

## **LAPSSET: Terrorism in the Pipeline?**

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## Editorial Note

# Africa in Focus

**W**e are pleased to release Volume 7, Issue 8 (September 2015) of the Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis (CTTA) at [www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta) (ISSN 2382-6444) by the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

In recent years, the terrorist threat in Africa has become an increasing concern for the countries in the region and the international community at large. Attacks by terrorist groups like Boko Haram based in Nigeria, and Al Shabaab based in Somalia, have been relentless not only in the respective countries, but also in the region. These groups have often targeted citizens and assets, with global implications. In this issue, we present analyses of the threat posed by regional groups like Boko Haram and Al Shabaab and government responses at the national and regional level.

**Eric Watkins** highlights how the Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor project has been derailed, owing to security risks posed by the threat of Al Shabaab in the region. This could adversely affect the economic development in East Africa, thereby requiring a more concerted response by the concerned governments in the region.

**Seun Bamidele** presents an analysis of the terrorist threat to Mali and Nigeria and the response to these threats by the respective countries. To address the threat of terrorism, he recommends that governments in these countries must address the underlying causes of terrorism, which are deeply rooted in socio-economic grievances.

**Jennifer Ogbogu** discusses the threat of Boko Haram in Nigeria and the regional security implications of Boko Haram's alliance with ISIS. She argues that this poses a grave security threat to Nigeria and to the West African region. This has highlighted the need for a more comprehensive counter-terrorism response.

In a similar vein, **Mohammed L. dan Suleiman** argues that Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) is an attempt to sustain its momentum in the region in the face of military campaigns against the group. According to him, short-term kinetic operations should be supplemented by both socio-economic and counter-ideology initiatives in order to deal with the threat in the long-term.

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# Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis

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# LAPSSET: Terrorism in the Pipeline?

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Eric Watkins

*Eastern African nations are looking to the Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor project as a vehicle to boost their economies. However, despite increased counter-terrorism efforts, the activities of Al Shabaab continue to threaten to derail the LAPSSET project.*

## Background

Over the years, discoveries of oil in East Africa and the potential for such oil supplies to yield huge economic profits have raised expectations of economic progress in the region (Anderson and Browne 2011). The most recent development is the Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor project, which aims to improve regional economic connectivity by linking Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and Ethiopia to the Indian Ocean via Kenya. In August 2015, Kenya and Uganda agreed on the route of a 1,400-kilometre pipeline that will carry oil from their fields to the coast at Lamu. However, the perceived economic promise of the LAPSSET development overlooks security risks in terms of terrorist attacks by groups like Al Shabaab, which could derail the project and potentially undermine the region's economic development.

Lamu in Kenya is the focus of East Africa's much hoped-for economic prosperity, since the port will be the mainstay of region's oil exports. However, Lamu has also been in Al Shabaab's target. Al Shabaab is an Al Qaeda-linked militant group said to have been created from Al-Ittihad Al-Islami (AIAI, or "Unity of Islam"). AIAI was a militant Salafi group that peaked in the 1990s civil war in Somalia, after the fall of the Siad Barre regime (1969 – 1991). To date, Al Shabaab has carried out attacks on targets not only within Somalia but also in the region.

From Al Shabaab's perspective, Lamu's significance is that it has been a centre of Islam for nearly 700 years. The LAPSSET development, spearheaded by Kenya's secular, non-Muslim government, is perceived to be a source that is gradually eroding Islam's heritage within the area (Agbiboba 2013). On 15 August 2015, suspected Al Shabaab militants invaded a village in the Basuba area of the volatile Lamu County, took over several mosques, and held residents hostage (The Standard 2015).

In an effort to secure LAPSSET, the Kenyan government has, since 2011, stepped up its counter measures against Al Shabaab, and has even focused its efforts within Somalia. Recent attacks by Al Shabaab were likely in response to Kenya's sending of troops to Somalia in 2011 in an attempt to eliminate rebel strongholds and to prevent Al Shabaab from gaining further ground (Foreign Affairs 2011).

Nonetheless, Al Shabaab has been exploiting the religious issue by its deliberate targeting of non-Muslims, especially Christians, in its attacks. In September 2013, the group murdered 67 people during a siege attack at the Westgate shopping mall. In June 2014, the group killed 60 in Mpeketoni, near Lamu. In November and December 2014, Al Shabaab murdered 36 quarry workers and another 26 people. In all such incidents, Al Shabaab would release the Muslims while killing the rest (Economist 2015). These incidents have raised the spectre of Islamist violence in the region.

### **Al Shabaab Targeting LAPSSET**

According to a report by Open Briefing, a London-based civil society intelligence and security advocacy agency, armed conflict, infrastructure sabotage, military operations and intercommunal fighting have all impacted oil industry operations in the region as the proposed LAPSSET route is said to be situated 'close to areas that are historically subject to conflict and violence' (Open Briefing 2013).

Additionally, there is a perception that investment earnings from LAPSSET project would benefit the so-called "up-country" Christians based in Nairobi instead of Lamu's indigenous Muslims, which are largely impoverished (Badurdeen 2012). Areas in and around Lamu have already been affected by violence, as Al Shabaab has

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On 2 April 2015, Al Shabaab militants attacked Garissa University College in Garissa, Kenya, killing 150 people. This was the worst attack on Kenyan soil since Al Qaeda's bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi in 1998, which killed 213 people. While the attack in Garissa targeted mainly Christians, the attacks were also designed to hurt the economy. The town will be linked by a key road, rail and pipeline to the town to Lamu, just 250 km to the south (JPC 2011). On 15 and 16 June, 2014, the group attacked Mpeketoni, a small town near Lamu, killing about 60 people. The two attacks were said to have underscored longstanding tensions between Kenya's Muslim-majority coastal communities and the Christian-majority who control the central government in Nairobi (Kiser 2014).

Lamu's perceived role as linchpin for the economic growth of East Africa as a whole has made it a strategic target for Al Shabaab to undermine the LAPSSET project. These recent attacks by Al Shabaab have delayed construction on Lamu port. In August 2014, Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta announced a \$480 million which was secured by Nairobi as a loan from China Communication Construction Company, a major stakeholder in the LAPSETT project, in an effort to maintain momentum on the project, especially to fund port construction (Mwangi 2014).

Attempting to play down concerns over terrorism, President Kenyatta stated that Al Shabaab was not behind the attack in Mpeketoni and instead, blamed opposition politicians for trying to grab

land along the coast (Straziuso 2014 and Kiser 2014). However, the loan from China apparently did not materialise as no work commenced. Although on 20 May 2015 LAPSSET Director General Sylvester Kasuku said that construction at Lamu would commence within a week, this decision was called off five days later, with no explanation. The investors President Kenyatta were long hoping for seemed to have lost interest in Lamu port development project.

### **Obstacles to LAPSSET Due to Al Shabaab Attacks**

Four international oil companies are at work in Uganda and Kenya, including Africa Oil, China National Offshore Oil Company, Tullow Oil Ltd and Total SA. These companies will be producing an estimated six billion barrels of petroleum that will drive economic development in East Africa despite volatility in global oil prices.

Although oil remains the region's main engine of economic development, the interest of concerned oil companies could falter. This comes amid ongoing security concerns about Al Shabaab attacks on oil infrastructure in the region, particularly in Lamu. Without an export terminal which is being built in Lamu, the construction of a pipeline or even any upstream investment would be out of the question (Platts 2015).

Two oil pipeline routes have long been under consideration. Both lines, one of which is dubbed the northern line and the other, the southern line, begin at Hoima, Uganda, and pass through Kenya, with the southern route ending at Mombasa and the northern route at Lamu.

Kenya's President Kenyatta wants the northern route to help open up northern Kenya under LAPSSET. However, the oil companies involved are uncomfortable with the northern route because it runs through dangerous territory, as evident from the attacks at Garissa and Mpeketoni.

Apart from these attacks, there is also the issue of kidnapping. Pipeline construction of LAPSSET involves about 3,000 workers, with hundreds more required to operate, maintain and secure for several decades. The oil companies are concerned for the safety of their personnel and for the security of their investments, which is estimated to cost at least \$20 billion for Uganda (East African 2014), \$16 billion for Kenya

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(Ecobank 2014), and which will see an overall increase in insurance costs.

### **Implications of Kenya’s Military Actions against Al Shabaab in Somalia**

Kenya's October 2011 direct military initiative in Somalia was aimed at pre-empting Al Shabaab's cross-border raids; securing Kenya's coastal provinces; and protecting Lamu for the overall LAPSSET project. Instead, it has increased Al Shabaab's campaigns in Kenya (Anderson & McKnight 2015).

In that regard, Kenya's actions have had the same effect as the eight-year-old African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) against Al Shabaab. According to an August 2015 report by the Institute for Security Studies, Al Shabaab “remains capable of taking AMISOM on at its own game – and winning” (ISS 2015). This claim is reinforced by the fact that Al Shabaab continues to carry out attacks on AMISOM convoys. Al Shabaab further intensified the region's insecurity with its 26 July 2015 bombing of the Jazeera Palace Hotel in Mogadishu. According to a senior Somali police official, the incident took place “despite all the security precautions in place.” In July 2015, U.S. President Barack Obama asserted that more work needed to be done in order to stem Al Shabaab in the region (Guled 2015).

Thus far, Kenya's actions in Somalia have not been successful in terms of thwarting Al Shabaab attacks or to secure LAPSSET's completion. According to Kenya's Anti-Terrorism Police Unit, Al Shabaab had attacked the country 133 times since October 2011, resulting in some 264 deaths and 923 injuries (Wafula 2014). Despite counter-measures by the Kenyan security establishment, Al Shabaab has regrouped and launched more attacks (Anderson & McKnight 2015), heightened the perceived security risks, which has previously stalled the LAPSSET project.

## Conclusion

LAPSSET is key to the development of East Africa, and oil is the main vehicle driving economic development in the region. In choosing the northern pipeline route, Kenya is showing its determination to continue in its strategy to pursue economic development in face of security risks. To this end, the government has initiated counter-terrorism policies to reduce the threat from Al Shabaab.

In the meantime, precisely when LAPSSET will be completed remains uncertain. Economic development remains closely linked with the security of the region. Much will depend on Kenya's ability to convince all parties that it is determined to work together with the governments in the region to blunt the threat from militant groups like Al Shabaab from carrying out attacks to the region.

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# Terrorism in Mali and Nigeria: Assessment and Projection

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Seun Bamidele

*Terrorism has become a critical security concern for governments in Mali and Nigeria. At its root, poor governance and socio-economic conditions in both countries are creating an environment which is conducive for militants to thrive. In the long-term, more holistic and multidimensional counter-terrorism approaches must be considered, in order to successfully counter the threats in the concerned countries.*

## Introduction

The article explores extremism and terrorism in Mali and Nigeria and the counter-terrorism efforts of both the countries. Mali and Nigeria have experienced some of the bloodiest terrorist attacks carried out by Africa's radical Islamists and other militant outfits. These entities, including the Tuaregs in Mali and Nigerian Boko Haram, have exploited the porous borders and ungoverned spaces in the continent. At the same time, vulnerable and corrupt central governments, and the out-dated security and intelligence apparatus of the concerned countries have created hospitable conditions for these militants to thrive. In 2012 and 2013, Tuareg rebels (a radical Islamist and separatist militia based in Mali) launched attacks targeting the Malian state in Bamako. In 2014, Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group, abducted over 250 girls from a school in the Nigerian town of Chibok in the Borno state. In July 2014, the group also captured large swathes of land across north-eastern Nigeria and declared the area an Islamic caliphate. These recent events signal the dramatic expansion of violence and strife in Mali and Nigeria in recent years.

## Mali

In January 2012, the Tuaregs of northern Mali rebelled against the government for the fourth time since the country's independence in 1960. Tuareg from the Kidal region have led rebellions in the past against the Malian state, alleging discrimination and marginalisation. After the uprising in January 2012, the Movement for the National Liberation in Mali (*Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad*; MNLA) drove out the Malian Army from the territory, named the area under its control as Azawad, and declared it an independent state.

Radical Islamist militant groups also operate in the region. Harakat Ansar al Dine (a Tuareg Islamist group also known as the 'Movement of Defenders of the Faith'), together with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) (an offshoot of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)), drove out the MNLA from northern Mali and imposed Sharia (Islamic law) in the area (Nossiter 2012). By 2013, the militant groups from the northern territories were moving further towards the south, forcing the Malian government to request for French assistance to stem the threat (BBC 2013). By mid-2013, the French-led military intervention appeared to have succeeded in suppressing the threat posed by Islamist groups in northern Mali. Meanwhile, the Malian government signed peace accords with separatist Tuareg rebels (Azawad representative) to allow for national elections and to pave the way for future talks (BBC 2013).

Following new presidential elections in 2013, Malians were hopeful about peace. However, new security plans, development programmes, as well as the devolution of authority to the Azawad region (which would make the region semi-autonomous, according to the initial agreement plan), were issues that were yet to be fulfilled by the Malian government. The ceasefire did not last long before Malian troops again clashed with rebels. At present, Mali continues to be plagued by terrorism, and the region has seen recurrent clashes taking place among the various armed groups in northern Mali.

According to the United Nations' mission on Mali (The *United Nations* Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation *Mission in Mali*), on 17 August 2015, pro-government militias belonging to GATIA (Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés) attacked Tuareg separatists and drove them out of a village in Mali (Ahmed 2015; United Nations

**“ Amid growing signs that violence has been increasing and further expanding to the south, there has been mounting pressure on the government to take concrete action to defuse tensions with the Tuaregs. ”**

2013). Attacks by pro-government militias have further undermined government attempts to pacify the region and has jeopardised the peace deal between the separatist groups, the government, and the various armed groups (BBC 2015).

Amid growing signs that violence has been increasing and further expanding to the south, there has been mounting pressure on the government to take concrete action to defuse tensions with the Tuaregs. However, it remains evident that granting autonomy to the Tuaregs alone in the north may not resolve the broader problem of terrorism in Mali.

### **Lessons Learned and Road Ahead**

Current efforts to address terrorism in Mali have so far been inadequate. There has been a persistence of radical Islamist militancy, and clashes regularly take place between armed groups in the north. This is in spite of the French military intervention, and the presence of peacekeeping forces. Moreover, Mali's proxy militia, Ganda Koy (Lords of the Land) and Ganda Iso (Sons of the Land), deployed to resist attacks by the Tuaregs, has not helped to stem the level of violence there. This has undermined prospects for a political settlement in northern Mali (Chauzal and van Damme 2015). For this reason, military action must be complemented with a coherent and concerted political strategy, in order to ensure progress in reaching a

peaceful settlement. Mali's political instability is often presented as a problem emanating from beyond its borders. The Algerian military operations against Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have been driving its members to the south and beyond its borders into northern Mali.

Moreover, Mali's armed fighters returning from Libya after the fall of Muammar Qaddafi also contributed to the increasing violence in Mali. These entities have managed to continue their criminal and terrorist activities largely because the Malian government is unable to act effectively by enforcing its control over the restive areas of Mali and provide security. The lack of economic opportunities, compounded by prolonged droughts, have also driven some individuals from the north to turn to militant groups who promise them economic returns in exchange for violence. To deal effectively with violence and instability in the country, it is important that these political and economic issues are addressed (Balt and Lankhorst 2013).

Mali must invest in a comprehensive assessment of the factors responsible for the persistence of terrorism in the country and develop a comprehensive and well-integrated strategy to address these factors.

At the political level, greater autonomy should be granted to the north with opportunities for concerned groups and actors to take part in the governance of the country. This will help prevent fighting between pro-government militias and the separatist groups. The resultant chaos and instability have created conditions which have allowed radical Islamist groups to thrive in the region. At the same time, the government needs to co-opt a wider group of actors and institutions, including the civil society and the media, to ensure that the state is held accountable for its actions.

In terms of security, civilian oversight of the army and oversight of other security forces should be increased, in order to stem the tendency to over-militarise the country's counter-terrorism strategy. The security services, including the military, should be represented by various segments of the society in Mali, including at command levels. This would make them and their actions more inclusive and hence legitimate in the eyes of the public. The government also needs to invest in projects to improve the delivery of basic services and to develop the

**“ Nigeria also has a range of political and socio-economic challenges including corruption, injustice, inequality, poverty and high unemployment especially among the youth. These problems have been exacerbated by weak governance. ”**

infrastructure especially in transport and agriculture sectors to reduce poverty and unemployment that have been at the root of violence and strife in the country.

### **Nigeria**

Nigeria also has a range of political and socio-economic challenges including corruption, injustice, inequality, poverty and high unemployment especially among the youth. These problems have been exacerbated by weak governance. The state's failure to provide basic necessities has aggravated socio-economic grievances, which in turn have been exploited by terrorist groups like Boko Haram.

Boko Haram's terrorist activities, which often involves extreme brutality and heinous crimes such as kidnapping of girls from a school and subjecting them to forced conversions, slavery and prostitution, are well known.

Boko Haram had attacked several towns in the north-east of Nigeria, dethroned their chiefs and occupied and imposed Sharia in those areas. It has forced hundreds of thousands of Nigerians from their homes with repeated attacks (Nigerian Vanguard 2014). Despite counter measures by the Nigerian government and its international partners, the group continues to launch deadly campaigns.

Furthermore, new patterns of radicalisation, violence and victimisation by the group continue to challenge the Nigerian security establishment. Boko Haram has exploited high unemployment, pervasive poverty and non-availability of basic necessities and infrastructure in Nigeria to its benefit. The group has radicalised and recruited youth and children to join its ranks (Onuoha 2014). These new recruits are being mobilised to act as fighters and in many cases, as suicide bombers.

### **Lessons Learned and Road Ahead**

By March 2015, the Nigerian government successfully retook most of the territories occupied by Boko Haram (Akingbule 2015). Nonetheless, its overall response remains inadequate. This is due to government's over-reliance on the use of military force. To deal with the threat from Boko Haram and its likes, a long term strategy to address the sources of socio-economic discontent and other human security concerns must be implemented, along with initiatives that will serve to undercut the appeal of the jihadist narrative (Adesoji 2011).

In 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan set up the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North to identify and constructively engage 'key leaders of Boko Haram' and to develop 'a workable framework for amnesty and disarmament of members of the group' (Agande 2013). This was inspired by the 2009 Post-Amnesty Programme (PAP) introduced to disarm and reintegrate ethnic militias in the Niger Delta (Okumagba 2012; Policy Brief 2014). The PAP's success has been brought under question, mostly due to the lack of funding for the programme and poor implementation of its projects (Abazie-Humphrey 2014).

Past efforts by the government to engage the group in talks have failed mostly due to difficulties in identifying Boko Haram's 'demands as a basis for negotiations' and 'credible interlocutors' (Thurston 2013). Amid these difficulties, in May 2014, President Jonathan offered conditional amnesty to the members of the group.

Given the cultural, economic and political differences between Boko Haram and Niger Delta militants, an amnesty programme based on

**“ A particular focus on job creation and vocational training for the youth is required to prevent them from joining the ranks of groups like Boko Haram for monetary benefits or for identity. ”**

the one for the latter could shift the government's focus away from the real problems as outlined above (Nwankpa 2014).

To deal with the threat from a long-term perspective, the Nigerian government should make the youth the central focus of the state. In a country ravaged by rampant unemployment, corruption and inequality, the youth are most likely to be radicalised and be recruited for terrorist activities, under the false promise of empowerment.

So far, political agreements between the government and the warring factions have not been sustainable because these emphasise alliances and bargains amongst existing religious and political elites, rather than the needs and interests of the youth. A particular focus on job creation and vocational training for the youth is required to prevent them from joining the ranks of groups like Boko Haram for monetary benefits or for identity.

On a local level, despite challenges, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) represents a veritable citizen-led initiative to tackle the security challenges in the country (Okeowo 2014). By virtue of their deep knowledge of the local environment, enmeshment in the socio-cultural life of the community, understanding and application of African values and practices, the CJTF have been effective in capturing and neutralising hundreds of terrorists on many occasions.

Supporting these initiatives is what is required for Nigeria's long-term success in responding to the challenge of terrorism in the country.

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# Analysing the Threat of Boko Haram and the ISIS Alliance in Nigeria

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Jennifer Ogbogu

*Following ISIS' acknowledgment of its allegiance, Boko Haram (BH) has declared itself the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP). Even though BH has carried out numerous attacks in Nigeria as well as in other countries in the region before, this may be a prelude to a greater security threat in the West African region. This warrants a more comprehensive counter-terrorism response by the Nigerian government.*

## Introduction

Although Nigeria has been plagued with various acts of insurgencies from tribal militias, including the Obatse Cult activities in Nasarawa state in central Nigeria and the militants from the Niger Delta (Tersoo, Ejue 2015), the emergence of Boko Haram (BH) has radically reshaped the landscape of violence. Boko Haram grew to prominence as a terrorist group in 2002, when a Muslim cleric named Mohammed Yusuf formed the group in 2002. The group had been operating under the name Shabaab Muslim Youth Organisation with Mallam Lawal as the leader since 1995 (Aro 2013, 1). Boko Haram's official name is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad ('People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'). The name Boko Haram (which means 'western education is forbidden' in the Hausa language), was adopted by residents of the area (Chotia 2015). BH seeks to impose Sharia (Islamic law) in Nigeria and establish a caliphate.

The group is opposed to secular governments and democratic values which they view as unjust. BH considers any person or group of persons, including Muslims who are not in line with their belief as anti-Islamic and deserving of being killed. The group has a well-structured organisation consisting of several departments headed by highly trained personnel tasked with specific

duties. Some of these include the Musakar (Defence/Military) and the Da’awa (Training) departments (Unokhua 2015). However, with intensified efforts by security agencies, some of these structures have collapsed. The group currently lacks a central organisational control, which has made the activity of the group quite difficult to predict (Unokhua 2015).

On 1 April 2015, the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein revealed that the appalling atrocities committed by BH had created a critical human rights situation in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. Since 2009, at least 15,000 individuals have been killed while women and girls have been subjected to horrific abuses, including kidnappings and sexual enslavement (UNHCR 2015). Apart from this, more than a million people have been displaced in Nigeria and at least 168,000 have fled to neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2015). Within the region, BH has carried out co-ordinated attacks on the border town of Diffa in Niger and Tiskra in Chad. BH employs fighters from Chad to enforce its control in the north eastern Nigerian towns and cities.

More disturbingly, BH has recently resorted to the use of female suicide bombers. The first reported case of a female suicide bomber was in June 2014, when a woman detonated a bomb near an army barracks in Gombe state Nigeria, killing two and injuring four others (Skinner 2015).

Since then, the rate of suicide bombings carried out by women has steadily increased. In November 2014, there was a spike in female suicide bombing attacks. On 16 November 2014, a female suicide bomber detonated an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in a cell phone market in Azare, killing 13 people and injuring 65 others (Al Jazeera 2014). On 25 November 2014, 2 female bombers blew themselves up in a crowded market in Maiduguri, killing at least 30 people (The Guardian 2014). On 25 August 2015, a 14-year-old girl with an explosive device strapped to her body detonated a bomb in a motor park in the city of Damaturu, killing 6 people (Reuters 2015).

The group’s increased use of female bombers could be attributed to the fact that women are less likely to be suspected or searched. Muslim women could also conceal the explosive devices

**“ The increased use of female bombers by the group could be attributed to the fact that women are less likely to be suspected or searched. ”**

under the attire they normally wear (Skinner 2015).

### **Boko Haram and ISIS**

In April 2014, ISIS cited the abduction of the Chibok school girls conducted by BH to justify its own enslavement of Yazidi women the same month (Anyadike 2015). The November 2014 issue of ISIS’ Dabiq magazine revealed the pledge of allegiance by BH. In August 2014, BH leader Abu Bakar Shekau also declared a caliphate in Gwoza in the Borno state, mirroring ISIS’ declaration of a caliphate in June 2014 (Anyadike 2015).

However, the links between the two evolved from the acknowledgement and emulation of ISIS by BH to what is seen as the beginning of cooperation among both the groups. Videos released by BH show that it has upped its ante and has given its media outlet a dramatic facelift; featuring better graphics and better production quality, much like the videos produced by ISIS’ media wing. For example, in a video released on the group’s Twitter account via YouTube, BH’s leader Abu Bakar Shekau, who is known for his strident, agitated rants, sported a more composed delivery (YouTube 2015).

The alliance between the two was reinforced when, in an Arabic audio message released online on 9 March 2015, Abu Bakar Shekau pledged allegiance to ISIS and recognised the authority of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (VOA 2015). In the eighth issue of ISIS’ Dabiq magazine, the group stated that the rejection of nationalism was what drove the mujahidin in Nigeria to give bay’ah (pledge of allegiance) to ISIS. These mujahidin were also committed to wage war against the Nigerian murtaddin (apostates) and to fight against the Nigerian *tāghūt* or infidels (Dabiq 2015).

## Implications of Boko Haram's Alliance with ISIS

The implications of Boko Haram's alliance with ISIS could be analysed on many fronts. In terms of status, BH has boosted ISIS' international profile. For example, in November 2014, jihadists in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Yemen committed to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in a coordinated show of support for the self-proclaimed Caliph (Thomas 2015).

For BH, falling under the ISIS banner could broaden its appeal and aid its recruitment. The high unemployment rates, illiteracy as well as absence of basic amenities especially in Northern Nigeria, has made the area a fertile ground in terms of recruitment for BH. People who are motivated to join ISIS but cannot go to Syria through Turkey because of heightened security will exploit existing travel routes by travelling to northern Nigeria through Libya (International Business Times 2015). The alliance has also enabled BH to gain access to ISIS' finances and operational experiences. BH has sent about 80 to 200 fighters to Libya to assist ISIS (Clarion Project 2015).

For Nigeria, this alliance would mean more young Nigerians heading to Syria. Recent reports have revealed that Ibrahim Lawal Uwais, the son of the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Muhammad Lawal Uwais, had left Nigeria with his family to join ISIS in Syria (Daily Trust 2015). On 7 August 2015, two young Nigerians, 24-year-old Imran Kabeer and 25-year-old Sani Jamiliu were arrested at the India-Pakistan border on their way to Pakistan from where they would move to Syria to join ISIS (The Nation 2015). On 13 May 2015, the Mosul Youth Resistance Movement killed five members of BH in Mosul who were taking part in a military training course conducted by ISIS (Naij 2015).

From ISIS' perspective, accepting BH as an ideological proxy gives it a foothold in a region where the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions are conducive for religious radicalisation and recruitment.

## Countering the Threat

There is an increasing acknowledgement of the evolving terrorist threat in the country and in the region and by the international community. In terms of international response, France has

**“ Although the current approach by the Nigerian government to countering terrorism is a military-centric one, plans are being made for community engagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists into the mainstream. ”**

expanded Operation Barkhane, its counter-terrorism campaign in Chad, to protect its interests in the region (Cummings 2015).

In terms of regional response, the growing menace of BH has shifted the focus of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter-terrorism operations. The MNJTF comprises troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, the Republic of Niger, Chad and the Republic of Benin and was initially tasked with border security within the Lake Chad Basin.

Presently, the focus of all counter-terrorism activity is on BH. To this end, the African Union has raised a coalition of about 7,500 troops, while the Nigerian government established a new Army division stationed in Borno state to combat BH (Dorrie 2015, Premiumtimesng 2013).

Although the current approach by the Nigerian government to countering terrorism is a military-centric one, plans are being made for community engagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists into the mainstream (Unokhua 2015).

More importantly, a terrorist group's source of funding has to be cut off in order for it to be completely defeated. In this regard, the Central Bank of Nigeria has started reforms that will make it difficult for suspected terrorist financiers to support BH (Premium Times 2015).

## Conclusion

Current efforts undertaken by the Nigerian government, the MNJTF, as well as the international community, have so far been effective to the extent that several terrorist strongholds have been recaptured and operations are ongoing to further destabilise the group. However, even though BH has suffered major losses, its ability to conduct attacks remains intact. As ISIS expands its foothold in Nigeria and the region, governments should remain vigilant, and continue to keep a close watch on the potential security implications of a BH and ISIS alliance.

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# Countering Boko Haram

Muhammad L. dan Suleiman

*Boko Haram's recent transformation into the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP) suggests that the group is attempting to project an impression of its continuing strength across the region. As the group is based in and primarily operates in Nigeria, the government of President Buhari needs to have a fresh look at its strategy to deal with Boko Haram in its new incarnation.*

## Introduction

In recent times, Boko Haram has seized territories across Nigeria and launched attacks in neighbouring countries. In August 2014, the group started its campaign of expansion by taking hold of towns and villages around Gwoza on the Nigeria-Cameroon border and declaring itself a caliphate (BBC 2014). By April 2015, Boko Haram had also given *Bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), and announced itself as *Wilāyat Gharb Ifrīqīyyah* or the Islamic State's West African Province (Bugnacki 2015). On 3 September 2015, Boko Haram militants killed about 30 people and wounded 145 others during attacks carried out on a market and infirmary in northern Cameroon. Military officials further noted that Boko Haram may be changing its tactics and targets, conducting quick raids against civilians rather than battling with government troops (CNN 2015).

Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin have carried out large scale military offensives against the group, which have resulted in recapturing key towns from Boko Haram. On 1 September 2015, the Nigerian army claimed that its troops have recaptured Gamboru Ngala in the Borno state, which is a key town along the border of neighbouring Cameroon (Bloomberg 2015).

In spite of the offensives, the group continues to thrive. Moreover, Boko Haram's use of females in suicide attacks in Nigeria and neighbouring West African countries suggests that the group may be seeking to change its tactics in an attempt to regain its momentum in the region.

### **Boko Haram: Trends and Implications**

There has been an increased incidence of suicide attacks involving females members of Boko Haram since 2011. In June 2014, a female suicide bomber on a motorbike dressed in Islamic garb targeted a military camp in Gombe, north eastern Nigeria, killing one soldier and injuring another (Ezedani 2015, 248). According to a report, in 2014, 85 percent of total suicide attacks involving females in the world occurred in Nigeria. Moreover, the abduction of the Chibok girls in April 2014 (BBC 2014) fed into fears that Boko Haram may even be deploying its captives on suicide operations.

The threat of Boko Haram's operational reach has also expanded across the region. Boko Haram has capitalised on the common language in Niger (the Hausa language link) and common Kanuri ethnicity in Chad and Cameroon to expand its operations in the region (Mazrui 1994). Moreover, shared economic conditions, such as poverty and unemployment and porous borders, have also compromised security in the region, enabling Boko Haram to recruit from other states and spread across the region.

### **Nigeria's Security Mandate under President Buhari**

As Boko Haram expands its profile as a terrorist group in the region, so has Nigeria managed to secure the military support of the neighbouring countries to quell the advance of the group. Yet, it also demonstrates that Boko Haram continues to be a formidable threat in West Africa, especially its ability to adapt to a more hostile environment in the region from a law-enforcement perspective.

Nigeria's newly elected President Muhammadu Buhari has to confront the question if the newly rebranded Boko Haram would see an increasing lethality in the country and in the region. The group's change in tactics and targets, with raids carried out on civilians rather than direct confrontation with military forces is indicative of

**“ From a localised insurgency in Nigeria, Boko Haram appears to have expanded its operations in the region, capitalising on the common language in Niger and common Kanuri ethnicity in Chad and Cameroon. ”**

such a trend. Under President Buhari, Nigeria has taken a number of steps to counter the renewed threat of Boko Haram. For instance, President Buhari has moved the command centre for Nigeria's military operation against Boko Haram from Abuja to Maiduguri, in Borno state, the birthplace of Boko Haram. With this move, Buhari aims to centralise operations close to the source and to make counter measures more effective by cutting bureaucracy and speeding up the decision-making process (Reuters 2015).

President Buhari has also replaced the National Security Adviser as well as the heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force (Sahara Reporters 2015). The appointment of General Mohammed Babagana Monguno as the National Security Advisor, Tukur Yusuf Buratai as Chief of Army Staff and Air Vice Marshal Sadiq Abubakar as Chief of Air Staff is vital as these men in arms are from the region engulfed by Boko Haram's atrocities. Therefore, they are more familiar with the group's operations, strength and support base.

President Buhari appears to be undoing the damage done by the Joint Task Force (JTF) set up by the previous President Jonathan to counter Boko Haram, which includes reported infiltration of the JTF by Boko Haram, incidents of extra-judicial killings and instances of inaction by security agencies in the face of Boko Haram raids.

## A Revival of Nigerian Counter-insurgency

Defeating Boko Haram and denying ISIS a West African foothold, requires more than a military-centric initiative. Nigeria needs a reappraisal of measures it has used so far (Kilcullen 2006). As military response has not been sufficient to degrade the group, the strategy against Boko Haram needs to be augmented with socio-economic measures as well. Boko Haram's resiliency can be attributed to domestic issues arising from political corruption, poverty and illiteracy (Aghedo and Osumah 2014, Onuoha 2014, 7). An effective approach must take into account the entire facet of contemporary Nigerian society. The approach should comprise both short and long-term measures, and should seek to address socio-economic and political grievances.

In combating the group, government responses to the Boko Haram must remain contextualised at all levels of the group's operation. At the local level, eliminating Abu Bakar Shekau may yield positive dividends, as there is no clear successor to Shekau so far. Moreover, since the group is now on the defensive, it would be difficult to find someone for an effective transition at the leadership level.

At the same time, the government needs to concentrate on segregating hard-line unrepentant jihadists from those members of the group, especially females and children, who could have been forced into carrying out acts of violence, including suicide attacks (Amnesty 2015). Amnesty may be reconsidered as an avenue to encourage members to leave Boko Haram.

At the regional level, the on-going military campaign by Nigeria and its allies has significantly weakened Boko Haram's capabilities and reduced the areas under its control. Therefore, a region-wide military campaign should be sustained. Additionally, proper securitisation of inter-country and regional borders, as well as counter-terrorism cooperation with allies at an international level in would also help to stop cross-border recruitment and assaults carried out by Boko Haram.

It is necessary to counter the extremist narratives of Boko Haram, which is based on a radical and extremist interpretation of Salafist Ideology. The Salafist movement within the Sunni Islam is usually implicated in movements that propagate

**“ As a military response has not been sufficient to degrade the group, the strategy against Boko Haram needs to be augmented with socio-economic measures as well. ”**

violent jihad (Sageman 2011; Shultz 2008). Interestingly however, the most vocal critics of Boko Haram in Nigeria have been Salafist scholars who could be co-opted to counter Boko Haram's rhetoric with positive and potent counter narratives (Spalek and Lambert 2008, Hill 2010).

## Conclusion

The peaceful political transition in Nigeria, the unity of Nigerians against Boko Haram and the bolstering of geostrategic trust among Nigeria's regional neighbours are opportunities which the country must capitalise to deal with the threat from the group in the country and in the region.

Additionally, while ISIS' notoriety and Abu Bakar Shekau's allegiance to ISIS certainly magnifies the Boko Haram threat, counter-terrorism agencies must avoid the temptation to sensationalise the 'ISIS in West Africa' propaganda. Rather, Nigeria under Buhari must concentrate on removing the threat of Boko Haram through the utilisation of proactive long-term measures along with more reactive short-term military campaigns.

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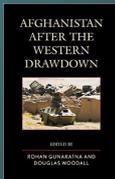
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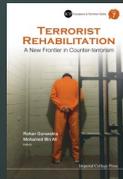


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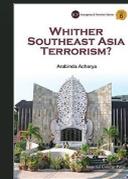
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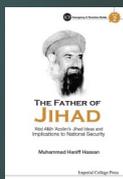
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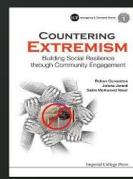
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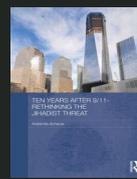
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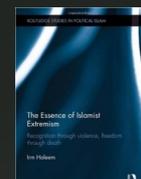
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**The Essence of Islamist Extremism**  
Irm Haleem  
(Routledge, 2011)

## ICPVTR'S GLOBAL PATHFINDER

Global Pathfinder is a one-stop repository for information on current and emerging terrorist threats from the major terrorism affected regions of the world. It is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, terrorist personalities, terrorist and counter-terrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps. This includes profiles from emerging hubs of global terrorism affecting the security of the world, as well as the deadliest threat groups in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Caucasus. The database also contains analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles. For further inquiries regarding subscription and access to Global Pathfinder, please contact Ng Suat Peng at [isngsp@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:isngsp@ntu.edu.sg).