

# FROM BOKO HARAM TO ANSARU

The Evolution of Nigerian Jihad

Raffaello Pantucci and Sasha Jesperson



Royal United Services Institute

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Occasional Paper, April 2015

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Printed in the UK by Stephen Austin and Sons, Ltd.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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The authors would like to thank the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) for supporting the research for this paper. Additionally, gratitude must be extended to the participants of an expert roundtable on Boko Haram held at RUSI and to Sofia Patel for their invaluable assistance. Finally, thanks to current RUSI colleagues for their editorial support: Becky Dale; Adrian Johnson; Ashlee Godwin; and Edward Mortimer. Any mistakes or omissions are the authors' own.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<b>AFP</b>	Agence France-Presse
<b>ANI</b>	Agence Nouakchott d'Information
<b>APC</b>	All Progressives Congress
<b>AQIM</b>	Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>DDI</b>	Director of Defence Intelligence (Nigeria)
<b>DHQ</b>	Defence Headquarters (Nigeria)
<b>ECCAS</b>	Economic Community of Central African States
<b>GSPC</b>	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat
<b>IED</b>	Improvised explosive device
<b>IMN</b>	Islamic Movement of Nigeria
<b>JTI</b>	Jamaatul Tajdid Islam
<b>JTF</b>	Joint Task Force
<b>MEND</b>	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
<b>MUJAO</b>	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (also known as MUJWA)
<b>NTA</b>	Nigerian Television Authority
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>RUSI</b>	Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies
<b>SARS</b>	Specialist Anti-Robbery Squad
<b>SSS</b>	State Security Service (Nigeria)
<b>SWT</b>	Subhabahuwata'ala ('Praise be to God')
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>VBIED</b>	Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device



## Introduction

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Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram remains a somewhat impenetrable creation. Periodically able to conduct terrorist spectacles that kill dozens, and acts of brutality such as executing school children as they sleep in their dormitories, the group requires a concerted response. But prior to the recent Nigerian general election of 28–29 March 2015, Boko Haram became a political tennis ball. Then-President Goodluck Jonathan attempted to turn a bad situation around by attracting international support on the back of major incidents, such as the kidnapping of nearly 300 girls from their school in Chibok in Borno State in April 2014, or Boko Haram's renewed attempts to create an Islamic Caliphate. But every claim by Jonathan that Boko Haram would be defeated, including the September 2014 proclamation that the group would be eradicated in the same way as Ebola, has been met with further attacks. Jonathan's presidency has subsequently been heavily criticised for the inadequacy of its response.

The impending election only intensified debates on how to respond to Boko Haram. As a key election issue, and with international attention focused on the threat, neither party was able to ignore the group. The election was even postponed by six weeks, reportedly because of the threat posed by Boko Haram. Reports also suggest that Jonathan's administration was plotting to capture an imposter of Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, in order to garner support. The opposition All Progressives Congress (APC), led by Muhammadu Buhari, was able to take the easier route, criticising Johnson's inaction.

While internally the focus on elections may have disrupted Nigeria's response to Boko Haram, the response from neighbouring countries has intensified. The African Union (AU) has approved a multinational force to respond to the threat posed by the group, with support from the UN Security Council. The Economic Community for Central African States agreed to commit 50 billion CFA francs (over \$86 million) to an emergency fund, partly in response to increasingly frequent Boko Haram incursions into Chad, Cameroon and Niger. These additional resources are sorely needed for an effective response, but current strategies continue to rely too heavily on military action. Nigeria's unilateral military response has been inadequate, and although the growing attention will overcome some of its shortfalls – low morale, corruption and inadequate equipment – the military must be part of a broader response.

At first glance, Boko Haram appears similar to many other terrorist groups – ideologically driven and unified with a clear chain of command. Boko Haram has even borrowed others' tactics: a penchant for kidnapping from Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); and the objective of an Islamic caliphate revived in line with the media focus on Daesh (also known as

Islamic State, or ISIS) and their goals. Yet it is no longer clear that the group is as coherent an entity as was initially believed. Clearly borne out of the thinking of Mohammed Yusuf, the group has evolved over time to become a more nebulous entity whose direction and aims are sometimes difficult to identify. One aspect that is of particular concern for those watching from the West is the emergence of the splinter faction Ansaru, a group that appears to espouse a more anti-Western rhetoric, and that in action appears to prioritise kidnapping and killing Western targets.

There is a wide-ranging and growing body of literature on Boko Haram. Although not always in agreement, there is much discussion around the etymology of the group's name and what it means. Frequently interpreted as 'Western education is sinful', the meaning is in fact more varied. The background and ideology of Boko Haram has been well documented, extending back to Usmandan Fodio's jihad in the early nineteenth century and his Sokoto Caliphate, as well as the more recent Maitatsine Riots in the 1980s. While the group remained relatively peaceful until 2003, its strategy and tactics since then, along with the government response, have been explored. Despite the broad body of literature, some areas remain a matter of speculation, such as the group's funding sources, affiliates and networks. Therefore, many unknowns remain surrounding the group's activities.

Perhaps resulting from this lack of understanding, responses have relied on military force. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of Nigeria's military, it has become clear that such an approach does not engage with the factors that have contributed to Boko Haram's growth and resilience. The rush to respond has ignored the lessons that can be learned by looking at the emergence of Boko Haram, its strategies, tactics and evolution. Collectively, these factors provide a better understanding of the group's dynamics and suggest potential entry points for an effective, and not exclusively military, response.

With the election now out of the way, an opportunity exists for the Nigerian government to work in partnership with its neighbours, the African Union and the wider international community to engage with the specific dynamics of Boko Haram and launch a meaningful response. However, in order to exploit this opportunity, all actors need to enhance their understanding of the trends that have determined the growth and development of Boko Haram so far. This Occasional Paper therefore investigates four inflection points in the group's development: the death of Mohammed Yusuf; the leadership of Boko Haram post-Yusuf; the 2011 bombing in Abuja; and the emergence of Ansaru. For each, it considers the indicators of a meaningful response to the group.

## I. Mohammed Yusuf's Death

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In July 2009, Mohammed Yusuf, leader of Boko Haram, was killed in police custody. His death was expected to weaken the group, but while it was definitely a turning point, the opposite occurred, speeding the shift towards more extreme violence conducted over a larger piece of territory.

There is little reliable reporting on Mohammed Yusuf. For instance, it is unclear whether he received a Western education or a basic Nigerian education, which he dropped and instead completed Qu'ranic studies in Niger and Chad. His public involvement in religious activities can be traced back to the early 2000s, influenced by the prominent Shia cleric Ibrahim Al-Zakzaky's Iranian-funded Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) as well as the Salafi scholar Jafa'ar Mahmoud Adam.<sup>1</sup> The IMN drew ideological inspiration from the thought of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, particularly Hassan Al-Banna and Said Qutb, who revived the concept of an Islamic State governed by Sharia Law in the second half of the twentieth century. El-Zakzaky also incorporated Khomeinist doctrine into the IMN's ideology, imitating Iran's anti-American rhetoric and training a paramilitary wing to 'provide security to members of the movement' modelled on Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Hizbullah.<sup>2</sup>

Over time, however, Yusuf diverged from his teachers, ultimately joining other Nigerian Sunnis to oppose the IMN, in part because of Iran's growing influence in Africa. Saudi Arabia began funding Salafist groups in Africa in the 1980s to counter this trend and Yusuf professed that Muslims should only follow 'true Salafists', and all others were infidels.<sup>3</sup> Two of the prominent Salafist groups that emerged in northern Nigeria during the 1980s were Jamaatul Tajdid Islam (JTI, Movement for the Revival of Islam) in Borno State<sup>4</sup> and Jama'atu Izalatul Bid'awal kamatu Sunna (Izala, Movement for the Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of Sunni Islam). Yusuf reportedly came to Borno State to exploit the Izala infrastructure, which he used to recruit followers.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Terje Østebø, 'Islamic Militancy in Africa', *Africa Security Brief* (No. 23, November 2012).
  2. *Zeenahbraheem*, 'The Islamic Awakening: Islamic Struggle, Correct Path to Lasting Success, Islamic Movement of Nigeria', <[http://islamicmovement.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=415](http://islamicmovement.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=415)>; Jacob Zenn, 'Nigerian al-Qaedaism', Hudson Institute, 27 January 2014.
  3. *Ibid.*
  4. Adesoji Ambibola, 'The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria', *Africa Spectrum* (Vol. 45, No. 2, 2010), pp. 95–98.
  5. US diplomatic cable, 'Nigeria: Borno State Residents Not Yet Recovered from Boko Haram Violence', 4 November 2009, <[https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ABUJA2014\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ABUJA2014_a.html)>.

In 1994, Yusuf became the Borno State ‘emir’ of JTI, whose members comprised radicalised IMN affiliates, and who rejected the secular Nigerian government as well as the northern Nigerian Hausa Muslim leaders who worked with the government. Unlike the IMN, the JTI followed Saudi Arabian Salafist doctrine, not Shia Islam or the pan-Islamic ideology of the Iranian Revolution.<sup>6</sup> Later, in the 2000s, Yusuf became affiliated with the Izala movement, which subsumed JTI in 1999. The Izala movement had been formed in 1978 principally as a way of trying to reform Islam in the region and to reject perceived Sufi dominance.<sup>7</sup>

By 2002, Yusuf had grown in prominence. He openly challenged IMN leader Jafa’ar Adam in sermons about Salafist doctrine and became the Borno representative on Sheikh Ibrahim Datti Ahmed’s Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria, a position that helped expand his community of followers. In time, however, Yusuf and others in the Supreme Council became dissatisfied with the implementation of Sharia Law in Nigeria, forming a new movement – Ahlul sunna wal’jama’ah hijra (Adherents to the Sunnah and the Community).<sup>8</sup> When the previous emir left to pursue studies in Saudi Arabia, Yusuf displaced elderly sect members to take charge. Eager to carve his own ideological path, the group shifted in an anti-Western direction, condemning Western education and civilization as taqut (evil). The group was renamed Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad (People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad), although it has become popularly labelled ‘Boko Haram’, inaccurately interpreted as ‘Western education is sinful’.<sup>9</sup>

This interpretation became widely accepted after 2004, when Yusuf’s disagreements with the IMN’s Jafa’ar Adam became more public.<sup>10</sup> Pamphlets and recordings of sermons promoted their respective views on education, healthcare, employment and government.<sup>11</sup> Education was the key sticking point. While Adam advocated the importance of secular Western-style education for Nigerian Muslims, Yusuf declared that it ‘spoils the belief in

6. Jacob Zenn, ‘Nigerian al-Qaedaism’, Hudson Institute, 27 January 2014, <<http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/nigerian-al-qaedaism>>.

7. Ramzi Ben Amara, ‘The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Sharia Re-implementation’, unpublished PhD dissertation, submitted to the University of Bayreuth, June 2011.

8. Zenn, ‘Nigerian al-Qaedaism’; Abee Olufemi Salaam, ‘The Psychological Make-up of Mohammed Yusuf’, *e-ir.info*, 4 November 2013.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Sani Umar, ‘The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram’, *Journal of Religion in Africa* (Vol. 42, 2012), pp. 118–44.

11. Roman Loimeier, ‘Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria’, *Africa Spectrum* (Vol. 47, No. 2-3), pp. 137–55.

one God'.<sup>12</sup> As a product of Western culture, secular education threatened to corrupt Muslims and society, and thus represented the major factor inhibiting the realisation of an Islamic political order.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, Yusuf rejected the modern Islamic schools of the Izala, and refused to recognise the Sultan of Sokoto as the nominal head of all Nigerian Muslims.<sup>14</sup> He criticised the state and its institutions, particularly the police and security forces; there were even allegations that he attempted to infiltrate their ranks.<sup>15</sup>

The growth of Boko Haram coincided with a palpable growth in public resentment at the social uncertainty arising from poverty in northern Nigeria while the south of the country enjoyed a boom in oil production.<sup>16</sup> Within this context, Yusuf was able to coax many vulnerable individuals, especially disillusioned youths that had received some basic Islamic training, to embrace his new, emerging Islamic 'utopia', promising better alternatives to existing opportunities in northern Nigeria. In particular, Yusuf drew on the narratives of anger at the perceived Western support of the south and the perceived failure of the Islamic leadership in the north.

Although its beginnings were relatively peaceful, Boko Haram first took up arms against state security forces on 24 December 2003 when it attacked police stations and public buildings in the towns of Geiam and Kanamma, Yobe State.<sup>17</sup> Members occupied the building for several days, hoisting the flag of the Afghan Taliban over the camps, before a joint operation of soldiers and police dislodged the group.<sup>18</sup> Eighteen members of Boko Haram were killed and dozens arrested.<sup>19</sup> In the following year, three more attacks were attributed to Boko Haram. In June 2004, four members arrested after the December violence attempted to escape from prison and were killed, leading to a retaliatory strike by the group in an effort to seize more weaponry.<sup>20</sup> On

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12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. Hussein Yahaya and Ibraheem A Fatai, 'Islamic Scholar Arraigned for "Terrorism"', *Abuja Daily Trust Online*, 12 January 2009.

16. J Peter Pham, 'Boko Haram's Evolving Threat', *Africa Security Brief*, 20 April 2012, p. 1.

17. Abee Olufemi Salaam, 'Boko Haram Beyond Religious Fanaticism', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (Vol. 7, No. 2, October 2012), pp. 147–62; Freedom C Onuoha, 'The Islamist Challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram Crisis Explained', *African Security Review* (Vol. 19, No. 2, July 2010), pp. 54–67. There is some dispute about this date, with an International Crisis Group interview suggesting it took place on 31 December 2003. International Crisis Group, 'Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict', *Africa Report* (No. 168, December 2010), p. 36.

18. Onuoha, 'The Islamist Challenge'.

19. *Nigeria Newswire*, 'Nigeria: Timeline of Boko Haram activity', 7 October 2011.

20. International Crisis Group, 'Northern Nigeria', p. 36.

21 September 2004, members attacked Bama and Gwoza police stations in Borno State, killing several policemen and stealing arms and ammunition. And on 8 October 2004, a third incident was attributed to the group in which a cell ambushed a police patrol in Kala-Balge, near Lake Chad, killing three officers and capturing a further twelve who were later executed. These attacks played out in similar ways, with a Boko Haram assault on an official building resulting in a firefight and subsequent localised government crackdown. They also drew in new members, with university students in Borno and Yobe reportedly tearing up their certificates and joining the group for Qur'an lessons and preaching.<sup>21</sup>

It was not until mid-2007 and again in 2008 that the activities of Boko Haram received much subsequent attention from authorities. In 2007, one of Yusuf's disciples, Al-Amin, who was also the Kano State leader of the group, was arrested along with other group members after an attack on a police station in Kano. He was subsequently handed over to the police for prosecution.<sup>22</sup> Yusuf himself was first arrested in November 2008 but was freed by an Abuja High Court in January 2009.<sup>23</sup> Between February and April 2009, Yusuf's second in command, Kilakam, was arrested twice and repatriated to his country, Niger.<sup>24</sup>

By this point, Yusuf's group had become increasingly audacious and willing to confront authorities. The summer of 2009 saw the group carry out at least ten attacks on churches, police headquarters, schools, prisons, and other high-profile targets. These attacks, and the police response that followed, resulted in more than 300 deaths, including those of nearly 100 perpetrators. The deployment of the Nigerian Army resulted in a further 800 deaths. It was during this crackdown that Mohammed Yusuf was captured and executed by police, an incident that led to the emergence of the group as it is really known today.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Government Response**

In the lead-up to the operation in which Yusuf was captured and subsequently killed, Boko Haram had become increasingly bold. The government response was equally violent, with many people killed by both sides. After some forty Boko Haram members were killed by authorities, Yusuf responded to the press: 'I will never give up myself, not after thirty-seven of my followers are killed in Bauchi. Is it right to kill them, is it right to shoot human beings? To

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21. Abdulrafiu Lawal, 'Rage of the Puritans', *Tell*, 10 August 2009; cited in Onuoha, 'The Islamist Challenge', pp. 54–67.

22. Juliana Taiwo and Michael Olugbode, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram Leader Killed', *This Day*, 31 July 2009.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. Scott Menner and Erin Miller, 'FTO Designation: Boko Haram and Ansaru', Background Report, START, November 2013.

surrender myself means what they did is right. Therefore, we are ready to fight to die'.<sup>26</sup> The result was a spike in violence in Borno, Yobe and Kano States where around 150 people were killed.<sup>27</sup>

The local police response was inadequate. Some reports attribute this to the well-connected militants from rich families with links to the government.<sup>28</sup> In response, Nigeria's then-president Umaru Yar'Adua directed the chief of the defence staff, Air Chief Marshal Paul Dike, to assume responsibility.<sup>29</sup> The military attacked Boko Haram's headquarters in Maiduguri, with two days of heavy military bombardment and the storming of a mosque connected to the group.<sup>30</sup>

Initial reports indicated that Yusuf was killed during the attack, but subsequent news reports clarified that he had been captured. Quite soon after, however, Isa Azare, a spokesman for the police command in Maiduguri, declared to the international press: 'He has been killed. You can come and see his body at the state police command headquarters'.<sup>31</sup> These facts were confirmed soon afterwards when a video emerged first of a pliant Mohammed Yusuf answering authorities' questions, and then later his bullet-riddled body.

After the announcement of Mohammed Yusuf's death, the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) hinted that more troops would mount a show of force in all the major northern cities to demonstrate the government's resolve to end the crisis and to assure the public that they were there to protect all law-abiding citizens.<sup>32</sup> There was also a joint press briefing by the DHQ, Department of Police and the State Security Service (SSS)<sup>33</sup> on the situation that prevailed across the northern states, suggesting a coherent and transparent relationship between these branches of government. The president also advised governors across northern states to mobilise traditional and religious leaders to mount a campaign against Boko Haram, from within their respective institutions.<sup>34</sup>

Despite this coherent response, there were other, conflicting perspectives from within the government. Information Minister Dora Akunyili expressed

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26. Ahmad Salkida, 'Nigeria: Sect Leader Vows Revenge', *Daily Trust*, 27 July 2009.

27. David Smith, 'Nigerian "Taliban" Offensive Leaves 150 Dead', *Guardian*, 27 July 2009.

28. Joe Boyle, 'Nigeria's Taliban Enigma', *BBC News*, 31 July 2009.

29. Juliana Taiwo and Michael Olugbode, 'Nigeria News Update: Mohammed Yusuf Killed While in Custody', *Nigeria This Day*, 31 July 2009.

30. *Al Jazeera*, 'Nigeria's Boko Haram Chief "Killed"', 31 July, 2009.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Madu Onuorah, Muhammed Abubakar and Njadvara Musa, 'Sect Leader Reportedly Killed', *Guardian* [Nigeria], 31 July 2009.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*; Ibrahim Mshelizza, 'Gunbattles in Nigeria after Sect Leader Killed', *Reuters*, 31 July 2009.

concern about the death of Mohammed Yusuf and stated that the government would find out exactly what had happened.<sup>35</sup> She was also quoted as saying that Yusuf was 'in the mode of Osama bin Laden' and that his demise was 'positive' for Nigeria.<sup>36</sup> Days after the incident, Colonel Ben Ahanotu, the military official who had led the operation that captured Yusuf, complained that his calls for something to be done about the growing problem of Boko Haram had gone ignored.<sup>37</sup> President Yar'Adua ordered an investigation into the death, instructing the national security adviser to carry out a post-mortem examination.<sup>38</sup> The former military governor of Kaduna State, Abubakar Umar, condemned the extrajudicial killing and stated that 'nothing can excuse the appalling conduct of government in its attempt to eliminate them [Boko Haram]'.<sup>39</sup>

Foreign observers similarly condemned the extrajudicial nature of Yusuf's death.<sup>40</sup> This anger resonated amongst some in Nigeria – notably Nobel prize winner Wole Soyinka.<sup>41</sup> Rival politicians also used it as an opportunity for political point scoring by calling for investigations and criticising the harshness of the government's crackdown.<sup>42</sup> Yet citizens in the region were still clearly scarred by the brutality of the the group and the mid-2009 crackdown, and were broadly in accord with the government's behaviour, including the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf.<sup>43</sup>

Following Yusuf's death, the government continued its crackdown and sought out Boko Haram members that had fled. A group of nine members found hiding in Maiduguri was handed over to local police and reportedly found dead in a hospital car park hours later.<sup>44</sup> During this period, police were allegedly rounding up anyone going in and out of mosques in parts of Borno state and executing them.<sup>45</sup> An estimated 1,000 people were killed as

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35. Bilkisu Babangida, 'At the Scene', *BBC News*, 31 July 2009.

36. *BBC News*, 'Nigeria Row over Militant Killing', 31 July 2009.

37. *Associated Press*, 'Nigerian officials ignored warnings about violent sect', 2 August 2009.

38. Bashir Adigun, 'Mohammed Yusuf's Death to be Investigated: Nigeria', *World Post*, 5 August 2009.

39. Emma Ujah et al., 'Yar'Adua Orders Probe of Boko Haram Leaders' Killing', *Vanguard*, 4 August 2009.

40. Bilkisu Babangida, 'At the Scene', *BBC News*, 31 July 2009.

41. Kamal Tayo Oropo, Samson Ezea, Onyeduja Agbedi and Njadvara Musa, 'Boko Haram Threatens to Attack Lagos, Claims link to al Qaeda', *Guardian* [Nigeria], 9 August 2009.

42. Ujah et al., 'Yar'Adua Orders Probe of Boko Haram Leaders' Killing'.

43. US diplomatic cable, 'Nigeria: Borno State Residents Not Yet Recovered from Boko Haram Violence', 4 November 2009.

44. Njadvara Musa, 'Nine Suspected Boko Haram Sect Members Arrested, Killed in Maiduguri', *Guardian* [Nigeria], 2 August 2009.

45. US diplomatic cable, 'Nigeria: Post-Yusuf Reflections and Updates', 3 August 2009.

Nigerian government forces fought Boko Haram in Borno, Yobe, Kano and Bauchi States in July and August 2009.<sup>46</sup>

Yet Boko Haram's response to its leader's death was not particularly immediate. In the short term, the group was driven underground and its membership scattered. On 9 August 2009, a message delivered to various news outlets on behalf of the group claimed that Boko Haram is 'a version of the Al-Qa'ida, which we align with and respect. We support Osama bin Laden, we shall carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamised ... The killing of our leaders in a callous, wicked and malicious manner will not in any way deter us. We have started a jihad in Nigeria, which no force on earth can stop'. The message indicated that bombings would be carried out in Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt, which 'will not stop until Sharia [Law] is established and and Western civilisation wiped off from Nigeria'. Lastly, it claimed that Boko Haram does not mean 'Western education is a sin', but rather 'Western civilisation is forbidden'.<sup>47</sup>

Despite reports that Boko Haram sought to radicalise members by circulating tapes with this message and plans for avengement as well as martyrdom videos, the group seemed largely to slink away for much of the rest of 2009 and early 2010. Violence reappeared in early 2010 through low-level clashes with security forces and targeted assassinations of local police and traditional leaders.<sup>48</sup>

On 14 June 2010, shortly before the anniversary of Mohammed Yusuf's death, Al Jazeera interviewed Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud (Abdelmalek Droukdel), emir of AQIM. He stated that his group would provide Boko Haram with weapons, training and other support in order to expand its own reach into sub-Saharan Africa, not only to gain 'strategic depth' but also to 'defend Muslims in Nigeria and to stop the advance of a minority of crusaders'.<sup>49</sup> He stated: 'We are ready to train your sons to use weapons and to provide them with all the aid it is possible to give to enable them to defend our people in Nigeria ... and to repel the hostility of the crusader minority'.<sup>50</sup> Droukdel had reportedly been making contact with the Nigerian movement since February.<sup>51</sup>

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46. *Al Jazeera*, 'Video Shows Nigeria executions', 9 February 2010.

47. Oropo et al., 'Boko Haram Threatens to Attack Lagos'.

48. *Sahara Reporters*, 'Breaking News: Boko Haram Organizes Prison Break in Bauchi', 7 September 2010.

49. Pham, 'Boko Haram's Evolving Threat', p. 3.

50. Michel Moutot, 'French Agency Ponders Threat of Al-Qa'idah Overtures to Nigerian Islamists', *BBC Monitoring* (in French), 14 June 2010; excerpt from report by French news agency *AFP*.

51. *Al Jazeera*, 'Alliance between Al-Qa'idah and Nigeria's Taliban Causing Alarm', *BBC Monitoring* (in Arabic), 14 June 2010; excerpt from report by *Al Jazeera TV*, Arabic.

Subsequently, Abubakar Shekau, Mohammed Yusuf's deputy – initially thought to have been killed by the police in the 2009 uprisings – surfaced in a video reminiscent of Al-Qa'ida's. Shekau proclaimed himself as the new head of Boko Haram and promised vengeance: 'do not think the jihad is over. Rather, jihad has just begun'. Significantly, he threatened attacks not only against the Nigerian state, but also against outposts of Western culture.<sup>52</sup> In a published manifesto, Shekau linked the jihad being fought by Boko Haram with jihadist efforts globally, especially that of the 'Islamic soldiers of Allah in the state of Iraq'.<sup>53</sup> This focus on international jihad seemed to permeate throughout the content of the video. Shekau was brandishing an AK-47 and stated that the group was merely responding to how the government was treating it.<sup>54</sup> Unlike Yusuf's approach, Shekau's inaugural statement carried a new jihadist tone, and addressed the statement to the 'leaders of Al-Qa'ida and its affiliated groups in Algeria, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen'.<sup>55</sup>

Although there were no major incidents around the anniversary of Yusuf's death, in September 2010 a heavily armed group attacked a prison in Bauchi, freeing some 700 inmates, including 150 alleged members of Boko Haram.<sup>56</sup> This was followed by accelerating violence as the group seemed to return aggressively to its former ways, targeting random security officials in the streets, and bombing a police divisional headquarters in Gamboru, Old Maiduguri, on 11 September 2010.<sup>57</sup> This was the beginning of a new cycle of violence for the group that continues to this day.

### **A Shift in Approach?**

There is no denying that Mohammed Yusuf's death was a turning point for Boko Haram. The group went from being a relatively low-level irritant in northern Nigeria to being an organisation that was openly praised and supported by local Al-Qa'ida affiliates. Boko Haram was able to develop its own identity and approach, along with an ability to launch repeated targeted assassinations and large-scale prison breaks. The group's propensity for violence had already emerged in the years prior to Yusuf's death, and the spate of violence that followed it was indicative of a new high. Despite his removal, the government's harsh crackdown failed. The indiscriminate deaths of civilians at the hands of authorities arguably had the opposite effect of that

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52. Pham, 'Boko Haram's Evolving Threat', p. 4.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Habeeb I Pindiga and Isa Umar Gusau, 'Dead Boko Haram Leader Re-Emerges in New Video', *Daily Trust*, 30 June 2010.

55. Jacob Zenn, Atta Barkindo and Nicholas A Heras, 'The Ideological Evolution of Boko Haram in Nigeria', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 158, No. 4, 2013) p. 51.

56. David Smith, 'More than 700 Inmates Escape During Attack on Nigerian Prison,' *Guardian*, 8 September 2010.

57. Isa Umar Gusau, Sharafa Dauda, Yahya Ibrahim and Ahmed Mohammed, 'Maiduguri: Soldiers, Police in Place, Boko Haram "in Command"', *Daily Trust*, 15 October 2010.

which was intended, transforming the group into the perceived protector of the persecuted Muslim populations, mustering further support for the group.

Historically, the group has thrived on government persecution, which has been a key driver in its growth. Looking at Yusuf's early record, he openly and aggressively rejected any form of authority, including existing forms of Sharia Law that were implemented in northern Nigeria. As Yusuf's organisation grew and clashed with authorities, the government's reaction was almost uniformly hard line, dispersing camps, arresting members and killing others. This forced the group to scatter, re-group and ultimately strike back. What is significant about the group's reaction to Yusuf's death, however, was the pause before doing so. This may have been a result of the severity of the government crackdown in the wake of the 2009 violence. On the other hand, the core group may also have become scattered, with many key figures joining extremist groups elsewhere in Africa.

The 2010 return of Boko Haram pointed to a transformed group, dedicated in its outlook and intent on mass violence. The group replenished its ranks through a mass break-out of imprisoned militants, which was rapidly followed by an increasing tempo of violence. There was a dramatic shift in rhetoric from the initial message after Yusuf's death to Shekau's video in 2010. While the early statement made reference to Osama bin Laden, it focused far more on the more traditional anger at 'Western civilisation' and threatening the south of the country and government. In contrast, Shekau's video was clearly influenced by Al-Qa'ida's messages – in style of the video, the rhetoric deployed and the references to other Al-Qa'ida affiliates around the world.

The conclusion to be drawn is quite clear: Mohammed Yusuf's death and the government crackdowns that preceded and followed it did little to eradicate the group. Rather, they temporarily displaced it, strengthened its base and helped it develop closer connections to regional Al-Qa'ida affiliates, who were keen to provide support.



## II. Leadership Post-Yusuf

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Despite the renewed drive behind Boko Haram's re-emergence in 2010, its leadership structure and key members were unclear. It appeared that Abubakar Shekau had taken on the leadership of the organisation. While the government claimed that the video he released in 2010 was a fake, he has taken a visible guiding role in the organisation since then. As Yusuf's deputy, it was reported that Shekau believed Yusuf was too liberal. Shekau was known for being the most influential and feared member of Boko Haram after Yusuf, and for his uncompromising stance when it came to interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith. This made him popular amongst the younger members of Boko Haram, whilst some older members saw him as too extreme compared to Yusuf.<sup>1</sup> His video statements since Yusuf's death unambiguously indicate a hard-line and brutal perspective.

For example, in a video released in December 2013, Shekau confirmed that his men had been involved in an attack on a tank-battalion barracks and stated that they would have eaten their enemies, but 'Allah forbids cannibalism'. Instead, they would continue their struggle using mutilation and decapitation.<sup>2</sup> Another video featuring Shekau released in June 2013 showed the leader rubbish stories of a ceasefire that had emerged in the press, while also, in a separate section, showing the beheading of a man identified as an informant.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond Shekau's involvement, there is limited reliable information about other figures of authority in the group. The author of the statement issued immediately after Yusuf's death, Mallam Sanni Umaru, was reported to be the acting leader of the group. Yet there has been no further reporting from or about him.

One key figure of the group is Abu Qaqa, the known alias of Boko Haram's spokesman.<sup>4</sup> This pseudonym seems to have been transferred between various individuals who have assumed the role of spokesman.<sup>5</sup> Abu Qaqa I, who was arrested in January 2012, was known by a number of different names, including Abu Dardaa, Mohammed Shuaibu, Mohammed Bello, Abu Tiamiya and Abdulrahman Abdullahi.<sup>6</sup> In a confusing twist in early 2012, someone claiming to be Abu Qaqa, but not sounding like the previous claimant to the

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1. Jacob Zenn, 'Boko Haram's Radical Ideologue: An in Depth Look at Northern Nigeria's Abu Shekau', *Jamestown Foundation Special Report*, January 2012, p. 13.
  2. *Associated Press*, 'Nigerian Extremist: Allah Says We Must Decapitate,' 28 December 2013.
  3. *AFP*, 'Boko Haram Leader, Abubakar Shekau Beheads "Informant" in New Video,' 3 June 2013.
  4. *Al Jazeera*, 'Nigeria Arrests "Boko Haram Spokesperson"', 2 February 2012.
  5. *The Nation*, 'Boko Haram Spokesman, Abu Qaqa II, Feared Killed', 15 April 2012.
  6. *Ibid.*

name, stated that the member of Boko Haram who had been captured was Abu Dardaa, identified as the head of the ‘enlightenment committee’ of the organisation.<sup>7</sup> It was reported in the Nigerian press that in 2012, Abu Qaqa II, also known as Mohammed Anwal Kontagora, was killed under orders from Shekau, and that the group was recruiting his replacement, Abu Qaqa III.<sup>8</sup> Some sources have also claimed that it was in fact the Nigerian authorities and the Joint Task Force (JTF) that killed him alongside another ‘senior’ member of the group, Isah Abuja.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in October 2012, Shekau claimed in a YouTube video that Abu Qaqa was indeed alive – which one he was referring to, though, remains unclear.<sup>10</sup> Although there is much ambiguity surrounding the man himself, ‘Abu Qaqa’ has been the chief intermediary between Boko Haram and the media for some time, speaking to various journalists from Western and Nigerian media outlets and providing some semblance of Boko Haram’s activities and future plans.<sup>11</sup>

Abu Mohammed ibn Abdulaziz is a self-identified leader and another spokesman for the group. In an interview published in the *Guardian*, this alleged member of Boko Haram stated that he was speaking on behalf of Shekau, although this is highly suspect as he was speaking in English instead of Hausa, which is unusual.<sup>12</sup> He stated that the group was in the process of holding peace talks with the Nigerian government.<sup>13</sup> In January 2013, he issued further written statements, in English, to journalists declaring a ceasefire.<sup>14</sup> His position within the group, let alone as a figure of authority, has been questioned by local experts and journalists including Ahman Salkida: ‘I know enough about the leadership of the sect and its protocols to know that the so-called Abdulazeez is a grand fiction created by those who want to feather their personal nests’.<sup>15</sup> His involvement is thus as ambiguous

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7. AFP, ‘Nigeria’s Boko Haram Refutes Claim of Spokesman’s Arrest,’ 3 February 2012.
  8. Ike Abonyi and Tokunbo Adedaja, ‘Boko Haram Kills Spokesman Abu Qaqa II’, *This Day Live*, 15 April 2012.
  9. Reuters, ‘Nigerian Troops Kill Boko Haram Spokesman, Abu Qaqa; ranking member; Isa Abuja’, Beegeagle’s Blog, 18 September 2012, <<https://beegeagle.wordpress.com/2012/09/18/nigerian-troops-kill-boko-haram-spokesman-abul-qaqa-ranking-member-isa-abuja/>> ; Monica Mark, ‘Nigerian Police Kill Boko Haram Spokesman’, *Guardian*, 17 September 2012.
  10. Sahara Reporters, ‘Boko Haram claims “Abu Qaqa” is Still Alive; Sect Plans to Attack Wives of Nigerian Officials’, 1 October 2012.
  11. Monica Mark, ‘Boko Haram Vows to Fight until Nigeria Establishes Sharia Law’, *Guardian*, 27 January 2012.
  12. Monica Mark, ‘Boko Haram ready for peace talks with Nigeria, says alleged sect member’, *Guardian*, 1 November 2012.
  13. *Ibid.*
  14. Ibrahim Mshelizza, ‘Boko Haram commander declares Nigeria ceasefire’, Reuters, 28 January 2013; Sahara Reporters, ‘Self-proclaimed Boko Haram Commander Declares Ceasefire in Maiduguri-PM News: Nigeria’, 28 January 2013.
  15. Will Ross, ‘What Hostage Video Reveals about Nigeria’s Boko Haram’, *BBC News*, 27 February 2013.

as his comments; he may, however, represent the fractures that have come to exist within the group, and his ideology may in fact form a new strand of the cellular structure of the organisation.<sup>16</sup>

Abdulazeez Marwan is another individual who claims links to the organisation and to speak on its behalf to the press. Named by Dr Freedom Onuoha as representing another faction within Boko Haram, Marwan's credentials seem equally suspect. Apparently, shortly after the ceasefire announcement by Abdulaziz, another faction of Boko Haram led by Mujhadeen Marwan, who also claimed to be second in command to Abubakar Shekau, insisted that the government fulfil certain conditions before negotiation could begin. Shortly afterwards, yet another faction distributed leaflets carrying messages purportedly from its leader, Abubakar Shekau, who denied ever delegating responsibility for discussing ceasefire with the Borno State government.<sup>17</sup> It remains unclear whether Marwan is indeed a representative of the organisation.

Kabiru Sokoto, or Kabiru Abubakar Dikko, has been identified as a key operational figure who was arrested on 14 January 2012 in Abaji, a suburb of Abuja, only to escape the next day<sup>18</sup> and then be re-arrested on 10 February 2012 in Taraba.<sup>19</sup> His escape led to a scandal involving the local authorities, as it seemed he was freed when an angry group of youths surrounded the police unit that was holding him after his arrest.<sup>20</sup> When arrested, Sokoto confessed to being a senior member of the organisation and to having trained at least 500 'students' as part of his leadership.<sup>21</sup> He was accused of being the mastermind of the Christmas Day attack in 2011 on St Theresa's Church in Madalla, near Abuja, that killed thirty-seven and injured a further fifty-seven. Concurrent incidents took place in Jos, Gadaka and Damaturu, targeting security officials and churches, leading to some forty-one dead around the country. The Madalla attack was initially believed to be the work of a suicide bomber, but in court Sokoto dramatically confessed that in fact a car bomb had been left behind and was detonated remotely.<sup>22</sup> Sokoto is currently in Nigerian custody serving a life sentence for the Christmas bombings.<sup>23</sup>

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16. *Ibid.*

17. Freedom C Onuoha, 'Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan: Nigeria's evolving militant group', Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 7 April 2013.

18. *BBC News*, 'Nigeria Boko Haram bomb suspect escapes from police', 18 January 2012.

19. 'Boko Haram escapee Kabiru Sokoto re-arrested in Taraba', *Sahara Reporters*, 10 February 2011.

20. Ben Charles Obi, 'Report details Nigerian Islamic Sect's Internal Crisis, Operations, Scandals', *Insider Weekly*, 20 February 2012.

21. Ikechukwu Nnochiri, 'Catholic Church Bombing: Court Sentences "Kabiru Sokoto" to Life Imprisonment', *Vanguard*, 21 December 2013.

22. *Sun*, 'How We Did It, Kabiru Sokoto Tells Court', 14 May 2013.

23. Nnochiri, 'Catholic Church Bombing'.

With different figures claiming to speak on behalf of the group, or to hold key leadership roles, it appears as though Boko Haram is far from the cohesive group it seeks to present. Yusuf's rise to leadership was fraught with divisions and disagreements. It seems that Shekau's reign is no different, but the character of these divisions seems to have changed. In particular, since Yusuf's death, there seems to have been increased influence wielded by members trained by or hailing from other groups.

Abu Mohammed is one of these members. He is a mysterious leadership figure who has been held responsible for the kidnapping of British national Chris McManus and Italian Franco Lamolinara. Captured just prior to the raid during which the two men were killed, Abu Mohammed allegedly died in police custody of gunshot wounds sustained when he was captured.<sup>24</sup> According to Nigerian press reports, he was in charge of the northwest sector of Nigeria for Boko Haram, described as a 'key strategist' and considered close to Abubakar Shekau.<sup>25</sup> After his death, an anonymous informant told a reporter for *Agence France-Presse (AFP)* that Abu Mohammed had trained at a camp run by Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the Algerian desert, where, alongside Khalid Al-Barnawi, he is said to have forged an allegiance with Abubakar Shekau in which he and Al-Barnawi would conduct kidnap operations while Shekau provided security cover for the group.<sup>26</sup> One speculative report in the Nigerian press, apparently guided by intelligence leaks, suggested the information leading to Abu Mohammed's capture had come from Abubakar Shekau's faction, but the reliability of this information is unclear.<sup>27</sup>

Khalid Al-Barnawi is an equally mysterious figure, who is still believed to be at large and has been categorised a 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist' by the US State Department, which closely ties him to both Boko Haram and AQIM.<sup>28</sup> Allegedly senior enough to be a trainer at an AQIM training camp in the Algerian desert, Al-Barnawi was reportedly involved in kidnapping foreigners in Niger and Nigeria as part of the alliance formed with Abu Mohammed and Shekau. According to the same source speaking to *AFP*, Al-Barnawi reportedly carried out the kidnappings without the approval of his AQIM bosses and subsequently feuded with the spiritual adviser at the camp.<sup>29</sup> Other reports indicate that Al-Barnawi was close to former AQIM commander, and now independent operator, Mokhtar Belmokhtar and

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24. *BBC News*, 'Nigerian Kidnap "Mastermind" Dies in Police Custody', 14 March 2012.

25. Obi, 'Report Details Nigerian Islamic Sect's Internal Crisis, Operations, Scandals'.

26. *AFP*, 'Barnawi, Kamar: Qaeda-linked militants with Boko Haram ties', 21 June 2012.

27. *Leadership* [Abuja], 'Nigeria: Power tussle in Boko Haram led to sect leader's arrest', 26 March 2012.

28. US Department of State, 'Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram Commander Abubakar Shekau, Khalid Al-Barnawi and Abubakar Adam Kamar', press release, 21 June 2012.

29. *AFP*, 'Barnawi, Kamar'.

fought under his command in the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC).<sup>30</sup> Highlighting the difficulty in assessing the importance of a figure like Al-Barnawi, researcher Alex Thurston has pointed out that at first blush, Al-Barnawi's name sounds suspiciously like an adopted fake name: 'Khalid' is a relatively common first name and 'Al-Barnawi' could translate as 'of Borno [State]'.<sup>31</sup>

A third member, Abubakar Adam Kamar, was categorised as a 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist' at the same time as Khalid al-Barnawi. He was also identified as having connections to both Boko Haram and AQIM.<sup>32</sup> The day after the US announced his designation, a senior Nigerian security official claimed that Kamar had died months earlier, on 18 March 2012, in a shoot-out with military forces when he refused to surrender. Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Suleiman stated that Kamar was 'the main link with Al-Qa'ida and Al-Shabaab'.<sup>33</sup>

Various other leadership individuals have been publicly recognised, although in many cases this is subsequent to their arrest or death. For example, little information can be found in the public domain about alleged chief Ibn Saleh Ibrahim prior to his death in November 2012 at the hands of government forces in Maiduguri. Reportedly responsible for the death of war hero General Mohammed Shuwa in his Gwange residence, Ibrahim was killed during a confrontation with the army,<sup>34</sup> but other information about him is scarce, leaving limited reporting about his role in the group.

All of this ambiguity makes pre-emptively identifying key individuals beyond Shekau almost impossible based on public information. Nevertheless, the involvement of members trained by or coming from foreign jihadist groups and the competition over leadership roles within Boko Haram suggest that diverse interests are at play. Since Yusuf's death, the group has clearly moved in a different direction. This has no doubt alienated some members and contributed to fragmentation within the ranks. And finally, at greater scale, dissent within Boko Haram has become publicly apparent with the emergence of Ansaru in the aftermath of the series of bombings in Abuja in 2011.

30. Jacob Zenn, 'A Brief Look at Ansaru's Khalid Al-Barnawi – AQIM's Bridge into Northern Nigeria', *Militant Leadership Monitor* (Vol. 4, No. 3, March 2013) – Zenn cites *Agence Nouakchott d'Information* as his source.

31. Alex Thurston, 'Nigeria a Middle Course on Designating Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization', *Sahel Blog*, 21 June 2012.

32. US Department of State, 'Terrorist Designations'.

33. *Vanguard*, 'JTF Claims "Global Terrorist" Kamar Killed', 7 June, 2013.

34. Gianluca Mezzofiore, 'Nigeria Troops Kills Boko Haram Chief Ibn Saleh Ibrahim', *International Business Times*, 16 November 2012.



### III. Bombings in Abuja

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The fragmentation of Boko Haram has resulted in spikes of violence and new targets; the group is increasingly dangerous and unpredictable. The 26 August 2011 attack on the UN headquarters in Abuja came amid a spate of lethal attacks carried out since May 2011. The increasingly destructive nature of the group came to the fore on 6 June 2011, when Muslim cleric Ibrahim Birkuti who had criticised Boko Haram for killing dozens of security agents and politicians, was shot dead by a gunman on a motorbike.<sup>1</sup> Unlike its previous, more predictable targets – bars (where people were consuming prohibited alcohol), churches and government institutions – the killing of another Muslim, although not surprising, demonstrated the ruthless capacity of the group. Birkuti's death came as the group affirmed that it was also responsible for the death of the brother of the Shehu of Borno, a senior Muslim cleric and local hereditary ruler.<sup>2</sup>

On 16 June 2011, a threshold was crossed when a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) right next to the national police headquarters in Abuja.<sup>3</sup> This operation marked a huge operational leap for the group. While it proved largely ineffective – security measures meant that the vehicle was kept in a car park away from the targeted building – the attack nonetheless represented a significant tactical development that demonstrated Boko Haram's mastery of a completely new aspect of terrorist tradecraft. Employing a suicide VBIED was considerably more advanced than Boko Haram's usual tactics of throwing dynamite with a piece of time fuse at a police station or leaving a small improvised explosive device (IED) with a crude timer outside a church. The VBIED destroyed approximately forty vehicles in the vicinity.<sup>4</sup>

Because Inspector General Hafiz Ringim's convoy entered the police compound just ahead of the bomber, some reports concluded that he was the key target; others suggest that the intention was to sneak in as part of the convoy.<sup>5</sup> The targeting of Ringim could be seen as a response to his visit to Maiduguri the week prior, where he had promised to eradicate the group within months.<sup>6</sup> Days after the attack, a spokesman calling himself Abu Zayd called both local press and the *BBC* to confirm that Boko Haram was responsible for the attack that had been undertaken by Muhammad Manga, allegedly a businessman from Maiduguri who became Nigeria's first

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1. *BBC News*, 'Boko Haram Gunman Killed Nigerian Muslim Cleric Birkuti', 7 June 2011.
  2. *Ibid.*
  3. Joe Brock, 'Nigerian Islamist Sect Claims Bomb Attack: Paper', *Reuters*, 17 June 2011.
  4. *Ibid.*
  5. Kingsley Omonobi, 'Force headquarters bombing: Suicide bomber was a foreigner – interim report', *Vanguard*, 18 June 2011.
  6. *BBC News*, 'Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists "Bombed Abuja Police HQ"', 17 June 2011.

suicide bomber.<sup>7</sup> Abu Zayd also told a local publication that the vehicle bomb was one obtained from abroad and that the group had numerous others ready to deploy.<sup>8</sup>

The bombing marked an innovation for the group that has greatly concerned the government and international community. Shocked by the use of suicide attackers, the initial assumption of the government was that the bomber must be a foreigner. The revelation that he was a Nigerian citizen, however, highlighted that the Boko Haram insurgency was stepping up. The group did not rest, following up with a series of lower-level attacks. On 20 June 2011, a bank and police station in Katsina State were attacked.<sup>9</sup> On 25 August, the group launched a daylight robbery in Gombi, in Adamawa State, killing twelve civilians, and a number of policemen in a bomb blast at a station in the same area.<sup>10</sup>

The next day, on 26 August, the group crossed another threshold when Muhammad Abul Barra drove a car into the UN compound and rammed it into an exit gate after being diverted by a security guard into a parking garage. Adebayo Jelil, a security guard at the building, said that he saw a big, jeep-like vehicle drive through the exit gate of the building, toward the reception area before exploding. Three floors of the seven-storey structure were heavily damaged.<sup>11</sup> Twenty-three people died and a further 116 were injured, with all of the casualties except one – a Norwegian associate expert working for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – being Nigerian.<sup>12</sup> Spokesman Abu Qaqa described the bomber to the press as a mechanic from Maiduguri. In a subsequent martyrdom video, a voice seeming to be Shekau's described the UN as the 'forum of all the global evil' and praises Osama bin Laden. Barra himself added an unspecified threat to 'Obama and other infidels'.<sup>13</sup>

Coming after the suicide attack on the police headquarters, the incident was not a complete surprise, and UN officials subsequently affirmed that they had received elevated threat warnings that Boko Haram might target them

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7. *Sahara Reporters*, 'The Story of Nigeria's First Suicide Bomber', 26 June 2011; *BBC News*, 'Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists "Bombed Abuja Police HQ"', 17 June 2011.

8. *Sahara Reporters*, 'The Story of Nigeria's First Suicide Bomber'.

9. *BBC News*, 'Nigerian Bank and Police Station Attacked in Katsina', 21 June 2011.

10. *Sahara Reporters*, 'Updated: Boko Haram Kills 12, Robs Two Banks in Gombi, Adamawa State', 25 August 2011.

11. Sean Murray and Adam Nossiter, 'Suicide bomber attacks U.N. building in Abuja', *New York Times*, 26 August 2011.

12. *UN News Centre*, 'UN Unveils Full List of Staff Killed in Recent Deadly Attack in Abuja, Nigeria', 14 September 2011.

13. *This Day*, 'Video of Boko Haram's United Nations suicide bomber Mohammed Abul Barra', 22 September 2011.

in the run-up to the incident.<sup>14</sup> It was attributed to leader Mamman Nur, who was said to have recently returned from a trip to Somalia, indicating a connection with Al-Shabaab.<sup>15</sup> Although little is known about Nur, he has been identified as Boko Haram's third in command during the 2009 uprising.<sup>16</sup> In response to the crackdown in 2009, he is thought to have fled first to Chad and then to Somalia. Nur's international experience created tension with Shekau, as there are reports that he was seen to be a better-trained leader.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Nur reportedly had a longstanding connection to Yusuf and had actually introduced Shekau to him.<sup>18</sup>

The attack on the UN office was followed by a continued campaign by Boko Haram, including another substantial attack on a police station in Bauchi that resulted in the release of prisoners as well as the deaths of at least four officers.<sup>19</sup> Mohammed Yusuf's brother-in-law Babakura Fugu was also assassinated in a high-profile attack, allegedly because he agreed to meet with former President Olusegun Obasanjo as part of an attempt to negotiate peace with the group.<sup>20</sup> The killing of Fugu showed that the group remained willing to kill both enemies and friends alike. The group also threatened authorities in Katsina State should they fail to repeal a new law on preaching that would require religious schools, preachers and mosques to obtain a licence.<sup>21</sup> Universities, particularly in the South, were also threatened with a bombing campaign during this period.<sup>22</sup>

Then-President Goodluck Jonathan, who had replaced Yar'adua in 2010, adopted a similarly militant stance to his predecessor and led the government response to the ongoing campaign in a dramatic crackdown. He quietly sacked his top counter-terrorism adviser, Ambassador Zakari Ibrahim, and replaced him with a senior military official, Major General Sarkin Yakin Bellow.<sup>23</sup> The US embassy in Abuja, the national airport and other prominent diplomatic sites in the city went into lockdown.<sup>24</sup> In Kano, hundreds of foreign nationals, primarily from Somalia, Chad, Mali, Sudan, Niger and Senegal, were rapidly

14. Murray and Nossiter, 'Suicide bomber attacks U.N. building in Abuja'.

15. Uduma Kalu, 'How Nur and Shekau Run Boko Haram', *Vanguard*, 3 September 2011.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. Stephen Ubanna, 'Is Shekau dead?', *Source*, 26 August 2013.

19. *AFP*, 'Gunmen Bomb Nigeria Police Post, Kill Police, Free Inmates', 12 September 2011.

20. *Guardian* [Nigeria], 'Nigerian Islamic Sect Gunman Reportedly Kills Member for Meeting Ex-president', 17 September 2011.

21. Hamza Idris, 'Nigerian Islamic Sect Asks Katsina State to Repeal New Law on Preaching', *Daily Trust*, 19 September 2011.

22. Wola Adeyemo, 'How to Tackle Boko Haram', *Tell*, 19 September 2011.

23. Ahamefula Ogbu and Ibrahim Shuaibu, 'Jonathan Fires Adviser on Counterterrorism; General Bello Takes Over; Immigration Deports Somalis', *This Day*, 5 September 2011.

24. Olawale Rasheed, Shola Adekola and Soji Ajibola, 'Security Beef up in Lagos, Abuja, Airports', *Nigerian Tribune*, 27 August 2011.

deported for not having their papers in order, although the deportations raised suspicions that this was in response to the belief that the suicide bombers were foreigners.<sup>25</sup> The operation was considered the country's largest peacetime military deployment with soldiers were deployed to address a situation the police had failed to contain. One officer was quoted in the press as saying 'there are literally no soldiers in the barracks'.<sup>26</sup>

Police across the country also intensified their security efforts as fear spread in the wake of the violence. In Warri, an oil-rich region in the Delta, 500 police were deployed in response to rumours that truckloads of Boko Haram members were on their way.<sup>27</sup> In other southern regions, former ex-militant groups and tribal leaders met, promising to respond with 'fire' if the northern threat was to reach their part of the country. Some went so far as to talk about secession.<sup>28</sup> In a more measured report, security sources across the Delta region confirmed that they were enhancing security in response to the elevated threat. However, it was not immediately certain whether the blame lay with Boko Haram or with more traditional insurgent-terrorist groups based in southern Nigeria.<sup>29</sup>

### **An Escalation of Violence**

The pair of suicide bombings in the summer of 2011 marked a new shift for Boko Haram. While they came during a year that was marked by repeated large-scale incidents, the use of suicide bombers in matching vehicles and with similar devices against symbolic targets in Abuja showed a new level of ability. In the immediate aftermath, concern focused on whether this marked a shift in the group's targeting and decision-making processes to focus more on international targets, as suggested by rhetoric in the martyrdom video and other statements released by the group in its wake. Although subsequent targets were lower profile, the tempo of the group's violence seemed to pick up as the year drew to a close, with over 100 killed in Damaturu (the capital of Yobe) and in gun battles and bomb blasts, including those caused by suicide bombers.<sup>30</sup> Just over a month later, on Christmas Eve, violence broke out in Abuja and sixty-eight were killed in clashes between the government and the group. Reports differed on who bore the brunt of these clashes; authorities claimed that most of the casualties were Boko Haram members,

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25. Ogbu and Shuaibu, 'Jonathan Fires Adviser on Counterterrorism'.

26. Andrew Agbese et al., 'Military in Biggest Peacetime Deployment: Investigation', *Daily Trust*, 20 September 2011.

27. Monday Osayande, 'Boko Haram threat; Delta Deploys 500 Police to Warri', *Daily Trust*, 20 September 2011.

28. Paul Orude, 'Niger Delta Groups, Ex-militants Meet; Consider Retaliation and Secession', *Daily Sun*, 31 August 2011.

29. Chika Amanza-Nwachuku and Michael Olugbode, 'FG Tightens Security at Oil Export Terminals', *This Day*, 14 September 2011.

30. *Al Jazeera*, 'Nigeria Group Threatens More Deadly Attacks,' 6 November 2011.

while local hospital workers claimed they were civilians.<sup>31</sup> On Christmas Day itself, a bomb left at St Theresa's Church in Madalla, just outside Abuja, killed some thirty-seven worshippers attending Christmas Mass.<sup>32</sup>

Boko Haram has continued its violence toward local targets and the group has proven willing to confront government forces in major clashes in urban centers. The logic of the deployment of the suicide bombers in Abuja and the targeting of the UN headquarters has to be viewed through the group's gradual escalation of violence. The bombings raised questions about Boko Haram's connection with Al-Shabaab. Statements by the group pointed to a foreign connection when claiming the attacks. Mamman Nur, who was blamed for the UN attack, had recently returned from Somalia, suggesting that the tactic was learned from Al-Shabaab. The Somali group has been known to deploy suicide bombers and has more recently targeted the UN, although reports indicate that its targeting of the UN in Mogadishu was something conducted under the direction of elements connected to Al-Qa'ida's East African cell.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the Al-Qa'ida affiliate to the north, AQIM, launched a bombing campaign across Algeria in 2007, including bombing the UN headquarters in Algiers. When subsequently claiming the attack, AQIM seemed to presage Shekau's later comments when it called the UN an 'international infidels' den'.<sup>34</sup>

Given the one-off nature of the strike, the UN attack does not appear to be an effort to join Al-Qa'ida's international effort officially. Rather it might be seen in the light of Boko Haram's growing desire to draw attention to itself and its cause. The attacks later in 2011 and the following year, when it launched around twenty suicide attacks on a variety of religious (both Christian and Muslim), military and other government targets,<sup>35</sup> all demonstrate the rapid adoption of suicide-bombing tactics, which, although initial training and inspiration may have been acquired outside Nigeria's borders, the group has accepted as a useful tool in its fight against Nigerian authorities. However, these indiscriminate attacks created dissent that contributed to further fragmentation and the emergence of a new group.

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31. *Reuters*, 'Nigeria Sect Clashes Kill at Least 68 – Officials', 24 December 2011.

32. *Reuters*, 'Nigeria Church Bomb Death Toll Rises to 37, Wounded 57', 30 December 2011.

33. Colum Lynch, 'We Knew They Were Coming', *Foreign Policy*, 7 October 2013.

34. *BBC News*, 'Algeries Bomb Shatters UN Office', 12 December 2007.

35. Bill Roggio, 'Boko Haram Suicide Bombs Kill 11 at Nigerian Military Church', *Long War Journal*, 25 November 2012.



## IV. The Emergence of Ansaru

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Ansaru first formally reared its head as an organisation in January 2012 when flyers were distributed around Kano. The full name of the organisation is 'Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan', which translates as 'Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa'. The group expressed displeasure at Boko Haram's style of operations, which it condemned as inhuman and damaging to Muslims, in particular the attacks against Muslims and innocent non-Muslims. It vowed to 'restore the dignity of Muslims in black Africa' and called upon the heritage of Usmandan Fodio, founder of the Sokoto Caliphate in West Africa in 1809.<sup>1</sup> This messaging was re-affirmed in June 2014 when a video emerged of Abu Usmatul Al-Ansari, who claimed to be the leader of the group. The video stated that Ansaru rejected Boko Haram's killing of innocent Muslims and 'innocent security operatives' and also stated that it sees its community as one spanning Africa, rather than being confined to northern Nigeria.<sup>2</sup>

An aspect of Ansaru that is repeatedly highlighted is its Fulani composition, whereas Boko Haram is a predominantly Kanuri entity. Fulani and Kanuri are two ethnic groups resident in northern Nigeria and across a swathe of West Africa. Most analysis concludes that the Kanuri make up the overwhelming majority of Boko Haram,<sup>3</sup> implying that Ansaru was born out of a rejection of this Kanuri leadership by a cell within the organisation. This is supported by elements within Boko Haram. In an interview conducted after his capture by the SSS, Abu Qaqa spoke of internal divisions along ethnic lines, complaining how suicide bombers tended to be chosen, rather than voluntary participants in attacks, and they were often non-Kanuri.<sup>4</sup> He also highlighted the fact that the non-Kanuris in the organisation felt specifically targeted by intelligence agencies, aided by Kanuris.<sup>5</sup> These tensions created a strong motivation for the Ansaru offshoot.

After its initial announcement, Ansaru moved into action. Between 26 November 2012 and 17 February 2013, Ansaru claimed responsibility for four attacks.<sup>6</sup> The first was on 26 November 2012, when its members stormed the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) detention centre in Abuja,

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1. *Sahara Reporters*, 'Rift in Boko Haram 'Ansaru' Splinter Group Emerges, Calls BH Inhuman to Muslims', 31 January 2012.
  2. LWJ Staff, 'New Islamist Group Emerges in Nigeria, Vows to Defend All Muslims in Africa', *Long War Journal*, 4 June 2012.
  3. James Forest, *Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Hara in Nigeria*, JSOU Report 12-5, May 2012.
  4. Yusuf Alli, 'Suspect Gives SSS Boko Haram Operations Clues', *Nation*, 7 February 2012.
  5. Yusuf Alli, 'How Bombers are Chosen by Boko Haram Suspect', *Nation*, 9 February 2012.
  6. Freedom C Onuoha, 'Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan: Nigeria's Evolving Militant Group', Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 7 April 2013.

freeing members and other detainees.<sup>7</sup> Shortly afterwards, the group claimed responsibility for the attack in an e-mail message, stating that 'Allah SWT [*Subhabahuwata'ala*, or 'praise be to god'] has obligated us to help those that are oppressed, especially those oppressions that are taking place in the security cells, prisons and other detention centres'.<sup>8</sup> Apparently demonstrating some level of knowledge of the group, Abubakar Shekau praised the attack soon afterwards in a video.<sup>9</sup>

The next claimed attack was the kidnapping of Francis Collomp, a French engineer working for a power company in Vergnet, Katsina. Captured in December 2012, Collomp was able to escape almost a year later from his captors as they moved him around the country.<sup>10</sup> In videos, the group claimed to be holding Collomp as punishment for France's invasion of Mali and for its public ban of the burqa. The first claim is tenuous and appears to be *post facto*, given France only made the announcement to launch Operation *Serval* in Mali on 11 January 2013, while UN Security Council Resolution 2085 permitting intervention was approved on 20 December, the day after Collomp was kidnapped. On 19 January 2013, Ansaru reaffirmed its anger against the operation when it claimed responsibility for an attack on a convoy of Nigerian troops in Kogi State, which was en route to Mali to participate in combat operations.<sup>11</sup>

Another major kidnapping operation took place a month later, when it captured a group of seven expatriate workers employed by Lebanese road construction company Setraco. Ansaru claimed responsibility through a Twitter message, claiming the men were being held for 'transgressions' by European nations in Mali and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> It further stated that any intervention by European or Nigerian authorities not in accordance with its demands would have the same result 'as it was in the previous attempt'.<sup>13</sup> This is apparently a direct reference to the incident involving Franco Lamolinara and Chris McManus, who were killed just before British and Nigerian special forces, undertaking a joint mission, reached them.

On 9 March 2013, Ansaru released a communiqué and video showing it had killed the seven hostages.<sup>14</sup> The communiqué stated that the attempts

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7. Ryan Cummings, 'Nigeria: What Do We Know About Ansaru?', *Think Africa Press*, 22 January 2014.
  8. Onuoha, 'Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan'.
  9. *Shamikh1*, 'Glad Tidings, O Soldiers of Allah', November 29, 2012, <<http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=188204>>.
  10. *BBC News*, 'Hostage Francis Collomp describes escape in Nigeria', 28 November 2013.
  11. Cummings, 'Nigeria: What do we know about Ansaru?'.
  12. Farouk Chothia, 'Profile: Who are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?', *BBC News*, 11 March 2013.
  13. Onuoha, 'Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan'.
  14. *Vanguard*, 'Ansaru Islamists Claim to Kill 7 Foreign Hostages', 10 March 2013.

by the British and Nigerian governments to rescue the hostages forced the group to carry out the execution.<sup>15</sup> According to Ansaru, British warplanes were reportedly seen over the northern Nigerian city of Bauchi, something the group members interpreted as evidence of an operation being mounted against them.<sup>16</sup>

This incident suggests a link with the group's emergence and the kidnapping of European engineers Chris McManus and Franco Lamolinara on 12 May 2011 in Birnin Kebbi in northwest Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> This was claimed by a group calling itself 'Al-Qa'ida in the lands beyond the Sahel', and which never re-emerged again. As Ansaru was distributing flyers another kidnapping took place – of a German engineer, Edgar Fritz Raupach, who was taken in Kano. AQIM issued statements through *Agence Nouakchott d'Information (ANI)* demanding the release of Filiz Gelowicz, the wife of an incarcerated German terrorist who had been connected to the Islamic Jihad Union in Pakistan. Gelowicz was released early, but Raupach was executed by his captors when an attempt was made to rescue him in May 2012.<sup>18</sup> Again, in messaging directed at the German government, the group referenced the 'recent lessons taught to the UK [Special Boat Service] by the mujahedeen'.<sup>19</sup> The similarities between these kidnappings suggest links between Ansaru and AQIM.

The connection to AQIM is further strengthened through analysis of the handling of certain elements of the McManus and Lamolinara kidnapping. First, the second of the videos released to the public by the group came through *ANI*, a regional news outlet that AQIM has traditionally used to release its messages. Second, the individual identified by *ANI* as the interlocutor offered by the group to negotiate the release has previously been connected to similar negotiations on behalf of AQIM.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Khalid Al-Barnawi was identified as being connected to the incident by both *ANI's* source and another individual telling *AFP* that Al-Barnawi and his close associate Abu Mohammed were involved in the kidnapping of the Briton and Italian.<sup>21</sup>

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15. *Ibid.*

16. *Associated Press*, 'Extremist Group in Nigeria Says It Killed Foreign Hostages', 9 March 2013.

17. Aminu Abubakar, 'Briton, Italian Kidnapped in Northwestern Nigeria', *AFP*, 13 May 2011.

18. Jon Gambrell, 'Al Qaeda Blames Germany for Nigeria Hostage Death', *Associated Press*, 12 June 2012.

19. Jacob Zenn, 'Boko Haram's International Connections', Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, 14 January 2013.

20. *Agence Nouakchott d'Information*, 'Exclusif...Mort des Deux Otages Occidentaux Tués au Nigeria: Une Source d'AQM', 10 March 2012.

21. *AFP*, 'Barnawi, Kamar: Qaeda-Linked Militants with Boko Haram Ties', 21 June 2012.

### **The Fracturing of Boko Haram?**

Much has been made of the emergence of Ansaru as a potential competitor to Boko Haram that could ultimately undermine it. The reality, however, is far more complex. Ansaru and Boko Haram do seem to have a relationship that appears tense at times. For example, on 15 January 2014, a message appeared from Abu Usama Al-Ansari criticising Boko Haram for claiming responsibility for recent massacres of civilians in Nigeria.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the two have publicly supported each other, such as Abubakar Shekau's praise of Ansaru's assault on the SARS unit in November 2012. Ansaru's leader, Abu Ja'afar, in a message published in the *Desert Herald*, also laid out the similarities between the two groups in terms of mission and ideology, and further notes that Ansaru complements Boko Haram since the ultimate aim is to create an Islamic state and to eliminate all enemies of Islam.<sup>23</sup>

A deeper analysis reveals key differences in ideology, however. Ansaru's stated goal is the foundation of a transnational Islamic emirate and thus it disapproves of the killing of Muslims, implying that Boko Haram is seeking instead to establish a specifically Nigerian entity and is less discriminating in its slaughter. This message certainly resonates with the nature of some of Boko Haram's massacres. The difference might also be in part the product of the closer AQIM-Ansaru connection. In documents apparently authored by senior figures in AQIM, found by journalists following the French-led Operation *Serval* in Mali, the group highlights the importance of winning the support of local populations and of not targeting Muslims.

This distinguishing ideological aspect is something that is strengthened by the supposed Kanuri-Fulani split between the two groups. While it seems clear that Boko Haram was at genesis a Kanuri entity – as both Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau are Kanuri – the lack of clear public knowledge about who is actually in Ansaru versus Boko Haram makes it difficult to conclude whether the split is as clean as it appears. Abu Qaqa's interview with the SSS seems to suggest a tension within the organisation. Regional tensions between Fulani tribesmen and Kanuri regularly escalate into violence, highlighting a longstanding tension between the two ethnicities that is likely to further express itself within Boko Haram.

However, Ansaru seems equally willing to provide support for Boko Haram at times. The kidnapping of the French priest Georges Vandenbeusch in

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22. *Jihadist News*, 'Ansar al-Muslimeen Leader Criticizes Boko Haram, Greets al-Qaeda Officials in Eid al-Adha Speech', 15 January 2014.

23. *Desert Herald*, 'Security Officials and Christians Are Enemies of Islam and Muslims, We Will Target and Kill Them – Says Spokesman of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladi Sudan, Abu Ja'afar', 5 June 2012.

November 2013 was allegedly carried out by a joint Boko Haram-Ansaru cell.<sup>24</sup> This may be a repetition of an earlier incident in Cameroon involving the capture of the French Moulin-Fournier family of seven, with conflicting reports suggesting that they may have been taken by either Ansaru or Boko Haram. The style of the incident was more reminiscent of Ansaru, though its resolution – allegedly through payment and the claim of responsibility by Abubakar Shekau – may indicate a closer connection to Boko Haram.<sup>25</sup>

The picture is similarly fluid and confusing when looking at the relationship between AQIM and Ansaru (or even Boko Haram) in this situation. There was some question about whether the incident involving the kidnapping of German engineer Edgar Fritz Raupach was conducted by AQIM, or by elements that might also be close to Ansaru. This picture is further muddled by claims that Khalid Al-Barnawi, a key member of Boko Haram, was involved in an earlier kidnapping in Niamey of two Frenchmen.<sup>26</sup> In this incident in January 2011, kidnappers, who later admitted to being AQIM, burst into a restaurant in Niamey, Niger, and captured Antoine de Léocour and Vincent Delory, who were working in the city. Both men were executed almost two weeks later as a rescue attempt was underway.<sup>27</sup> It was later revealed that a Boko Haram scout may have been involved in scoping the target and that the operation was conducted by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an individual previously linked to AQIM's Al-Barnawi.<sup>28</sup>

The way this operation played out helps lay out a clear spectrum of operations that tie Ansaru first to AQIM, and then to Boko Haram. The key analytical question, however, is what pushes the groups in one direction versus another and what differentiates the response in each situation. Why did the incident with the Moulin-Fournier family play out peaceably, while most of the other efforts ended with the deaths of hostages, and how are Ansaru and Boko Haram now able to co-operate on operations while at the same time publicly scolding each other?

First, Boko Haram is likely in need of funds and sees the kidnapping of Westerners as a potentially lucrative enterprise. Second, unlike Ansaru with its globalist agenda and rhetoric, Boko Haram likely wants to attract less, rather than more, international attention. Abubakar Shekau's pronouncements against the West and pledges of fealty to Al-Qa'ida have not thus far

24. Clovis Casali, 'Boko Haram "Holding" Kidnapped French Priest', *France24*, 16 November 2013.

25. Konye Obaji Ori, 'Nigeria: Terrorists Seek French Hostage Swap', *Africa Report*, 19 March 2013; Angélique Chrisafis, 'French Family Seized in Cameroon by Suspected Boko Haram Islamists Freed', *Guardian*, 19 April 2013.

26. *AFP*, 'Barnawi, Kambar'.

27. *BBC News*, 'Al Qaeda Claims Responsibility for Niger Kidnappings', 13 January 2011.

28. Jacob Zenn, 'Cooperation or Competition: Boko Haram and Ansaru after the Mali Intervention', 27 March 2013.

translated into many operations clearly targeting the West in a lethal fashion. The exception is the 2011 attack on the UN headquarters in Abuja, but this incident seems not to have presaged a shift towards targeting the West. Finally, there is a more fundamental question of resources and capacity.

Boko Haram has repeatedly proven itself to have a very deep bench of individuals willing to sign up to its cause – in part driven by heavy-handed government responses that tend to victimise populations rather than guilty individuals. Establishing itself as the protector of these communities and as a fighter against the oppressive authorities, Boko Haram is able to recruit from a broad base of willing individuals, a wellspring of support that has sustained the group from Mohammed Yusuf's time. This is reflected in the group's actions that predominantly occur within Nigerian borders. In contrast, Ansaru has yet to establish itself in a similar fashion, has a much smaller cadre of individuals within its ranks and has so far largely become known for incidents with a foreign connection – be this by targeting foreign nationals or targeting Nigerian forces heading to foreign battlefields. In terms of local attacks, Ansaru has been quite restrained in its efforts, something that has likely decreased its local popularity.<sup>29</sup>

The reality of the Boko Haram-Ansaru relationship is therefore somewhat fluid. The two groups clearly have ideological differences that they express to each other, but they are fundamentally fellow travellers. It is even possible that the reported involvement of Al-Barnawi in the Niamey kidnapping reflected a division of labour between two factions of the same organisation.<sup>30</sup> Given Ansaru's relative silence of late, it is difficult to know whether the group has now been largely subsumed by its bigger partner or whether it is merely biding its time. For Boko Haram, however, it is clear that the struggle continues and the organisation is going to maintain its regular digest of attacks against official and religious sites around the country.

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29. Jacob Zenn, 'Ansaru: Who Are They and Where Are They From?', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 July 2013.

30. *AFP*, 'Barnawi, Kamar'.

## V. A Cohesive Actor?

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Boko Haram and Ansaru remain relatively opaque entities. The original organisation, formed from a coherent community made up of Mohammed Yusuf's followers, has now devolved into a more nebulous creation with unclear lines of contact and direction. The recent emergence of Ansaru highlights a combination of ideological differences and likely personality disputes within the group. Unfortunately, there is a lack of reliable information and sources about both Boko Haram and Ansaru. This dearth spans everything from specific events to information about leadership figures within the organisation(s). This is important as it likely colours official analysis and therefore has substantial impact on constructing appropriate responses.

The rhetorical and conceptual root of both Boko Haram and Ansaru are the historical, rebellious caliphates of Usman dan Fodio and the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s. Both events were uprisings against the perceived corrupt local order as well as the imposition of Western habits and non-Muslim traditions from the south of the country. This sense of inequality and anger continues to this day through central-government neglect and a desperate economic situation in the north of the country. The north-south divide is, however, emblematic of a larger rebellion against the state and local authorities that Boko Haram and Ansaru represent, due to the perceived corruption among leadership in both north and south. This leads to the targeting of historical Muslim leaders of the north and is captured in rhetoric that rejects almost all forms of current leadership or any compromise. This division lies at the heart of Boko Haram's ability to thrive and underlies the narrative that Ansaru uses to talk about creating a pan-African caliphate that will protect Muslims across Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria.

In addition to this divide, government action has played a key role in aiding Boko Haram's growth. This has two expressions: direct support by certain local authority figures and heavy-handed government action leading to a violent response, which feeds the underlying local narrative that drives people to join the group. Throughout the organisation's history, right through to Ansaru, it is clear that Nigerian authorities' actions have helped feed the pool of disaffection from which both groups find recruits. Military reactions that kill indiscriminately and state imprisonment likely to end in death illustrate a brutal government response that is radicalising the population. Beyond this, the government has proven itself unable to deal with fundamental inequalities in Nigerian society. Similarly, its politicking has trumped effective responses to violence, all of which have helped Boko Haram to develop.

Shekau's leadership of Boko Haram marks a notable change, most clearly expressed in the group's rhetoric. The statement just after Yusuf's death

included only one mention of international jihadist terrorism, instead focusing on domestic issues. In contrast, when Shekau appeared again in 2010, his rhetoric was full of references to external groups and his style strongly reflected what is traditionally considered Al-Qa'ida's approach. This implied that Shekau's group would be more international in its outlook, but this proved not to be the case for Boko Haram as a whole; rather, Ansaru translated this rhetoric into practice. The progressive shift toward brutality on the part of Boko Haram overall, however, seems to correlate with Shekau's ascent within the organisation, highlighting his centrality to the group's increasing violence.

The connection to AQIM and other Sahelian groups is strong, although it remains uncertain the degree to which there is any sort of formal command and control among them. They clearly see each other as ideological fellows, and the Sahelian groups have repeatedly referred to providing assistance to the Nigerian groups. However, at this point it seems as though AQIM or its affiliates may have been instrumental in providing seed support for either Boko Haram or Ansaru, helping to push or inspire the organisations towards suicide bombings and other tactics. Today, however, it remains unclear the degree to which this link persists.

The decision to use suicide bombers in Abuja in 2011 against the police headquarters and the UN building started a trend. The initial idea may have come from outside, but once adopted, the group seems to have wholeheartedly embraced the tactic, conducting twenty such attacks in 2012. The number declined in 2013, but suicide bombing has nonetheless remained an acknowledged weapon in the Boko Haram arsenal. The targeting of an international organisation in the same manner, however, was not repeated. The only international targets that have since been hit are individuals kidnapped by Ansaru.

Ansaru is best understood as an evolution from core Boko Haram practices to a closer alignment with AQIM and other jihadist groups in the region. Rather than any clear delineating barrier, there is a grey area between the groups and they occasionally operate together to varying degrees, depending on the operation and intent, despite at the same time maintaining quite strong and divergent ideological perspectives. The groups see each other as companions in a common effort, though they do not always agree on the method to use. This is further accentuated by the fact that it is not clear what Ansaru has been doing recently, suggesting either that the smaller organisation has been subsumed once again into the larger Boko Haram and has not been able to regroup or that it is simply too small to absorb strikes against it in the same way. It is also possible that there might be internal political or personality dynamics between the two organisations that are not reported in the public domain underlying the silence. Nevertheless, it is clear

that while Ansaru might act as a separate entity at times, this division is a relatively flexible one.

Nonetheless, Ansaru does differ from Boko Haram in key ways. It appears to have stronger linkages to AQIM and a preference for international targets. In this sense, Ansaru is fulfilling the international rhetoric deployed by Shekau. It seems likely that Ansaru's approach to kidnap and murder is something drawn from experience and interaction with AQIM and other jihadist groups. In contrast to Boko Haram, Ansaru rejects violence against Muslims, a philosophy also linked to AQIM, which tries not to alienate the populations it invades. As Shekau is considered an authoritative leader, the growth of Ansaru may be a reflection of anger with his leadership style.

The public face of both Boko Haram and Ansaru is sustained through fairly conventional means, rather than the social media feeds maintained by other Sunni jihadist groups. They release videos through traditional jihadist fora, and through communications (often via e-mail or telephone) to editors of publications. They have been known to distribute flyers and create martyrdom videos and other propaganda that is then circulated using mobile telephones – low-tech approaches that probably reflect the reality of Internet penetration and electricity availability in northern Nigeria. Possibly the group's greatest social-media success – the televised murder of its leader Mohammed Yusuf – was not of its own doing. His public execution at the hands of local police acted as a clear beacon for the group, highlighting its struggle against the Nigerian government and the oppression and cruelty that it suffered in return.



## Conclusion

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The violence of Boko Haram and Ansaru has repeatedly prompted an almost panicked response in which the only option appears to be the deployment of troops. This approach was heightened during the pre-election period, as the incumbent government seemed driven by a need to appear in control. Yet when every military success story is met with further violence, it is clear the current strategy is not working. The involvement of the AU and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) is beginning to lend a strategic approach to the proposed engagement, but it remains overwhelmingly military in nature. An effective response, one not exclusively reactive and military-dependent, requires deeper understanding of the group than is currently being exhibited. Uninformed approaches in the past have often had the opposite effect of that intended, increasing rather than undermining public support for Boko Haram. For example, the violence and civilian deaths that accompanied the Nigerian offensive against Mohammed Yusuf in 2009 transformed Boko Haram into the perceived protector of persecuted Muslims.

The four elements examined in this paper reveal the evolution of Boko Haram and the rise of its internal factions and breakaway groups, as well as the role of regional allies and government action in sustaining the group and its tactics. The analysis of this history raises key areas integral to any considerations of intervention and also points to the motives and potential paths the group may take.

Since its emergence, Boko Haram has pursued two different and at times contradictory strategies. The group has provided an ideological grounding and social services not made available by the state. It has also engaged in a campaign of terror that has undoubtedly alienated potential supporters and allies. The simultaneous pursuit of these strategies has been counterproductive – on the one hand bringing people into the group, while on the other driving them away in fear. Attempts to capture territory in northeastern Nigeria in late 2014 included a renewed focus on supporting communities. Residents were told to stay and become part of the new Islamic caliphate, but Boko Haram's violent reputation encouraged many to flee. Ansaru seems to understand this tension and addresses it by refusing to attack Muslims.

The government has only engaged with the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, ignoring the role the group plays in providing services for northern populations. This neglects a potential strategy to cut off the support base of the group. Instead, the government has preferred a military response that further endangers civilians, including those who may turn to Boko Haram as well as those who will not. While continued military engagement will be required, any response – whether by the Nigerian government, the AU or

neighbouring states – will need to consider these factors in order to have any lasting effect in the fight against Boko Haram.

Moving forward from his election in March 2015, President Buhari now has the opportunity to take a more proactive approach towards Boko Haram. While the temptation will be to bolster military action, drawing on his previous experience as a military commander, the response must be more wide-ranging to be effective. It needs to be based on an understanding of the origins and evolution of the group, engaging with the many factors that have sustained Boko Haram's existence.

## About the Authors

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