvement in Mali, as part of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) force has inevitably widened the anger about the Abuja government’s involvement in suppression of groups seeking territorial control and Islamic law, especially if reports of Nigerian soldiers’ treatment of civilian populations are believed. But the kidnapping of Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara in May 2011 was in the city of Sokoto, in the

northwest and far from Boko Haram's areas of operation. President Jonathan used the failed rescue of the hostages in March 2012 (a British and Italian citizen) to call for closer cooperation dealing with terrorism within Nigeria. There are stories of West African youths being trained in al-Qaeda camps, of whom Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab is the most famous – the person who tried to ignite a bomb concealed in his underwear on a plane between Amsterdam and Detroit on Christmas Day 2009 (US State Department 2010, 22; 2011, 5). However Abdulmutallab, while from the Nigerian city of Kaduna, was radicalised in Yemen. There are no known links between him and Boko Haram (ICG 2010, 19). Equally, the two killers of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London in 2013, though of Nigerian parentage, were British citizens since birth and had no apparent links to militant groups in Nigeria itself. Links between Boko Haram and AQIM are possible, but the idea can serve the propaganda purposes of both groups and the Nigerian state. Even within Boko Haram its cell-like structure means that a unified command is difficult to see, and negotiation and ceasefires unlikely to bind all elements within it (Walker 2012, 8, 11-12).

Boko Haram is therefore not the only challenge facing the Nigerian state. It is important to distinguish between Boko Haram, broadly in the north-east, with other Islamic groups broadly in the north-west that may have affinities with AQIM, and that link to events in Algeria and Mali. Some of these groups are self-determination movements. The labelling of northern groups as 'al-Qaeda', 'African Taliban' or 'Taliban' is partly due to simple association by act, being so-named by local communities, rather than by actual linkages. Adesoji suggests, though without much evidence, that Boko Haram is getting support from global jihadist groups and specifically claims "affinity with the North Africa branch of Al-Qaeda" (2011, 105). The US regional command AFRICOM commander, General Carter Ham, alleged in August 2011 that there are links, at least in aspiration AQIM and al-Shabaab, based in Somalia (Aghedo and Osumah 2012, 864; Johnson 2011; Higazi 2013; Agbiboa 2014). The connections with the latter are on the basis of a similarity of methods—suicide bombings and video recordings (Cook 2011, 22-23), but these have been used by diverse groups for different purposes. In the south there are attacks in the Niger Delta from groups that are opposed to the unequal distribution of oil wealth – the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDVF) (see Watts 2004; 2009; Kashi and Watts 2008; Ifeka 2010). The confessional violence following the Miss World controversy of 2002, and the violence around elections shows the ties that hold groups together are fragile at best. Christians have launched reprisal attacks; churches and training colleges have become arsenals, and there are various reports of attacks from Christians on Muslims in Jos and Kaduna. These have been less reported in news media, especially Western media (Last 2012, 2-3). In April 2013 MEND threatened a series of reprisal attacks to defend Christians. In addition, the actions of the Federal Joint Task Force are often thought to have exacerbated the situation, with hundreds of deaths in custody (Amnesty 2013).

The suggestion that Nigeria is not far from being a 'failed state' is common: "If a primary characteristic of a failed state is that its government has little or no control

over a significant part of its territory, Nigeria's condition is not good" (Campbell 2011, 139; see Maiangwa et. al. 2012; Onapajo and Uzodike 2012, 31-3). While the 'failed state' idea often expects states to live up to an unrealistic, Western-derived model of what states are supposed to be (Elden 2009, Ch. 2), it is clear that the spatial extent of the Abuja government's sovereignty is profoundly uneven. Even back in 2011 there were concerns that the states of Borno and Yobe were becoming separate from the rest of Nigeria, and that Boko Haram was likely to be seen as "the one group that can actually project power and hold out the illusion of security to the people" (Cook 2011, 24). Former US ambassador John Campbell's suggestion is that Nigeria may be going the way not of secession on the model of the Biafran war, but closer to what has happened in Congo, where central government exercises only partial territorial control (2011, 140). However, the geographical concentration of Boko Haram means that a *de facto* partition of the state is one of several possible outcomes. Indeed, the group has already been characterised as operating as a "state within a state," with a cabinet, its own religious police, and a large farm" (Walker 2012, 3), along with a micro-finance scheme and plans for "schools, a hospital and markets" (Hansen and Aliyu Musa 2013, 9; Onapajo and Uzodike 2012, 28). If realised, this is similar to how Hezbollah operates within southern Lebanon. What happens within those areas is also important.

In his analysis of the Niger Delta, Watts points to the complex political economies and geographies of Nigeria (2004). The health problems in the country are serious—although infection rates are relatively low compared to sub-Saharan Africa in general at 3.6%, this still means it has the second highest population with HIV in Africa, and it has the highest tuberculosis burden in the world (Ploch 2012, 14-15; see Ingram 2008). It has widespread and non-seasonal malaria, regular cholera outbreaks, and has not eradicated other diseases, being only one of three countries along with Afghanistan and Pakistan that has endemic polio. In Borno state, "only two percent of children younger than two years old have been vaccinated, 83 percent of young people are illiterate, and 48.5 percent of children do not go to school" (Elkaim 2012, 9). On 8th February 2013, between nine and twelve people working for a polio vaccination programme were shot dead in two health clinics in Kano. The gunmen arrived on three-wheel motor-taxis. Only two days later, three Korean doctors in their beds were killed with machetes in the town of Potsikum in Yobe state. In this last instance it is not clear if they were killed because they were doctors, because they were foreigners, or because they were paying local women for sex. Journalists in Kano were arrested, on the charge of inciting the attacks on the health workers. A number of kidnappings, some in north-eastern Nigeria and some just over the border in Cameroon were attributed to a Boko Haram offshoot named Ansaru: some of the hostages were later killed (ICG 2014, 26-29; see Zenn 2014).

In terms of the reaction against health workers and health programmes there is something peculiar going on here with a group that is seeking control of territory, and control of law over that territory, also seeking to control the bodies that are within it, their health and the medicines that they have access to. A related reading could be made of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls (Peters 2014) and of the group's more general targeting of women (Zenn and Pearson 2014). One thing that the

programs and the resistance to them shows is that geopolitics and biopolitics need to be understood together, bodies in place and places embodied. Just as claims might be made of how Boko Haram operates in both these two registers, so too might an analysis of the Nigerian state, its principal donors, and the health organisations that it sponsors and endorses (see Ingram 2008). There has long been resistance to immunisation campaigns, partly because of a belief “that it is a Western and Christian plot sponsored by the federal government in Abuja to limit Muslim births” (Campbell 2013a). While this might appear fanciful, the militarization of health security, and the controversial pharmaceutical trials that US companies have made in the past shows that there may be some basis for skepticism. Immunisation programmes are viewed with suspicion, partly as a result of the fake programme run by a Pakistani doctor working with the CIA in its hunt for Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, but also because of Muslim leaders claiming that the vaccinations can cause infertility or even polio itself (see Campbell 2013a; Abimbola et. al. 2013; Yahya 2007).

The ‘Global War on Terror’

The north and west African aspects of a wider ‘war on terror’ have been explored in some detail (see Lyman 2009; Keenan 2009, 2013), though not with the attention paid to Afghanistan and Iraq or even the Horn of Africa. Nigeria has long been part of this wider picture. In a message broadcast on February 11th 2003, Osama bin Laden listed Jordan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Morocco as among the apostate anti-Muslim states to be liberated by *jihad* (2005, 183). Equally the 9/11 Commission Report identifies several places where they think terrorists would be likely to locate in future, including West Africa, especially Nigeria and Mali (2004, 366-7). Given the wider context of interventions by French and allied forces in Mali (see Karmon 2014), and the implications of the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya for the wider region including Algeria, this demonstrates the new position these parts of Africa are playing within the continuing developments of the ‘war on terror’. Nigerian troops going to join the AFISMA operation in Mali were attacked within Nigeria.

Developing from the earlier Pan-Sahel initiative and the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism initiative, AFRICOM was authorised in 2007 and began operations in 2008 (Ifeka 2010, 35-6; Keenan 2013, Ch. 2). AFRICOM has its base in Stuttgart, Germany and a secondary one in Camp Lemonier, Djibouti—both a considerable distance from West Africa. Nigeria and Algeria were adamant that it should not have its command headquarters on African territory. In 2011 the US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security characterised Boko Haram as an “emerging threat to U.S. interests and the U.S. homeland” (2011, 4), as a reaction to the UN bombing but also, through its links to AQIM, to the Christmas Day bomb attempt by a Nigerian national. It also drew comparisons with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Pakistan Taliban. The United States has long been concerned with its linkages and its operations beyond Nigeria. It has named three of its members, including Shekau as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (Elkaim 2012, 21; US House of Representatives 2011; Karmon 2014) though it resisted

labelling Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organisation until as late as November 2013, due to a wish to avoid giving it a higher profile (US Department of State 2013, 2014). In particular, they were concerned that the separatist movement in Northern Mali would provide a base for AQIM. General Ham of AFRICOM stated in June 2012 that it had “a safe haven in a large portion of Mali and is operating essentially unconstrained” (quoted in Doyle 2012).

The US response is outlined in the House of Representatives committee recommendations not to underestimate Boko Haram’s potential, suggesting that AQAP and the Pakistan Taliban were underestimated in the past. A proposal for a more active engagement can be found in a paper written for the Joint Military Operations Department, of the US Naval War College. It was written by Racine Robertson, a Major in the U.S. Army. Entitled “Pre-Emptive Threat Mitigation: Neutralizing the Boko Haram Threat to U.S. Interests” (Robertson 2012), it advocates a much more engaged strategy for AFRICOM and pre-emptive action in Nigeria. It discusses how important Nigeria is to US interests, especially for oil and hydrocarbons, and talks up the links between Boko Haram and AQIM.

Robertson suggests that AFRICOM’s ‘Theater Strategic Objectives’ can best be met by the use of “Engagement Teams (ETs) to neutralize the foundation of the Boko Haram in Nigeria” (2012, 2), and especially future collaboration between Boko Haram and AQIM (2012, 4-5). Robertson cautions: “it is critical that any outside footprint remain minimal due to the deep seated effects of colonialism, a strong resistance to U.S. occupation, and Nigeria’s leading role as the premier country in West Africa” (2012, 5). The ETs being called for are 20-30 men teams, with at least a 50% Nigerian component “including local state citizens, police, military and both Islamic and Christian religious leaders” (2012, 5). They would be “highly vetted” (2012, 8). The US part “should consist of U.S. military Chaplains, Intelligence, Ordnance, Corps of Engineers, Administrative, Logistics, Civil Affairs and Special Forces personnel, agents from the FBI and CIA, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Justice (DoJ) and USDA [Department of Agriculture] employees” (2012, 5-6). Robertson asserts that “the confluence of representatives from the aforementioned agencies would enable AFRICOM to bilaterally neutralize the foundations of Boko Haram” (2012, 6).

The proposal suggests that that such ETs would be able to gather intelligence in advance, and strike pre-emptively, rather than work as the Nigerian state currently does which is after attacks. Robertson suggests that current Nigerian responses are hampered by the use of forces from the south in the north, and infiltration of sympathizers (2012, 6-7). She draws on the US experience in Vietnam to think about possible responses to this problem, discussing that war’s Civil Operations and Rural Development and Support (CORDS) program. Robertson argues that “CORDS intertwined civilian, military and the local populace to accomplish non-military functions during the Vietnam War. One lesson learned from CORDS is the importance of directly attacking the enemy’s center of gravity: its ability to remain among the population” (2012, 7). Robertson argues that as well as these measures

being designed to “drastically limit the Boko Haram’s ability to continue discrete operations among the northern Nigerian population... actions must also be taken to counteract safe havens and tolerance outside of Nigeria” (2012, 9). This requires her to suggest that the ETs would need to work with Nigeria’s neighbours, drawing on US relations with Pakistan and India in relation to Afghanistan (2012, 9).

Engagement Teams in Nigeria would pre-empt an all-out war that could potentially destabilize the entire region and block access to key U.S. interests. Efforts by the Nigerian government to end the horrors brought about by the Islamic radicals of Boko Haram are simply not broad enough in scope to truly eradicate the roots of this insurgency. A purely military solution will not work. Rife with religious, economic and ethnic strife, corruption and many other traits of a failed state, Nigeria is still an emerging power (2012, 16).

While it does recognize there are structural issues that lead to support for Boko Haram, and that the legacy of colonialism is important, this proposal is alarming and suggests recent calls for international intervention may not fall on deaf ears. The March 2013 establishment of a U.S. drone base in neighbouring Niger, a facility that would station around 300 U.S. troops (Obama 2013; Campbell 2013b), has already committed the U.S. to a long-term presence in the region. The tension within Robertson’s piece is that while she believes US involvement could prevent an all-out war, this is increasingly how things are developing, in part inspired by US actions. As the ICG suggests, dialogue has been tried but so far failed, with ten Boko Haram commanders meeting in Côte d’Ivoire with representatives of the government. Despite what looked like a peace agreement, the United States placed bounties on Shekau and AQIM’s Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar, with the Jonathan government outlawing both groups. The process quickly collapsed (ICG 2014, 38). The legacy of these decisions has been the events of the past year, with what President Jonathan has called “total war” (BBC News 2014).

Conclusions

With fast-moving events such as these, it is impossible to offer definitive conclusions. Rather, the analysis here is intended to provide a background to recent events, and something of an interpretative lens to the wider contexts. Six key points should be taken from the analysis. First, the political geography of the group is important, both with its specific territorial base but also its actions in wider parts of Nigeria, and its frequent crossing of international boundaries. Second, the Federal Government of Nigeria is seeking to preserve the state’s territorial integrity, both in the sense of territorial preservation and in terms of territorial sovereignty, but it is clear that the last at least is severely compromised, and its forces in the northeast are seen as an occupying force. Third, there are legal complexities associated with the group’s aims, both in terms of its stated purpose of establishing Sharia, and tensions with Federal law (see Idowu 2013). Fourth, US and UK and other Western power’s involvement in the country has been underway for some time, but more is likely in the future, especially given the higher media-profile of recent events. While Barack Obama has said that “no American security operation can eradicate the

threat posed by an extremist group like Boko Haram”, he did also suggest that the US would support Nigerian efforts – both to find the missing girls but also to educate (2014). Fifth, and perhaps under-appreciated by a West-centric media, Nigeria’s involvement in the AFISMA Mali force, which led to its troops moving through Niger, broadens the geopolitical issues. Sixth, to understand Boko Haram, what they are opposing, and responses to their actions, it is necessary to examine the geopolitical issues alongside biopolitical issues.

As Nigeria enters election year in 2015, with long-standing north-south and religious issues set to re-emerge as major points of concern (Oyeniyi 2014; ICG 2014, 39-40), these issues may reach a new intensity. Jonathan, in particular, needs some kind of ‘victory’ to help his re-election campaign. What form this might take is not clear. Most responses to violence are combinations of “three broad forms, namely, militarizing, criminalizing and the liberal approach” (Yusuf 2013, 377; following Jarvis 2009, 12). Having tried the first two, with little success, the third is again being reconsidered with dialogue going on through intermediaries (Watts 2014; Oyeniyi 2014). Like in the Delta, some compromise and possible amnesty seems the most likely outcome (Sampson 2013; Nwankpa 2014). The alternative, of wider international involvement, whether from former regional colonial powers or the United States, seems certain to make matters worse.

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