

# Challenges and Prospects in the Counter Terrorism Approach to Boko Haram: 2009 – 2018

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**Abstract:** This work is an attempt to look at the many efforts that have been adopted to combat Boko Haram. It looks at the challenges faced in the counter-terrorist campaign and how the strategies have failed or succeeded so far. Attempts are made to take a broad look at the general theories of counter-terrorism and how the federal government of Nigeria has fared so far in the practical application of counter-terrorist strategies against the Boko Haram group. What are the specific counter-terrorism measures adopted by Nigeria in the fight against Boko Haram – how is Nigeria combating Boko Haram? What are the challenges in the efforts? What are the possible ways to combat Boko Haram and similar insurgencies in the future?

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Nigeria, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, Insurgency, Security.

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## Introduction

To a very big extent, insecurity in the form of terrorism has turned out to be one of the leading contemporary challenges facing the modern state with records showing that terrorism has become a truly global phenomenon over the past two decades. The actual impacts of terrorism on each region or country vary, albeit, no country is immune to terrorism due to globalization, porous borders, the proliferation of light weapons and the many other technological innovations that have been adopted or could possibly be adopted by terrorist organizations across the globe to create their networks of terror, thereby making them more sophisticated or even elusive. As a result, Boko Haram has remained a thorn in the flesh of Nigeria as the primary target for more than a decade. It has evolved to seize the headlines among the ranks and files of global terrorist groups. A discussion of terrorist groups in 21st century Africa, and indeed, the world, will not be complete without a mention of the group.

## Theoretical Framework

This work is situated within the thrust of *political realism*. It holds that the two actors (a

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state actor and a non-state actor) are fighting for the control of sovereignty within a given territorial boundary. This implies that the said definite territory can only be controlled by one government or a single entity which is superior and sovereign at a given time. In this interaction, there can only be one dominant sovereign player in the long run, or two players in different states depending on the outcomes. Power, as consideration for realism, is crucial as an instrument of dominance for each player.

Power, as an important element of realism, belongs to the state as the sovereign body that organizes the affairs of the territory. Accordingly, if the state, or by extension a political regime is to exist, the hierarchical sovereign power must remain inalienable. Explicitly, this implies that the very existence of a state has to do with its ability to coerce its citizens when they act in a way that threatens the existence of the state. Without power, or legitimate force, a state cannot exist. Contrarily, the non-state actor (Boko Haram) intends to wrestle for this sacrosanct instrument of statehood from the successive governments of the federal republic of Nigeria. As a result, the state must take all the necessary means to assert itself or emerge victorious in the contest.

Major State Actors	Major Non-State Actors
Nigeria	Boko Haram - Jamā"atu Ahli as-Sunnah lid-Da"wah wa"l-Jihād - Society of the People of Prophetic Traditions for Preaching and Jihad (داهجلاو قوعدلل فنسلا لهأ ةعامج):
Cameroun	
Chad	
Niger	
Benin Republic	

This theoretical framework has given us one broad way to understand the Boko Haram insurgency; it explains Boko Haram as constituting a threat to the existence of Nigeria as a state or at the very least, a parallel competitor and rival for the instrument of statehood – power and sovereignty. This has been taken to a new level by the attempt to create a distinct sovereign state or *Khilaafat*<sup>1</sup> by the group within the sovereign geographical boundary of Nigeria.

### Conceptualizing Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism

There has been no single definition of terrorism as a concept. For this paper, terrorism is defined as the systemic use of violence by non-state actors against civilians to achieve political objectives from state actors.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, counter-terrorism is explained

1 Abdulgafar Fahm, "Boko Haram's Claim to an Islamic Caliphate: Is It Creditable?" *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*, 2017.

2 J. Jeremy Wisniewski, *Torture, Terrorism, and the Use of Violence* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

here as the totality of all activities and strategies adopted by governments or any group to combat terrorism or all acts of terrorism. Counter-terrorism has been defined by Philip Wilcox as:

the policies and methods used to deter and defeat terrorism which involves the use of information gathering, law enforcement, diplomacy, military force, and other all-inclusive protective security.<sup>3</sup>

### **Theories of Counter-terrorism**

Broadly put, counter-terrorism can be explained from two simple approaches (but not limited to these two), which can be classified as (i) Military Approach and (ii) Soft Non-Military Approach. According to Wilkinson<sup>4</sup> existing research on counterterrorism tends to structure debates around two major approaches which are: (i) Stick or military approach and (ii) the carrot non-military approach. Iro Aghedo and Oarhe Osumah<sup>5</sup> have divided these two approaches using different, but similar words which are “coercion and reconciliation.” The third approach to counter-terrorism has been identified as the Hybrid Doctrine.<sup>6</sup>

The military approach to counter-terrorism focuses on the actual deployment of military assets to fight terrorist organizations. Contrarily, the non-military approach focuses on non-violent engagement of terrorists by adopting non-overly military measures that appeal to them and seek to persuade terrorist groups to avoid continuous violence as well address the underlying motivation for terrorism through steps like dialogues, negotiations or other forms of concession. The third approach to combating terrorism and indeed Boko Haram has been referred to as the Hybrid Doctrine as put forward by Adewumi Falode<sup>7</sup> in his recommendations on how Nigeria should fight Boko Haram. The Hybrid Doctrine is an aggregate of other approaches, it recommends a “harmonisation of all state capacities and resources by blending the carrot and sticks approaches into one single strategy and deployed concurrently.” According to him, the Hybrid Doctrine is a strategic initiative that “means the deployment of assets and resources in the Contested Zones, both in the battlefield and non-combat areas to achieve synergistic effects.”<sup>8</sup> The key to an effective Hybrid Doctrine as expounded by Falode rests in his “Four Ds” which are: to defang,

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3 Philip C. Wilcox, “Counterterrorism,” 2009.

4 Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response*, 2 edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

5 Aghedo, Iro & Osumah, Oarhe. “The Boko Haram Uprising: How should Nigeria respond?”. *Third World Quarterly - Third World Q.* (2012) 33. 853-869.

6 Falode Adewumi, “Countering the Boko Haram Group in Nigeria: The Relevance of Hybrid Doctrine by Adewunmi James Falode: SSRN,” 2016, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2893262](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2893262).

7 Falode Adewunmi “The Nature of Nigeria’s Boko Haram War, 2010-2015: A Strategic Analysis,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* (2016) Volume 10, Issue 1.

8 Falode James, 2016.

depower, degrade and to detox the group through a concerted effort. The Hybrid approach would end with socio-political and economic reforms.

## Boko Haram

Loosely known among the people as “Boko Haram,” a phrase in Hausa language, which means “western education is forbidden.” “Boko” simply means “book” to imply western education, model and lifestyle, while “haram,” properly pronounced as “haraam”<sup>9</sup> is used as nomenclature for things, events or actions that are deemed unlawful or forbidden. Conversely, Paul Newman<sup>10</sup> stresses that “Boko” does not come from English and never meant “book”; it refers rather to a sham or a fraud. Essentially, the proper rendering of the meaning of Boko Haram implies that Western norms and system of government is corrupt, but not necessarily that they are against learning and study. The group has been given this appellation because of its stance against western orientation which they deem as hopelessly and helplessly corrupt as a system of justice and governance in Nigeria.

The group considers itself more formerly as *Jamā’atAhl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wahwa’l-Jihād* which means “the group of the people of prophetic tradition for the propagation of Islam and struggle.” Recently, a faction of the group changed its name to *Wilāyat el islaamiyyat fi Gharbi I frīqīyyah*<sup>11</sup> (Islamic State of West Africa) to create a direct link with ISIL as a global force.

The exact date for the creation of the group would be difficult to ascertain because the group did not start out as a violent organization that was soon to become a terrorist one, but as a movement. However, some analysts have traced the solidification of the group to 2002. Various accounts, often conflicting, and at times, complementary exist about the emergence and formation of the group. According to Aghedo and Osumah,<sup>12</sup> its existence can be traced to the mid-1990s when it existed under the name *ahlusunnah waljamaa hijrah* also referred to popularly in later years as “the Nigerian Taliban. However, this position does not seem coherent because the said *ahlusunnah waljamaa hijrah* exhibited a lot of differences in terms of thought and ideology compared to Boko Haram. There are many groups that continue to use the appellation *ahlu sunnahwa l jamaa*” but remain strict critics of Boko Haram and denounce<sup>13</sup> the group as anti-Islam and lunatic during sermons and speeches among Muslim scholars. The difficulty in tracing the establishment

9 Pronounced Ha-raa-m ‘حرام is originally an Arabic word which means unlawful or forbidden. This is a literary explanation of the word. It is in no way a depiction of the legal technical meaning in the Islamic jurisprudence texts.

10 Paul Newman, “The Etymology of Hausa Boko,” *Mega-Chad Miscellaneous Publications*, 2013, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/20965>.

11 Glenn Kessler, “Boko Haram: Inside the State Department debate over the ‘terrorist’ label,” *The Washington Post*. 2014, May 19 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2014/05/19/boko-haram-inside-the-state-department-debate-over-the-terrorist-label/>.

12 Aghedo and Osumah, 2012, The Boko Haram Uprising: How should Nigeria respond?

13 Ogunlesi Tolu, “Opinion | Nigeria’s Internal Struggles,” *The New York Times*, 23 March 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/24/opinion/nigerias-internal-struggles.html>.

of the group in a formal way arises largely because of its existence as a movement for social and religious cause prior to emerging as a violent group. The evidence of this can be seen in the multiple clips where the known founder Yusuf, was seen answering questions about religious clarifications.<sup>14</sup> Thus, we can establish the development of the group through stages such as the era of evangelism which was peaceful and the era of confrontation with the Nigerian security agencies which was reportedly triggered by their frustration against the Nigerian security operatives<sup>15</sup> and led to more attacks by the group after members were killed extra-judicially.

A more detailed systemic account has been given by Andrew Walker<sup>16</sup> and Muhammad Kyari,<sup>17</sup> the former traced the group's evolution to its moment of hijrah<sup>18</sup> from the urban areas to remote places along the borders of Nigeria and Chad, while the latter identified three stages in the development of the group as "the era of calling," the "Kanama or retreat phase" and "the "active combat era." The major flashpoint was the brutal crackdown on the members of the group and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf who was the leader of the group. Yusuf Muhammad was arrested and extra-judicially killed<sup>19</sup> after a series of clashes with the state authority leading to the "Kanama period" or retreat. Afterward, they re-grouped more effectively under Mallam Shekau. The Shekau Era is also known as the active combat era. In 2016, following what seems to be a series of intra-group disagreements a faction of Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS' leader, Abubakar Al-Baghdadi. The leader of the new faction has been identified as Abu Musa Al-barnawi.<sup>20</sup>

### *Atrocities of the group*

The transitioning of the group has been an unusual phenomenon in terrorism. The confrontation by Boko Haram started first, against the government – a stage that may not necessarily fit their actions into the broader definitions of terrorism. The group, after being repressed militarily regrouped to become more powerful. They sought to attract members

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14 *Tafsirin Tauba 1-1 Mallam Muhammad Yusuf Maiduguri*, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y33rL\\_D\\_6pw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y33rL_D_6pw).

15 In one of the earlier interviews I had with an eye witness, it was revealed that the confrontation by the group started originally as a demonstration against assaults by the members of the Nigerian police force on citizens and innocent motorcycle riders. It is not uncommon in Nigeria for members of the police force to harass innocent citizens or even kill them extra-judicially. This spark led to degeneration and further escalation against the government and symbols of the authority. The group existed as a non-violent movement prior to the eventual extra-judicial killing of its leader.

16 Andrew Walker, "What is Boko Haram" *United States Institute of Peace* (2012) <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/05/what-boko-haram>.

17 Mohammed, Kyari. "The Message and Methods of Boko Haram," *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*. Ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos. African Studies Centre: Leiden, Netherlands, 2014.

18 Hijrah is an Arabic word that means "migration." It is used here to denote the initial movement of the group.

19 Cameron Duodu, "Mohammed Yusuf's Final Days," *The Guardian*, 6 August 2009, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/aug/06/mohammed-yusuf-boko-haram-nigeria>.

20 Shideler, Kyle "FRANK GAFFNEY: Boko Haram discusses Baga massacre, ideology in new video," *Washington Times*. 29 January 2015.

to join them by force, the promise of financial reward<sup>21</sup> or by a sense of common goal against the government. Those who declined to join the group were targeted as enemies.<sup>22</sup> Like other terrorist groups, they sought to use indiscriminate violence against the citizens to get concessions from the government or to intimidate the local population.

Boko Haram has murdered more than 18,000<sup>23</sup> people up till September 2019 after it began its offensive campaigns. The years 2014 and 2015 represent the peak period for the group in terms of casualties and transition into a rebel-insurgent group after it seized a swathe of territories in northeast Nigeria. Churches, mosques, markets and several places have been targeted in the attacks. In terms of Internally Displaced Persons, about 2.4 million individuals had fled the conflict zone by September 2019.<sup>24</sup>

Highlights of their attacks include several attacks on schools, the bombing of UN building in Abuja<sup>25</sup> and the kidnapping of the Chibok girls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State.

### Combating Boko Haram; the Stick Approach

Having established the broad approaches to counter-terrorism as well as a modest account of the group, I shall turn my attention to the practical attempts by Nigeria to combat Boko Haram.

*Stricto sensu*, the *modus operandi* in the Federal Government counter-terrorism campaign as it relates to Boko Haram has been largely military or kinetic in nature, which involves the deployment of military assets to confront the group. Starting from 2009, when Yusuf was killed, the security agents have continued to respond to Boko Haram by force. As observed by Felix, Ekanem and Angela,<sup>26</sup> the military approach to combating Boko Haram can be highlighted thus:

- Continuous military reinforcement
- The International Joint Task Force (IJTF)
- Declaration of state of emergency
- Imposition of Curfew
- Establishment of Civilian JTFs

21 Alfred Charlotte, "Why People Join Nigeria's Boko Haram" *HuffPost*, 16 March 2016.

22 I had discussions with individuals who fled from the North-East to the South Western part of Nigeria. I met with individuals who declined to join the group. They made it clear that they have been declared as targets by members of the group for turning them down.

23 John Campbell, "Nigeria Security Tracker," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 1, 2019.

24 UNHCR, "Nigeria emergency."

25 Mshelizza Ibrahim, "Islamist Sect Boko Haram Claims Nigerian U.N. Bombing", *Reuters*, 29 August 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-bombing-claim-idUSTRE77S3ZO20110829>.

26 Akpan, Felix; Ekanem, Okonette; Olofu-Adeoye, Angela "Boko Haram Insurgency and the Counter-Terrorism Policy in Nigeria" *Canadian Social Science*, March 1, 2014, <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-3330435321/boko-haram-insurgency-and-the-counter-terrorism-policy>.

In 2012, the government introduced ‘state-of-emergency’ in the most affected states of the region.<sup>27</sup> The state-of-emergency implied that, a designated military chief would run the affairs and day-to-day activities in the affected areas and as such, empowered to declare curfews and take other precautionary measures as deemed fit. In May 2013, the government extended the declared state-of-emergency in the north-eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. The shifting of the military command headquarters as ordered by the federal government, further alludes to the total dependency of the government on the use of stick approach to overcoming the Boko Haram menace.

Consequently, the government increased its military expenditure on security as a response to the crises and to crack down heavily on members of the group, with a report by Premium Times showing that a total N4.62trillion has been allocated to the federal security sector in the past five years.<sup>28</sup> For instance, in the 2015 budget, N934billion was allocated for the security sector, the highest for the year. The figures for 2011 and 2012 were N920billion and N924billion respectively while N923billion each was thrown at the sector in 2013 and 2014. In the 2018 budget, 123 billion naira was voted for the office of the National Security Adviser.<sup>29</sup> An estimated sum of Six trillion naira has been spent on security between 2008 till the year 2018.<sup>30</sup> For the year 2019,<sup>31</sup> there is a projected 436 billion naira for the Ministry of Defence.

*Multi-National Joint Task Force:* As part of the direct approach to combat Boko Haram, the Nigerian government has adopted a multi-national approach to the war on the group by working jointly with neighboring countries such as Cameroun, Niger, Chad and, the Republic of Benin. The Multi-National Joint Task Force was initially made up of about 8,700 troops from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin which has since been expanded. It is imperative to underline here that a multi-national joint force became imperative due to at least two conditions. The first is the cross-border and guerilla tactics that have been embraced by Boko Haram without any respect for international border demarcation, such as attacks and the seeking of haven across Cameroon and other countries across the sub-region. The second reason for deploying the IJTF was due to the positioning of the conflict as part of the global campaigns against international terrorism and the sensitivity of the insecurity it brings.

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27 Jack Moore “Nigerian Military Enter ‘Final Stages’ of Boko Haram Offensive,” *Newsweek*, 23 April 2015. Retrieved 2 May 2015.

28 Joshua Omufemi , “Nigeria spends N4.62 trillion on National Security in 5 years, yet widespread insecurity remains,” *Premium Times* June 18, 2015, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/185285-nigeria-spends-n4-62-trillion-on-national-security-in-5-years-yet-widespread-insecurity-remains.html>.

29 Wale Odunsi, “2018 Budget: Buhari Govt Gives Breakdown of Allocations,” *Daily Post Nigeria*, 21 June 2018, <https://dailypost.ng/2018/06/21/2018-budget-buhari-govt-gives-breakdown-allocations/>.

30 Ndujihe Clifford, “Security: FG Spends N6trn on Defence in 11 Years,” *Vanguard Nigeria*, 29 July 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/07/security-fg-spends-n6trn-on-defence-in-11-years/>.

31 Udo Udoma Udoma, “Breakdown of 2019 FGN Budget Proposal,” Budget Office of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, accessed 2 November 2019, <https://www.budgetoffice.gov.ng/index.php/breakdown-of-2019-fgn-budget-proposal?task=document.viewdoc&id=697>.

*The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)*: The CJTF is a paramilitary group made up of hunters and vigilantes<sup>32</sup> who have helped the Nigerian military in its fight against the Boko Haram group. They are usually armed with basic Dane guns for hunting and amulets. They are particularly useful for intelligence gathering and combats in places where military deployment is not readily available. Their knowledge of the local terrain and their ability to track members of the group using basic footprints learned from their years of hunting and tracking animals have significant advantages.

### **Successes and Criticisms of the Stick Approach**

In terms of success, the strong military approach and coordinated assault launched by the state actors have drastically led to the reclamation of territories that were held by the group. At its apogee, the group held a vast territory that was almost the size of Belgium,<sup>33</sup> where they erected an almost parallel government as a traditional rebel group. The coordinated attacks by the Nigerian military resulted in a steady recovery of almost all territories under the group thereby forcing them to return to their early guerrilla tactics that are typical of non-state violent groups.

*Tactical Challenges*: Policing terrorism and containing it requires a different approach when compared to conventional warfare where parties involved can identify one another, fight within a given territory and follow the rules of military engagement. In the military approach to Boko Haram, the line of action or even theatres of war are usually not clear-cut, and the enemies are not usually identifiable – a daunting task that usually proves herculean. The continuous shift in the approach by Boko Haram has forced the government to re-adjust inconveniently. The group had lost most of the territories it once held due to the direct assault and superior military organization from the federal government. However, the group has returned to its initial adoption of hit-and-run tactics which has made it difficult for them to be contained.

A new set of challenges emerged when other tactics, such as suicide bombing were adopted by the group, most especially the use of underage children who are forced to wear suicide vests. In conventional military ethics, these tool-children cannot be shot at as suspects, but a slight misjudgment could lead to irreversible loss of lives and damage on the side of the troops or other citizens.

The use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) has proved particularly difficult to contain by the Nigerian military who were mostly trained in conventional warfare. Roadside bombings have resulted in the deaths of Nigerian soldiers. At the tactical level, suicide bombings and the use of IEDs represent a different and cumbersome layer of

32 Cropley Ed, “On Boko Haram Front Line, Nigerian Vigilantes Amass Victories and Power,” *Reuters*, 15 June 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security-vigilantes-idUSKBN1960FK>.

33 Ola Lanre, “About 20 Nigerian soldiers missing after Boko Haram clash: sources,” *Reuters* July 16, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/about-20-nigerian-soldiers-missing-after-boko-haram-clash-sources-idUSKBN1K628N>.

challenge for any military as we can see in the experience of the USA-led coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Additionally, reports from videos obtained by media outlets have shown that Boko Haram has adopted the use of Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (SVBIEDs) which was efficiently used by the *Daesh* terrorist group in their campaigns. Based on several assessments, it remains unclear whether the Nigerian military is fully equipped to contain the use of SVBIEDs by the group due to depleted resources and tactical problems. There are also fears that the group might adopt the use of drones alongside other difficult-to-track offensive weapons.

The capacity of the group has improved from crude methods to more a more sophisticated type with RPGs, anti-aircraft guns and other weapons seized from the Nigerian Defence Forces or smuggled through the porous borders. In 2014, a Nigerian pilot, Wing Commander Chimda Hedima was decapitated by Boko Haram members when he could no longer hold on to the control of his fighter jet after he came under heavy fire while providing air support for the Nigerian Army. Attacks like this show a significant improvement in the ability of the group.

*Inadequate Weapons and Corruption:* Another visible challenge that Nigeria has faced in the fight against Boko Haram is in the areas of procuring weapons. This problem is exacerbated by two major factors, namely corruption on the part of Nigerian officials and international delay. There have been allegations of diversion of funds meant for military equipment by the top brass in the military especially under the administration of President Jonathan. About 2 billion dollars earmarked for acquiring weapons in the fight against Boko Haram was said to have been diverted or difficult to account for. In 2015, Sambo Dasuki, the National Security Adviser was charged for fraudulent practices in connection with about 68 million dollars meant for the military.<sup>34</sup> Nigerian soldiers have posted clips from the frontline which showed that soldiers were under-fed almost throughout the period leading to the 2015 general elections. Soldiers have lamented their ordeals by stressing that they have been forced to out-stay their routines on the frontline and sometimes cover the costs of personal needs while on national duties.<sup>35</sup>

The Nigerian military has suffered from international delay or outright cancellation of military equipment/armaments contracts. For example, in July 2015, the United States of America refused to sell advanced weapons to Nigeria as a result of the Leahy Law<sup>36</sup> which prohibits the sale of US military weapons to countries whose militaries are accused of gross human rights violations. Practically, this implies that the country's air force,

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34 BBC Africa, "Nigeria's Sambo Dasuki charged over '\$68m fraud'" *BBC*, December 14, 2015 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35093785>.

35 Malik Samuel, "Nigeria: Soldiers Forced To Buy Their Own Uniforms," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, accessed 4 October 2019, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/nigeria-soldiers-forced-buy-their-own-uniforms>.

36 Joe Picard, "Nigeria Calls for a Re-Think of the Leahy Law," *The Hill*, 5 February 2015, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/231778-nigeria-calls-for-a-re-think-of-the-leahy-law>.

like other sister agencies, was unable to purchase new attack helicopters such as the Cobra attack helicopters which are significantly needed across the theatres of operation to provide on-the-spot air cover and attack for the Nigerian army. Hence, the country has tilted towards Pakistan,<sup>37</sup> South Africa and Russia<sup>38</sup> in a bid to fill the supply vacuum left by the USA.

Boko Haram members are armed with RPGs, anti-aircraft guns and an enormous number of foot soldiers with booties from looting, kidnapping for ransom and a supply of weapons from the black markets.<sup>39</sup> All these problems are the consequences of long-term systemic decay and fraud which has eaten deep into the system in the country.

### Criticisms of the Military Approach

The highhandedness and the overly brutal tactics that were allegedly adopted by men of the Nigerian security service at the initial stage of the crisis which included shooting-at-sight<sup>40</sup> and random execution has hampered real-time intelligence service because of the fear of being detained by the authority. The military approach to security issues, most especially to civilian affairs and riots has become normalcy in Nigeria. In simple cases; where students protest the policies of school authorities or even during widespread protests, the government calls on the military to arrest the situations. This over-reliance on the military approach to civilian issues has come with unintended negative consequences such as loss of civilian lives. This is probably because soldiers are not extensively trained to handle civilian matters coupled with long-standing negative images of the army in the eyes of the public. This break down in the army-civilian relationship stems from the repressive eras of military government where soldiers could harass civilians on the street with no consequences. Political and social uprisings are always tamed by the deployment of soldiers. This is usually preceded by poor intelligence gatherings and lack of good strategic analysis of the situations. The first response to security challenges is guns and tanks as deterrence. For example, during the fuel subsidy protests in Nigeria, about seven civilians were shot dead or rough-handled by war-trained soldiers or members of the

37 "Nigeria Turns to Pakistan, China for War Planes, Helicopters, Others - Premium Times Nigeria," 4 December 2016, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/217061-nigeria-turns-pakistan-china-war-planes-helicopters-others.html>.

38 "Russia & Nigeria Ink Deal for Delivery of MI-35 Combat Helicopters," *RT International*, accessed 2 November 2019, <https://www.rt.com/business/471604-russia-niger-helicopters-contract/>; Reuters, "Russia Signs Deal to Supply Nigeria With 12 Attack Helicopters: RIA," *The New York Times*, 25 October 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2019/10/25/world/africa/25reuters-russia-africa-niger-helicopters.html>.

39 Open Briefing, "Reducing the Supply of Weapons to Boko Haram," 12 March 2015, <https://www.openbriefing.org/docs/Reducing-the-supply-of-weapons-to-Boko-Haram.pdf>.

40 Eye witness accounts I obtained directly shows that Nigerian soldiers were ordered to shoot at sight during the beginning of the crisis. An inter-state trailer driver explained how they were instructed to shave their beards to avoid suspicion by the police. This tactics would have been counter-productive because it pushes non-Boko Haram individuals towards the group due to be targeted based on their appearances.

police force.<sup>41</sup>

This continuous use of overhanded military tactics to diffuse all situations whether appropriate or inappropriate took a negative turn when it was used against members of Boko Haram – an organised group that had become popular through expressive criticism of the government that is deemed corrupt and helpless. The initial controversial and extra-judicial killing of a one-time leader of the group, Muhammad Yusuf in the hands of the security operatives of Nigeria highlights the lacuna in military approach to the issue in its formative years. The situation spiraled out of control despite the assurance by the government that the extrajudicial killing would be investigated. Five officers linked to the incident were arrested for Yusuf’s murder, but it bore no positive impact on the level of unrest and his followers swore to avenge the killing of their members as well as free those who were detained without any court trial.

The overly military approach has resulted in gross human rights abuse and summary executions by Nigerian troops. According to a research by Amnesty International, “One of those executions, captured in footage, shows people who appear to be members of the Nigerian military and the Civilian Joint Task Force (Civilian JTF) using a blade to slit the throats of five detainees, before dumping them in an open mass grave. Nine people were killed this way and, according to witnesses, other detainees seen in the video were shot.”<sup>42</sup>

Other criticism against the Nigerian army, in particular, includes allegations of war crimes, the use of torture against suspects and raping of women.<sup>43</sup> All these anomalies, from tactical and financial problems, are important obstacles in the war against Boko Haram.

### **Failures of the Non-Military Approach**

The non-military approach to combating Boko Haram can be highlighted as containing negotiation, the promise of amnesty and return to normalcy. Two important impediments can be identified here. The first is that the strategic objective of the group to establish a sovereign state in the region cannot be reconciled by negotiation except if the group abandons its goal of creating a sovereign state altogether. The second impediment is the unwillingness of the group’s leadership to reach out for serious negotiations and in fact, the negotiation process came a bit late as it was done when the government realised that a total military solution had become difficult. Limited attempts have been made by the Federal Government to adopt this as a counter-Boko Haram method. The lateness in

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41 Gillian Parker, “Nigeria Paralyzed by ‘Occupy’ Strike over Gas Prices,” *Time*, 9 January 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2104053,00.html>.

42 Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Threats from the Military Won’t Deter Us from Defending Human Rights”, 7 June 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/nigeria-threats-from-the-military-wont-deter-us-from-defending-human-rights/>.

43 Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Starving Women Raped by Soldiers and Militia Who Claim to Be Rescuing Them”, accessed 4 October 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/nigeria-starving-women-raped-by-soldiers-and-militia-who-claim-to-be-rescuing-them/>.

the effort for dialogue is well corroborated by a revelation through one of the respected negotiators with the group Barrister Aisha<sup>44</sup> who posits that the group was willing to have a reasonable dialogue with the federal government, but the abuses and extrajudicial killings against its members were a stumbling block. The leader of the group was recorded to have said “you were here when they shot and killed my followers and as we were carrying the deceased, they shot us again. My hands are tied, but if we’re able to meet governor Ali Sheriff [former governor of Borno state] and talk things over, the war will not happen”.<sup>45</sup> The reasons for the current failure in the attempt at peaceful resolution range from perceived lack of a defined leadership representation of the group to the group’s unwillingness to sit with the government. It is very dicey to see how effective and productive a possible negotiation with the group could be held because of the lack of clear-cut leadership and representatives for the group. There are in-group division<sup>46</sup> and disagreement over whether to negotiate with the government or not. There have been reports of willingness to negotiate in the past, but these attempts have failed because of counter-claim and refusals by other members of the group that the faction that called for negotiation does not represent the whole group<sup>47</sup>. In an embarrassing scenario that unraveled in 2014, the federal government allegedly negotiated with some “top members of the group” only for it to eventually turn out as a controversial fraud<sup>48</sup> in which the said splinter group was later denounced by the supreme commander, Shekau. In 2011, former president of the country, Olusegun Obasanjo visited Maiduguri to reach out to members of the family of the group’s former leader, Yusuf Muhammad, but the host<sup>49</sup> was killed in the aftermath of the visit<sup>50</sup>.

In April 2013, President Jonathan inaugurated a Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges<sup>51</sup> in the affected areas, but this dialogue was futile. The possibility for the success would have been higher if the initial extra-judicial killing of

44 Ashionye Ogene, “‘Mama Boko Haram’ Grasps for Peace in Nigeria,” accessed 4 October 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/boko-haram-grasps-peace-nigeria-2014615113232422214.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/boko-haram-grasps-peace-nigeria-2014615113232422214.html).

45 Ibid.

46 Zenn Jacob, “Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, Africa Special Issue (February 2014), <https://ctc.usma.edu/leadership-analysis-of-boko-haram-and-ansaru-in-nigeria/>.

47 Dionne Searcey and Chris Stein, “Nigeria Describes 3 Failed Negotiations With Boko Haram on Kidnapped Girls,” *The New York Times*, 16 September 2016, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/17/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-chibok.html>.

48 Gaffey Conor, “Goodluck Jonathan Lost ‘Millions’ to Fake Boko Haram Leaders: Buhari Adviser,” 1 December 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/goodluck-jonathan-lost-millions-fake-boko-haram-leaders-buhari-adviser-414426>.

49 The name of the host has been given as Babakura Fugu, a relative of Yusuf Muhammad who has been described as one of the founders of the group during its formative years.

50 Ajani Jide, “Boko Haram Visit: Obasanjo’s Host Shot Dead”, *Vanguard Nigeria* (blog), 17 September 2011, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/09/boko-haram-visit-obasanjos-host-shot-dead/>.

51 Campbell John, “Nigeria’s President Launches Amnesty Committee for Boko Haram”, *Council on Foreign Relations* (blog), accessed 4 October 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerias-president-launches-amnesty-committee-boko-haram>.

the former leader of the group was not carried out. For Boko Haram, there was no turning back, most especially, when they appeared to have recorded quick victories over the government and even seized some territories to create their own system of government.

One of the prominent actors in the bid to negotiate with Boko Haram for various dialogues, including for the release of hostages is Barrister Aisha Wakil, also known, as Mama Boko Haram. She has been named as Boko Haram as one of the necessary participants for any meaningful discussion and dialogue with the group. However, all these efforts have been moribund in finding a lasting solution to the insurgency. Negotiations for ceasefire and the release of the kidnapped Chibok Girls was one of the options explored by the federal government in its fight against Boko Haram. Consequently, Boko Haram demanded the release of detained terrorists in exchange for the Chibok girls, and several other civilians held hostage by the group.

Falode<sup>52</sup> recommends a blend between the carrot and stick approaches against Boko Haram, this approach is somewhat limited in terms of practicalities and successes. A careful analysis reveals that there have been elements of this approach in one way or the other, but the crisis still thrives and has been on for a decade already. Broadly, the combination of carrot and stick approaches is expected to force them to abandon the thought that they stand a chance against the organized army of the state actors, while the carrot arm would give them the assurance that they will be welcomed into the system as law-abiding citizens.

*De-radicalization:* De-radicalisation can be explained as a process through which potential terrorists or recruited members of any terrorists group are made to go through psychological and social re-engagement to address their extremist views and by extension, the potential danger they pose to the society with the aim of re-integrating them back into the society. In the words of Alex Schmidt,<sup>53</sup> deradicalization refers to “a cognitive or mental denunciation of certain attitudes and views.” The process of de-radicalization in Nigeria is relatively new, but a very important one nonetheless. As part of the efforts to combat Boko Haram, certain achievements have been recorded in this area including re-training of former Boko Haram and others who pleaded for forgiveness after undergoing various capacity-building training and professional workshops.<sup>54</sup> The de-radicalization efforts have continued to blossom with members of the group learning different vocations through the federal government’s re-integration programs. The challenges of de-radicalization and the potential for recidivism has been discussed by various authors, but

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52 Adewumi, “Countering the Boko Haram Group in Nigeria: The Relevance of Hybrid Doctrine by Adewunmi James Falode: SSRN.”

53 Alex Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review,” *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies* 4 (1 March 2013), <https://doi.org/10.19165/2013.1.02>.

54 NAN, “ICYMI: Deradicalised Ex-Boko Haram Members Beg for Forgiveness,” *Punch Newspapers*, accessed 4 October 2019, <https://punchng.com/deradicalised-ex-boko-haram-members-beg-for-forgiveness/>.

the successes and failures in this regard require a different study.

*Anti-Terror Acts:* Prior to Boko Haram, Nigeria had no elaborate counter-terrorism measures in the constitution due to the novelty of the phenomenon. The constitutional and legal framework for anti-terrorism was built on the existing legal provisions covered under the standard Violence and Criminal Acts. The delay in the enactment of counter-terrorism acts can be attributed to the newness of the phenomenon to Nigeria. The Anti-Terrorism Acts remains the most comprehensive single legal document in the history of Nigeria to deal with terrorism. As specified in the final memorandum of the Act, it “provides for measures for the prevention, prohibition and combating of acts of terrorism, the financing of terrorism in Nigeria and its effective implementation”<sup>55</sup> The provision of the document ranges from identifying terrorist groups and individuals to specifying the necessary punishment for the acts and everything related to it.

*Counter-Ideological Narrative:* Security experts have urged the government to adopt non-kinetic measures against the group such as the spiritual warfare strategy discussed by the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, “the need to defeat the ideologies of Boko Haram and ISWAP is based on the awareness that it is the ideologies that enhance their resources and help to recruit new fighters to their fold and as such; kill their ideology and the terrorist movement withers and dies.”<sup>57</sup> Social aspects of this includes the series of talks and discourse by Muslim leaders against the group in the mosques or other public forums where the violent views of Boko Haram were criticised as *unislamic*. The adoption of counter-ideological methods and narratives against Boko Haram is not a new phenomenon. Several top scholars of Islam have openly criticised the ideas of Boko Haram as abhorrent in what has been an ideological polarity between mainstream Salafi groups and Boko Haram<sup>58</sup>. Popular clerics have stood up to counter the extreme narratives of Boko Haram in mosques and fora across the country. In 2011, Mallam Ibrahim Birkuti was killed<sup>59</sup> by members of Boko Haram for criticising them in open talks. In 2014, another prominent, Adam Albani<sup>60</sup> was killed alongside members of his family.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Nigeria failed in at least two broad ways. First; the government largely showed a sheer

55 Terrorism Prevention Act, 2011.

56 Olaleye Aluko, “spiritual Efforts Needed to Defeat Boko Haram —Buratai,” *Punch Newspapers*, 30 September 2019, <https://punchng.com/spiritual-efforts-needed-to-defeat-boko-haram-buratai/>.

57 Ibid.

58 Alex Thurston, “Nigeria’s Mainstream Salafis between Boko Haram and the State”, *Islamic Africa* 6, no. 1–2 (2015): 109–34.

59 “Muslim Cleric Killed in Nigeria”, *BBC News*, 7 June 2011, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13679234>.

60 “Nigerian Muslim Cleric Opposed to Boko Haram Shot Dead”, *Reuters*, 3 February 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-bokoharam-idUSBREA120CK20140203>.

inability to recognize the possible localization of the global terror threat as well as work towards the renewed threats posed by the proliferation of weapons. Boko Haram did not start as a global threat but did take great inspiration from other established groups such as ISIS. They perfected their models so much that it took them a few years to even surpass ISIS in terms of the number of casualties. Following this, it is important that other countries in the ECOWAS sub-regional zone, most especially Ghana, Senegal and Mauritania among others develop broad and comprehensive pre-emptive measures to counter the threat of terrorism pre-emptively.

Nigeria needs to channel more funds into the military industry of the country to save the country from over-reliance on imported military hardware which has hampered the operation and may continue to hamper similar military operations elsewhere. Today, there are countries in West Africa that do not possess enough military power to contain potential insurgencies without reaching out to the countries of the global north.

Adequate moral support and welfare should also be made available to officers and men of the Nigerian military, most especially those who are at the forefront of the operation against Boko Haram. Leaked videos and audios from the frontlines reveal widespread dissatisfaction among Nigerian soldiers due to neglect, corruption and diversion of fund meant for their welfare.

The usual use of brutal tactics and crackdown by officers of the Nigerian Police and other security agencies is a well-known trend in the country which further aided the impetus and resolve of the group. Disregard for the rule of law, continuous human rights abuses and systemic failure are some of the many problems that led to the emergence of Boko Haram as a terrorist group. These factors have also continued to hinder Nigeria's efforts to combat the group. The potential for similar conflicts is widespread in the country due to institutional failures. For example, one of the potentially similar cases is the re-current Shia-Army standoff facing the country with the army killing hundreds of members of the group.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, Boko Haram as a group gives an interesting insight into the evolution of terrorist groups for any theoretical consideration. The patterns in its evolution are different and it offers a fertile ground for a serious academic discourse that would be separate from this paper.

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61 Murtala Wazeer, "In Search of Justice and Tolerance among Muslim Groups in Nigeria - The Muslim Vibe", accessed 4 October 2019, <https://themuslimvibe.com/muslim-current-affairs-news/analysis/in-search-of-justice-and-tolerance-among-muslim-groups-in-nigeria>.

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