BOKO HARAM: A COGNITIVE PROCESS PERSPECTIVE

An analysis and recommendation for the United States in regards to Boko Haram

Abstract

Known to some as the Nigerian Taliban, Boko Haram has gained increasing notoriety since 2010 for its attacks and extremism. This report proposes a cognitive process framework which is used to analyze this organization. This analysis will be used to explain the rise of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, and answer the question of what, if any, response should the United States have to the group's rising influence. Investigations into these questions reveal that the Nigerian government has pursued an increasingly violent and ineffective response to Boko Haram, threatening the stability of the country. Additionally, the role Nigeria plays for Muslims in Africa exhibits the vested interest the United States has in the resolution of this conflict and suggests that the United States should indeed act to resolve the conflict. This report recommends that the United States undertake a nonmilitary policy aimed at providing humanitarian aid to the north, developing community policing strategies and increasing border security to isolate the group.

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Introduction

"They told us that if we do not convert to Islam they will slit our throats. They said that we would be married off as soon as we were well and that they would marry us to their members that were single. We never thought we would regain our freedom."[1]

-Abigail John, Age 15
Captive of Boko Haram for one month

Since the Islamic militant group Boko Haram entered the international stage in 2011, over 30,000 deaths have been attributed to their actions or conflicts stemming from their actions.[2] The group widely referred to as Boko Haram, which is often quoted as translating from its original Hausa to 'Western education is forbidden' is officially titled *Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad,* which translates to People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad.[3] The group, operating only in Nigeria in its beginning, has spread operations into neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger and ignited tensions between Nigeria's predominantly Christian south and Muslim north. Boko Haram has gained repeated international media attention with kidnappings, destruction of schools, and reports of mass killings and forced marriages. All of these actions, while themselves instilling fear in Nigerians, have led to heavy-handed responses from the Nigerian government. These responses from the government have often been criticized as brutal, indiscriminate, and ineffective. Indeed by the close of 2014, nearly 5,000 deaths could be attributed solely to the government security forces.[4]

From the countless news reports, personal testimonies, and widespread destruction, many questions arise. What is Boko Haram? How did it come to exist? What are its goals? Why hasn't it

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[1] Oduah, Chika. "Boko Haram Kidnaps Hundreds, Tells Captives Stories Of Chibok Girls." *The Huffington Post*. Associated Press, 11 Feb. 2015. Web. 01 Apr. 2015.
[2] "Nigeria Security Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, Web. 01 Apr. 2015.
[3] "Country Reports on Terrorism 2013." *U.S. Department of State*. Bureau of Counterterrorism, 1 Jan. 2013. Web. 2 Apr. 2015.
[4] "Nigeria Security Tracker."

been stopped? Should the United States care about Boko Haram? What response should the United States have? These questions, and others, will all be answered in the following discussion. This report will begin by proposing a decision-making model. This model will be used as a framework to mold the analysis and discussion of Boko Haram to determine the factors motivating individuals to join the organization. After analyzing each of these factors, an argument will be made for the United States' interest in the conflict, various policy responses will be reviewed, and a final recommendation will be provided which addresses each of the contributory factors.

Foundations of Terrorism

*Everyone, without exception, believes his own native customs, and the religion he
was brought up in, to be the best, and that being so, it is unlikely that anyone but a
madman would mock at such thing.*

-Herodotus
Histories, 420 BCE

This first section discusses the root causes and generation of domestic terrorism to provide a

framework to analyze Boko Haram and eventually prescribe targeted policies. The framework

established in this section seeks to analyze why an average Nigerian may join an organization such as

Boko Haram. The model assumes that decisions are made with bounded rationality and that individuals

make decisions with consideration of pressing environmental factors which are weighed differently

according to their socialization. Decisions will only be changed by either changing environmental factors

or changing the way in which they are weighed and processed. The model can be applied to any person

but may not be useful in producing practical recommendations if an individual greatly weighs certain

factors. As a result, the model will probably not yield policies which will sway the minds of the most

dedicated leaders, but could greatly influence the cognitive calculus of average participants.

A great amount of literature has been written following 9/11 on the root causes of terrorism.

Three primary theories in regards to the causes of terrorism are found: structural (environmental),

psychological, and rational choice.[5] Structural theories argue that the causes of terrorism can be found

in environmental conditions such as political, cultural, social, and economic structures as well as

triggering events. Psychological theories investigate the reasons individuals join terrorist organizations

as well as the radicalization process of beliefs. A primary focus of many psychological theories is to

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[5] Ross, J. I. "Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model." *Journal of Peace
    Research* 30.3 (1993): 317-29. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

investigate the role that religion and religious beliefs play in terrorism. One such theory is the

Attachment Theory, which argues that individuals turn to the psychological comfort of religion in

response to external threats, and in turn use religion or religious reasoning to defend themselves and

their actions.[6] The last theory explaining the causes of terrorism are rational choice theories. These

argue that participation in terrorist organizations and actions of terrorists are the result of cost-benefit

analysis. While each of these theories have merits, they are most compelling when each are

incorporated into a theory of cognitive and social behavior.

At the base of cognitive processes are a series of programs or social scripts; prescribed

behaviors in response to situations. These scripts are formed by biological factors and socialization

experiences caused by the environmental context. While these social scripts are often formed via

cognitive processes, once they are formed, they are often used unconsciously. When a situation arises,

it is first filtered by cognitive schemas of the world which essentially interpret the situation or event to

tell us what is going on and why.[7] Once a situation has been filtered through our cognitive schemas, it

activates a specific social script, or program which tells us how to respond to the situation. This script,

or prescribed response is filtered through normative and moral filters, which ultimately result in our

action or response.[8] Thus, our actions are a function of situational factors and within-person factors

(biology and socialization). The entire process of the interaction between situational factors, within-

person factors, cognitive schemas and normative and moral filters is regulated by higher order,

executive functioning programs in the frontal lobe and limbic system.[9] A visual depiction of the process

is presented by Figure 8.

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[6] "On the Psychology of Extremism." *Responses to Terrorism: Can Psychosocial Approaches Break the Cycle of Violence?* Ed. Colin M. Parkes. New York: Routledge, 2014. 9-28. Print.
[7] Jackson, Richard, and Samuel J. Sinclair. "The Causes of Terrorism." *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*. London: Routledge, 2012. 113-19. Print.
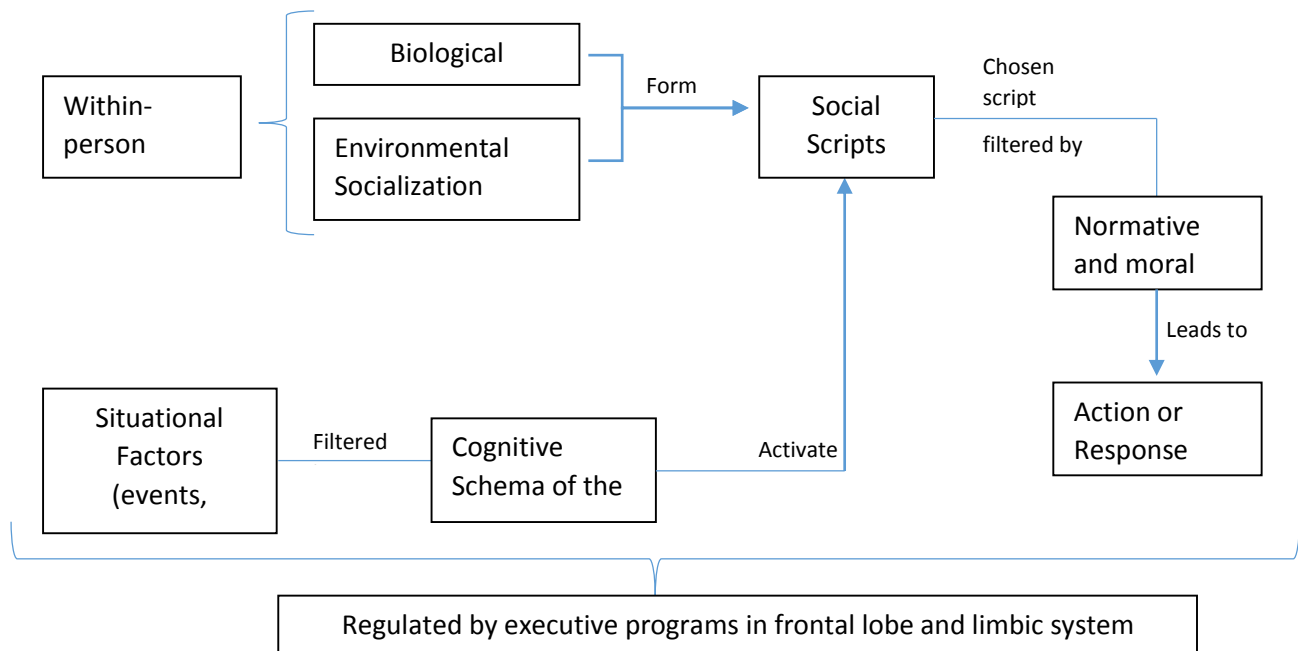[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Figure 1: Cognitive Process of decision-making

Thus, in this cognitive process model we can see that the environment influences the situational factors in the short term and the socialization process in the long term while psychological processes interpret these events to choose social scripts with the whole system being regulated by the rationally-based frontal lobe. This model suggests then that the most effective avenue to combat terrorism would be to target one, or several, of these steps in the decision-making. The short term situation and stimuli must be changed to select different social scripts while long-term socialization must be used to form different scripts. Psychological approaches should be utilized to change people's cognitive schemas while appeals to rationality should be used to influence normative and moral judgements as well as the higher order executive systems.

To illustrate how the model works, a hypothetical example will be used. An individual who was raised Muslim grew up in an economically depressed environment and quickly assumed the world view of his village in blaming the corrupt government for the situation. Having had to resort to force often to protect himself, this individual soon interprets the police as hostile government agents. This hostility,

however, is not connected to his faith until a radical imam moved to the village, promoting righteous violence against the government in the name of a pure Islam.

At this point, the cognitive process model can be used to analyze this individual and his possible decision to join Boko Haram. From a young age, the man was socialized to believe that force was the only thing he could trust to ultimately defend himself. This socialization formed pre-programmed responses for him; when he was threatened physically, he resorted to force. Additionally, when threatened with uncertainty or insecurity, he fell back on his Islamic beliefs and upbringing for security as suggested by attachment theory. The poor economic prospects of his village (a situational factor) is attributed to the corrupt government and the resentment is weaponized by the teachings of the radical imam. Mamadou interprets the government as a threat to him physically, activating a script for violent defense, and morally, activating his script to fall back on his Islamic beliefs. Normally he would not do more than grumble about the government, but the radical teachings of the imam altered his normative and moral filters, permitting him to commit violent acts against the government with little cognitive dissonance. Ultimately, the man's socialization and situational factors and psychological filters which were influenced by the radical imam led him to join arms with Boko Haram as he perceives it as the most satisfactory response to his situation.

This cognitive process model can be used to analyze the factors influencing individuals to join Boko Haram. First, the long-term factors influencing individuals' socialization processes will be analyzed. These long-term factors also influence individuals' cognitive and moral filters. Then, situational factors will be analyzed which affect individuals immediate decisions and activate social scripts. While the psychological filters and socialization of individuals may greatly vary, certain experiences and values may be shared by a large portion of the population.

Factors Influencing Cognitive Processes

"Take up the White Man's burden, Ye dare not stoop to less--
Nor call too loud on Freedom To cloke your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper, By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples Shall weigh your gods and you."[10]

-Rudyard Kipling
The White Man's Burden

The primary shared environmental factors for Nigerians are the country's history and religions. For the present purposes, the history of Nigeria can be divided into three periods: the pre-colonial period, the colonial period, and the post-colonial period. The discussion will begin with the emergence of modern societies followed by the introduction of Islam and then transition into the colonial period and explore the colonization efforts by the British with a specific focus on education and governance. The results of the colonization period will then be discussed in the post-colonial period. These historical events laid the foundation for many Nigerian's socialization processes, which have helped to form an entire nation's social scripts. Following discussion of the long-term socializing factors, a summary of present-day situational factors will be presented.

Long-term Socializing Factors

Three vegetative regions determined the development of societies in modern-day Nigeria and laid the foundation for how these regions would interact and develop. In the coastal regions, which are dominated by salt and freshwater swamps, trading and fishing flourished in addition to salt production, which would prove to be very profitable for the early southern states.[11] Additionally, due to the coastal

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[10] Kipling, Rudyard. "The White Man's Burden." *Internet History Sourcebooks*. Fordham University, 1 Aug. 1997.
    Web. 2 Apr. 2015.
[11] Ibid. 20.

zone's heavy oceanic trade, it would gain contact with Europeans as early as the 16th century. Moving

north, the south-central rainforests yielded a rich agricultural economy with the production of root-

based plants such as yams and eventually cocoa and palm oil.[12] Finally, transitioning north, nomadic

herding cultures began to dominate due to the predominantly grass-based savannas. The distribution of

community types (stable agricultural and coastal trading based in the south versus nomadic herding in

the north) ultimately led the southern portion of Nigeria to establish contact and identity with

Europeans while the northern nomads established contact with Islamic traders from the Maghreb.

As nomadic herders in the north began trading with Muslim merchants during the 13th century,

Islam spread and would eventually become the predominant religion for most of the northern states.[13]

Additionally, since pre-colonial education in Nigeria was conducted by and for the community, Islam

would come to play a major role in education. This education was very functional to Nigerians but

impeded communication and development between communities since education had a tendency to be

specialized for the local tribe. Pre-colonial education had very practical roots and taught Nigerians to be

useful members of their community. Islamic education began in the north in the 13th and 14th

centuries as traders and scholars brought Islamic influences into the Hausaland and other northern

tribal areas. This Islamic education was reinforced in 1804 with the jihad of Usman Danfolio, which led

to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate.[14] Established as a result of the Fulani War, the Sokoto

Caliphate was the most powerful Islamic State in West Africa in the 19th century, and would eventually

be confronted by the British colonists when they arrived.

Ironically colonialism in Nigeria began when Great Britain abolished slavery in 1807. The Royal

Navy formed the West Africa Squadron to patrol African shores and prevent slave trade from occurring.

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[12] Ibid. 21

[13] Garba, Safiya J. "The Impact of Colonialism on Nigerian Education and the Need for E - Learning Technique for
        Sustainable Development." *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 2.7 (2012): Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
[14] Ibid.

In 1865 following the impetus of the White Man's Burden, Britain occupied the Niger area and in 1885 it

received recognition from other European countries to expand its sphere of influence in West Africa.[15]

As the British colonizers expanded from the southern and central tribal areas, they confronted the

Sokoto Caliphate near the beginning of the 20th century. Eventually the Sokoto Caliphate was

overthrown in 1903, with all resistance ending by 1906.[16] By 1914 the Crown unified Nigeria as a colony

and the Northern Nigeria Protectorate was formed. The governor, Frederick Lugard, created a system of

semiautonomous rule by the existing emirates, retaining much of the preexisting political structure.[17] A

result of this, however, was marginal economic expansion by the British, which included never being

connected to the railway network.[18] The British established their colonial government and throughout

the first half of the 20th century trained Nigerians, predominantly southerners, in how to operate

regional and national governments. Then, following World War II, in response to the growth of Nigerian

nationalism and demands for independence, successive constitutions legislated by the British

government moved Nigeria toward self-government on a representative and increasingly federal basis.

By the middle of the 20th century, a great wave for independence was sweeping across Africa, leading

Nigeria to finally achieve independence on October 1, 1960.[19]

Shortly after independence, sharp political divides developed between the dominant ethnic

groups – the Hausa in the north, the Igbo in the southeast and the Yoruba in the southwest. These three

groups formed coalition governments which operated in a relative balance until the following year. In

1961 as Africa became decolonized, a plebiscite was proposed to the British mandate of Cameroons.

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Hirshfield, Claire. *The Diplomacy of Partition: Britain, France, and the Creation of Nigeria, 1890-1898*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1979. Print.

[17] Ibid. 29

[18] Swindell Kenneth. Population and Agriculture in the Sokoto Rima Basin of North-West Nigeria: A Study of Political Intervention, Adaptation and Change, 1800-1980. *Cahiers d'études africaines*. Vol. 26 N°101-102. pp. 75-111.

[19] Crowder, Michael, and Guda Abdullahi. *Nigeria: An Introduction to Its History*. London: Longman, 1979. Print. Pg 194.

The result of the plebiscite was that the southern portion of the mandate joined the French colony of Cameroon while the largely Islamic northern portion joined Nigeria. This caused a great imbalance in the population as with the inclusion of northern Cameroons, Muslim northerners now outnumbered their southern counterparts. This imbalance lead eventually to a series of military coups against the federal government. These coups, primarily between Igbo and Northern generals, would lead the southeastern portion of the country to declare independence as the Republic of Biafra in July 1967.[20] This marked the beginning of the Nigerian Civil War, which lasted from July 1967 to January 1970 and claimed the lives of over 1 million people.[21] The majority of these deaths occurred during a siege and blockade of Biafra by the northern and western soldiers. Ultimately the official government forces under the control of a military junta would retake the southeastern portion of the country and reassert dominance. During this time, Nigeria had begun to greatly increase its extraction and sales of oil. Indeed by 1975 Nigeria's budget was ten times that of 1965 with oil revenues constituting ninety percent of the federal budget.[22] However, along with the development of oil industries, poor management and corruption flourished and the successive military juntas led Nigeria to become incredibly dependent upon oil. The fact that the majority of the oil reserves are located in the south in the Niger Delta has contributed to the vastly different economic conditions between the north and south.

Fast forward to May 2010 when Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as president amidst the initial growth of Boko Haram. During his presidency from 2010 to 2015, Goodluck Jonathan was criticized widely for failing to deliver on anti-corruption promises and failing to respond adequately to the rise of Boko Haram. Jonathan served as president until March 2015 when Muhammadu Buhari won

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[20] Ibid. 202
[21] Ibid. 203
[22] Ibid. 205

the presidency by approximately 2 million votes. Mr. Buhari had sought the presidency on three

previous occasions and had ruled Nigeria from January 1984 to August 1985 following a military coup in

December 1983.[23] General opinion on Muhammadu Buhari is that despite having a poor human rights

record during his rule, he is largely incorruptible and as a northern Muslim, better suited to handle Boko

Haram than Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the far southern state of Bayelsa.[24]

   The above investigation into Nigeria's history yields telling information on the conditions that

influence Nigerian's socialization and social scripts. The topography and climate of the country allowed

southern Nigerians to have an inherent propensity to establish contact with Europeans via maritime

trade. Additionally, the nomadic lifestyle in the dryer north allowed for the introduction of Islam and

the development of a substantially different society than the south. These differences were reinforced

with the colonization of the British, who, due to coastal contact, established closer governance with

southern Nigerians and left the north to largely govern itself. The result of this administrative decision

by the British was that European schools populated the south and facilitated the spread of Christianity

while the north remained securely Muslim. Because of this division in education, many of the future

bureaucrats and politicians would come from the south when Great Britain decolonized Nigeria after

establishing a western-style federal government which favored southern participation. Following

Nigeria's independence, a fragile coalition government was degraded after the inclusion of Northern

Cameroons in the country, leading to the Nigerian Civil War. To reassert control, a series of coups and

military juntas ruled the country. During this time, oil became Nigeria's primary export and the country

fell under 'the resource curse' as corruption, misallocation of resources and economic uniformity

became more prevalent. These differences between the north and south in religion, social structure,

resources, and political power developed fertile ground for Boko Haram to exploit feelings of

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[23] "Nigeria Election: Muhammadu Buhari Wins." *BBC News*. BBC, 1 Apr. 2015. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.
[24] Ibid.

disenfranchisement in northern Nigerian youth. Boko Haram, which has emerged as a force seeking to create a better society than the Nigerian government, perceives as corrupt, inept and beholden to foreign interests. These perceptions are exacerbated by fewer economic opportunities in the north and lack of foresight and responsive capabilities by the government; yielding the present-day situation.

Further influencing northerners socialization is Islam. According to attachment theory, many of these northern Nigerians may perceive government forces as a moral attack and fall back on Islamic beliefs for psychological comfort; particularly if the government is perceived as Christian or beholden to foreign interests. The predominant sect of Islam in Northern Nigeria is Qadiriyya Sufism; a Sunni sect of Islam which relies upon strict adherence to the fundamentals of Islam.[25] The leader of Qadiriyya Sufism is considered the spiritual leader of Nigeria's 70 million Muslims. While the position has become increasingly ceremonial, it still carries a significant amount of weight with Fulani and Hausa people. The current Sultan of Sokoto, and leader of Qadiriyya Sufism in Nigeria is Sa'adu Abubakar.[26]

Present-day Situational Factors

Today nearly 175 million people live in Nigeria, making it Africa's most populous country. Approximately 50% of the population is Muslim, 40% Christian, and 10% indigenous beliefs.[27] The median age is 18.2 years, life expectancy is 52.62 years (212 in the world), and infant mortality is 74.09 per 1,000 births (10th in the world).[28] In terms of economic activity, Nigeria operates Africa's largest economy with a 2013 GDP estimated at $502 billion. Despite decades of mismanagement and lackluster economic performance, Nigeria has seen substantial economic growth as evidenced by Figure 2. While

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[25] Paden, John N. Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2008. Print.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "Nigeria". *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency
[28] Ibid.

since 2000 Nigeria has approximately matched GDP per capita growth for Sub-Saharan Africa, the purchasing power parity of the Nigerian GDP has increased significantly, leading to an overall increase in wealth compared to the rest of Africa. Figure 3 shows the composition of the Nigerian GDP by industry sector in 2010. While the GDP of the country has become increasingly diversified, and growth has been fueled primarily by non-oil sectors, the federal budget still displays pronounced dependence on oil for revenue as evidenced by Figure 4. This concentration of federal revenue into oil fosters corruption, as evidenced by Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index score of 27 out of 100 (0 worst, 100 best) in 2014.[29]

This economic growth has largely occurred in the southern oil and agriculture industries, as evidenced by the share of GDP by industry in Figure 3. These facts have yielded situational factors where growth and prosperity are largely being enjoyed by southerners. Additionally, 72 per cent of the people living in northern states are impoverished compared with 27 per cent in the South and 35 per cent in the Niger Delta.[30] For many Nigerians, and northerners in particular, the high degree of perceived corruption likely fuels northern youth to blame the government for the lack of opportunity growth. These situational factors have been exploited by Boko Haram to recruit individuals, promising to improve their immediate situation while appealing to the values and beliefs developed during their socialization. Indeed a declaration issued by Sani Umar, a temporary leader of Boko Haram, in 2009 on the behalf of Boko Haram illustrated the sharp divide between Boko Haram and the south, "We promise the West and Southern Nigeria, a horrible pastime. We shall focus on these areas which is the devil

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[29] Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2014. Dec. 2014
[30] Iro Aghedo & Oarhe Osumah (2012) The Boko Haram Uprising: how should Nigeria respond? Third World Quarterly, 33:5, 853-869.

empire and has been the one encouraging and sponsoring the Western Civilization into the shores of

Nigeria."[31]

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[31] Cook, David. "Boko Haram: A Prognosis." *James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy*. Dec. 2011. 26 Apr. 2015.
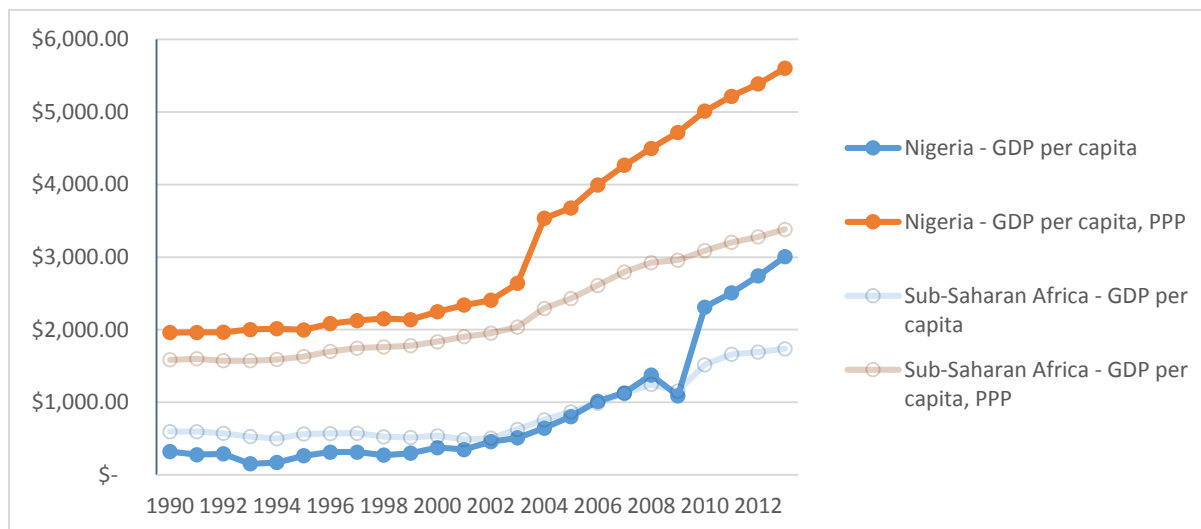
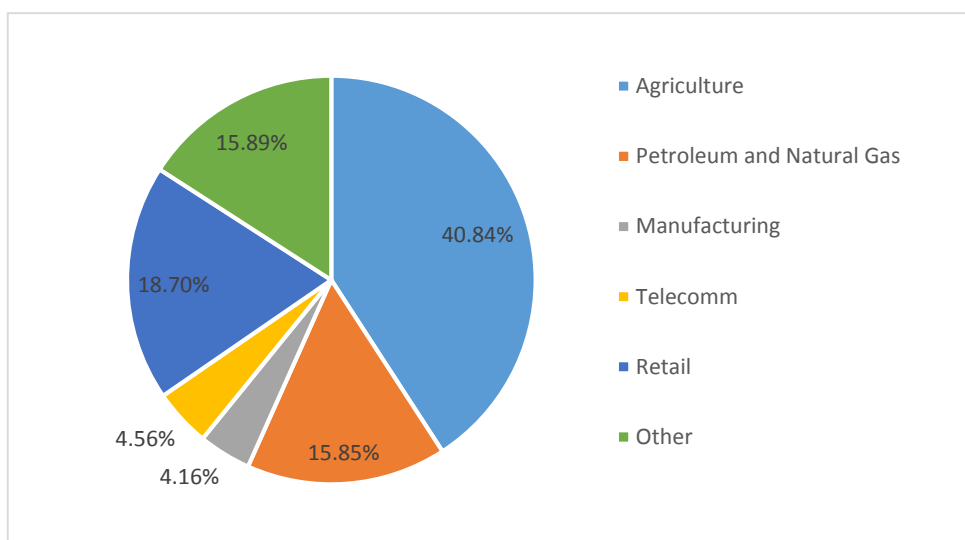*Figure 2: GDP per Capita (nominal and PPP). Source: The World Bank*

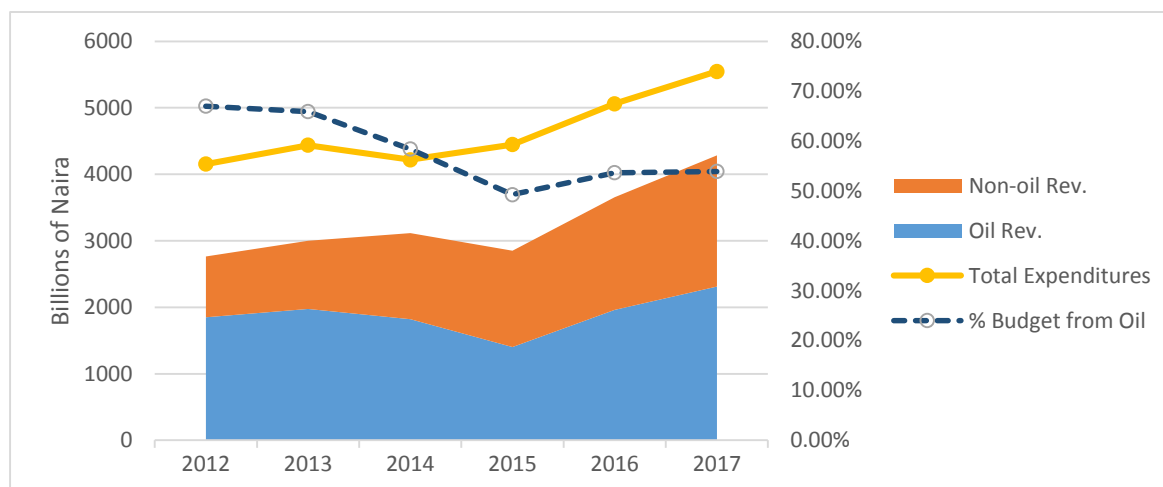*Figure 3: Industry Composition of Real GDP (2010). Source: IMF*

Figure 4: Federal government sources of revenue and expenditures. Source: IMF Country Report

Boko Haram: History, Structure, and Goals

When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.

-Desmond Tutu

Boko Haram developed in the northern state of Borno in the city Maiduguri under a radical Islamist youth group operated by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf in 2002. However, today, despite their media exposure and a common leader, Abubakar Shekau, defining Boko Haram and its exact aims is difficult. In fact, the actual name, "Boko Haram" was not chosen by the group, and is not a complete representation of their aims. The name was given to the group early on by citizens of Maiduguri.[32] However, given the group's use of modern weapons and technology, they clearly do not reject modernity outright. A more clear representation of what Boko Haram represents is found in their rejection of *yan boko* (children of the book) which refers to the ruling elite and political system inherited from British colonial rule.[33] In other words, Boko Haram is most clearly against those people that they believe have been turned away from *Allah* by money, power and Western values. However, their rhetoric indicates that their overarching goal is to create a state-like organization which governs the north and operates parallel to the federal government or to convert Nigeria into an Islamic state.[34] In summarizing Boko Haram, John Campbell, former US ambassador to Nigeria and senior fellow at Council on Foreign Relations says that the group is simultaneously:

1. A grassroots movement of northern Nigerians angry at deprivation and poverty in the north
2. Core group of Mohammed Yusuf's followers who reconvened around Abubakar Shekau and are exacting revenge on the state
3. "A kind of personality cult, an Islamic millenarianist sect, inspired by a heretical but charismatic leader."[35]

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[32] Walker, Andrew. *What is Boko Haram*: United States Institute of Peace, 2012. Web. Special Report 308.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Aghedo 2012.
[35] Ibid.

While it is difficult to pin down the exact structure and operation of Boko Haram, Nigerian sources have said that the group has evolved into a cell-like structure with a 30 member governing council.[36] Each council member is responsible for a cell with each cell having a different operational purpose or geographic area. Decisions are made by the council, but leader Abubakar Shekau also makes decisions without consulting the council, although this appears to be occurring less frequently.[37] Additionally, following the death of Boko Haram's founder, Mohammed Yusuf in 2009, leadership of the organization was divided between his two deputies Abubakar Shekau and Mamman Nur as well as a third associate Khalid al-Barnawi.[38] Subsequently, however, Nur and al-Barnawi split from Shekau in protest of his excessive killing of Muslims to establish the Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands, commonly called Ansaru. The relationship between Boko Haram and Ansaru appears to be fluid with the groups cooperating to various extents since 2009. This is evidenced by several incidences which bear the marks of both groups, such as the 2014 Chibok kidnapping of over 200 school girls which bore resemblance to previous Ansaru operations, but was publicly claimed by Shekau and Boko Haram.[39]

In terms of tracing Boko Haram's history, it is, in fact, a challenge to ascribe actions specifically to the group due to Nigeria's weak institutional structure, the largely corrupt and incompetent Nigerian police, and the propensity for the government to ascribe any domestic disturbance to Boko Haram. Additionally, many have argued that President Goodluck Jonathan used Boko Haram more as a distraction for political opportunity to pull attention away from unpopular tax increases and

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Campbell, John. *U.S. Policy to Counter Nigeria's Boko Haram*: Council on Foreign Relations, November 2014.
   Web. Council Special Report No. 70.
[39] Ibid.

opposition.[40] Furthermore, evidence of Boko Haram appealing to individual's socialization and situational factors can be found in analyzing its actions.

Boko Haram had its initial beginnings in 2002 when an offshoot of a radical Islamist youth group in Maiduguri declared the city intolerably corrupt and irreparable. It embarked on a "*hijra*" to Kanama in Yobe State and established a separatist community. From 2003 to 2006 the group returned to Maiduguri where a new leader, Mohammed Yusuf established a mosque, the Ibn Taimiyyah Masjid, in the center of the town. Yusuf also pushed the group to expand into other states including Bauchi, Yobe, and Niger state. The group was able to attract a substantial number of followers and construct its own state within a state by offering welfare handouts, food and shelter, according to observers. Many of the people who benefited from these services were refugees from wars in Chad and jobless Nigerian youths. These initial beginnings indicate that Boko Haram did indeed use Islam to portray the government as a physical and psychological threat. Additionally, the group appealed to situational factors by establishing their autonomous government which provided social services.

On the eve of presidential elections in 2007, Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam was murdered while praying at the Ndimi mosque in Maiduguri. Sheikh Ja'afar was a popular cleric and respected figure of the Islamic establishment in Northern Nigeria. His assassination was determined to have been conducted at the behest of Mohammed Yusuf after Sheikh Ja'afar had begun to criticize the group for its hardline ideology and predictions of future clashes with the state. This marks a turning point for many in the history of Boko Haram as it marks the point where many believe Boko Haram could no longer be absorbed into the mainstream of the Islamic movement in Northern Nigeria. It essentially marked Boko Haram's permanent departure from more institutional forms of Islam and indicated that Boko Haram possessed moral and normative filters which differed greatly from mainstream Islam.

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[40] Walker 2012.

The Bauchi government responded with a massive and brutal crackdown with arrests of over 700 members. A similar crackdown was adopted in Maiduguri after Boko Haram members controlled the town for 3 days following an initial attempt by the police to surround the group's mosque. Dozens of people were arrested and executed without trial including Mohammed Yusuf and his father-in-law. Another heavy-handed response by the Nigerian government was seen in 2013 in Baga. In Baga, the government is accused of killing over 200 people, very few of which are suspected of having actually been members of Boko Haram, and arresting hundreds more. These violent and extrajudicial tactics have been largely unproductive and have perhaps helped to strengthen Boko Haram.[41] Indeed many citizens of Maiduguri and Kano claim to be more frightened of security forces than they are of Boko Haram. These events have been used by Boko Haram to paint the government as an external threat to northerners and influence cognitive schemas to interpret situational factors to select social scripts resulting in violent action.

Despite the growth of Boko Haram, several attempts have been made by the government to negotiate with the organization, but none have succeeded. The situation is complicated by the splintered structure of the organization, which makes it difficult to find a representative to negotiate with. Additionally, most negotiations are followed by internal purges by the organization, suggesting any negotiations likely do not have the support of top leadership. Further complicating the situation are the fact that many of Boko Haram's stated demands are impossible or contradictory. The eventual fate of Boko Haram is also debated. John Campbell again weighs in on the possible outcomes for Boko Haram. He believes there are five possibilities for Boko Haram:[42]

1. Burn out due to internal divisions and casualties
2. Crushed by the state
3. Evolve into the mini-state it desires
4. Continue smoldering
5. Negotiations could reintroduce moderates into the mainstream and isolate radicals

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[41] Walker 2012.
[42] Ibid.

All in all, since 2002 over 30,000 deaths can be attributed to the conflicts surrounding Boko Haram. Figure 5 displays deaths per month and cumulative deaths while Figure 6 displays the deaths according to actors in the conflict. Additionally, Figure 7 shows that the vast majority of deaths have occurred in the northern states, particularly Borno state.
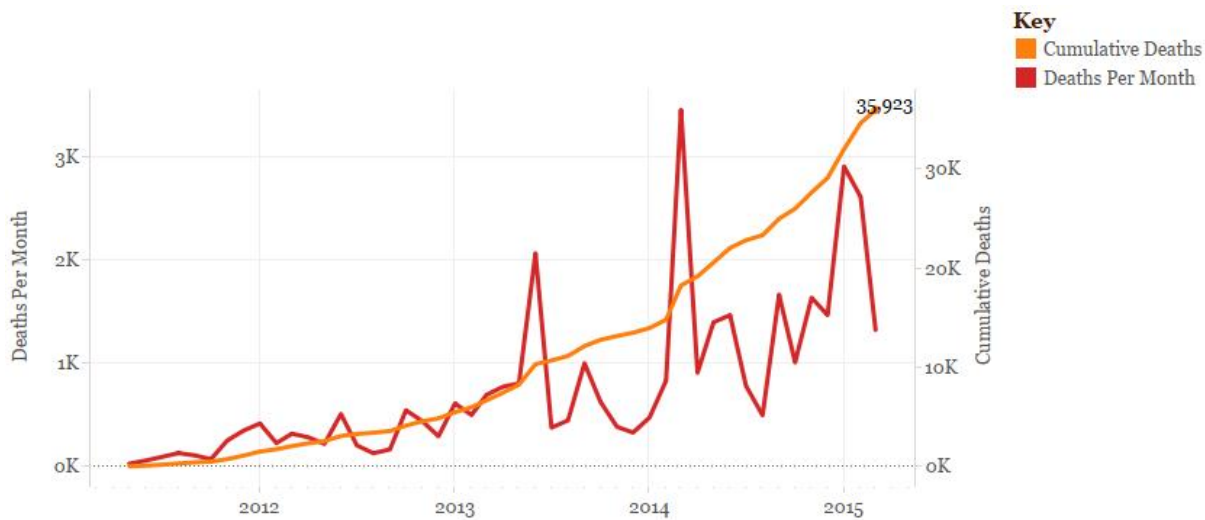

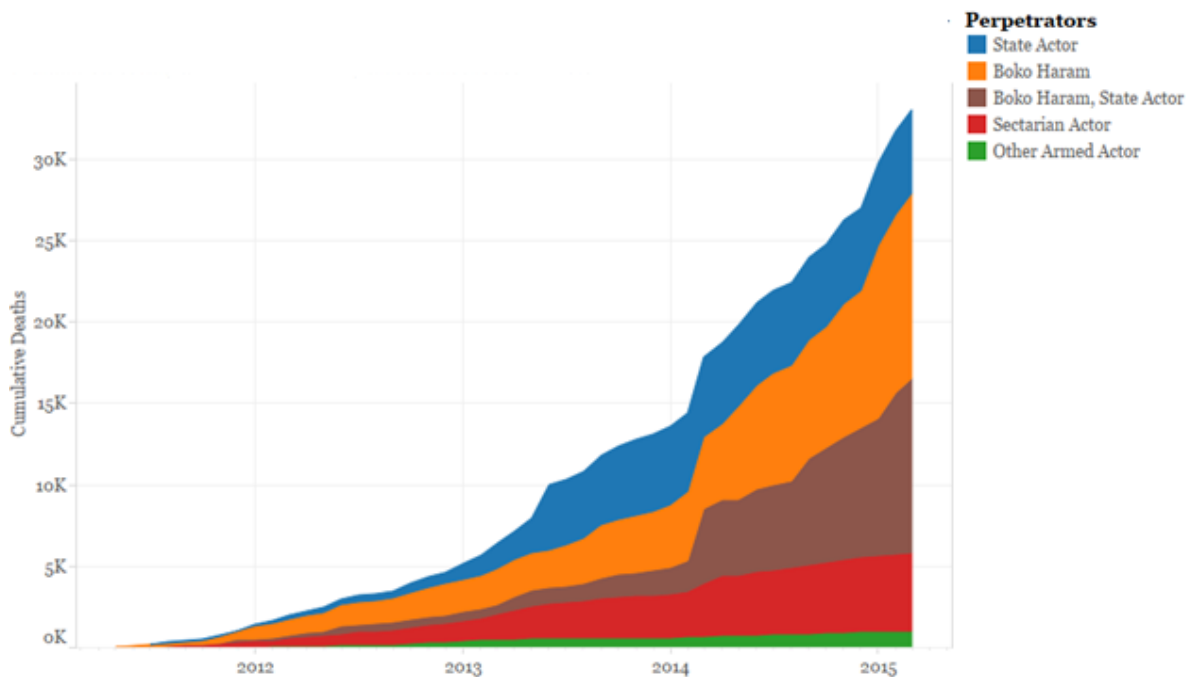*Figure 5: Deaths per month and cumulative deaths. Source: Council on Foreign Relations Nigeria Security Tracker*

Figure 6: Deaths by actor: Source: Council on Foreign Relations Nigeria Security Tracker

The map depicts deaths by state. Nigeria's northeastern states have been hit the hardest. Borno is the epicenter of Boko Haram related violence with over 14,000 media-documented deaths.

Date
May 2011 to March 2015
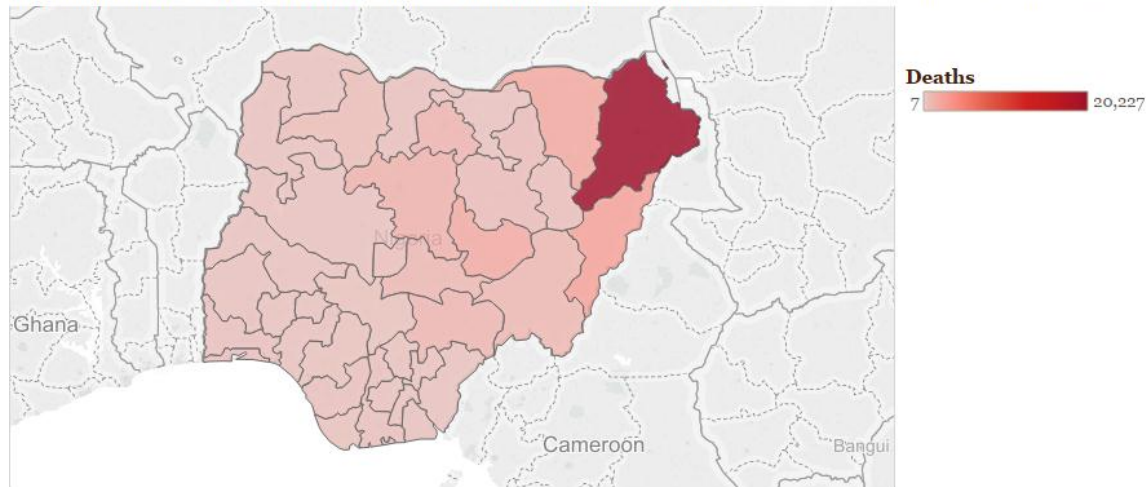
Deaths
7 — 20,227

Figure 5: Map depicting deaths by state. Source: Council on Foreign Relations Nigeria Security Tracker

In summary, despite isolated incidences of attacks targeted toward international interests, it does not appear that Boko Haram is focused nor capable of largely attacking western interests or overthrowing western authority in general. At first glance it appears that conflicts in Nigeria stem from religious differences. While this undoubtedly plays a role, the primary driver behind violence is more likely political frustrations caused by a group asserting governmental control over a very "heterogeneous and ethnically diverse part of Nigeria".[43,44] The Nigerian government, due to capacity problems, often adopts a reactionary rather than proactive approach to controlling and addressing dissent. Usually these reactionary measures are knee-jerk, indiscriminant, and over-reactive. The group is likely to continue to attack domestic 'soft targets' in response to political oppression and widespread corruption of the government. Boko Haram broadly believes that the government, especially the regional plateau government under Jonah Jang, has been taken over by corrupt and impure half-Muslims. Ultimately, the conflict with radical groups like Boko Haram may appear to be local difficulties but could be masking larger regional rifts between the north and south.

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Agbiboa, Daniel E. "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 3.1 (2013): 144-57. *Project MUSE [Indiana University UP]*. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

U.S. Interests in Nigeria

Weak states…can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders

-White House Office of the President, 2002

While many analysts concede that Boko Haram does not pose a direct threat to the United States presently, there are significant indirect threats the organization poses, particularly in its ability to degrade the Nigerian government and foment ethnic and religious discord. [45],[46] These capabilities should illicit three primary concerns for the United States in regards to Boko Haram. First, the insurgency could threaten U.S interests due to the role Nigeria and its stability play in Africa religious and geo-politics. Second, the U.S should be concerned with preventing the further development and internationalization of Boko Haram. Finally, the U.S. should be concerned with securing U.S. interests and property in Nigeria. In the following discussion, arguments will be made in favor of these three primary concerns in an effort to prove that the United States should have a vested interest in resolving the conflict.

At a population of 175 million, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. It is also the largest contributor as a percentage of budget for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU).[47] Additionally, Nigeria boasts the largest economy of Africa at $521 billion and produces 2.5 million barrels of oil per day making it the thirteenth largest oil producer in the world.[48] These characteristics make Nigeria a major player in sub-Saharan geopolitics, earning it the

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[45] Campbell 2014.
[46] Walker 2012.
[47] Campbell 2014.
[48] U.S. Energy Information Administration.

nickname the, "giant of Africa." Nigeria also occupies a pivotal role in the Muslim world as a nation

exhibiting two equally represented faiths coexisting. Indeed Nigeria sits along a major religious divide of

Africa, representing a pivotal state between the coexistence of Christianity and Islam in Africa.[49]

Furthermore, the country has also historically been a strategic partner with the United States and at

times been an avenue for U.S. policy in Africa.[50] As a result, political instability in Nigeria could have far-

reaching consequences for the stability of Africa. A successful challenge to the Nigerian government

could destabilize the region and provide a base for jihadist groups hostile to Western interests, fuel a

humanitarian crisis, and discredit democratic aspirations elsewhere in Africa.[51] Indeed, if Boko Haram is

successful in creating an autonomous state in Borno state, it could become a breeding ground and

launching pad for operations far more damaging than those currently. Related to the U.S. interests in

maintaining a strong Nigeria is the U.S. interest in a weakened Boko Haram.

To date, Boko Haram's attacks have mostly been targeted toward domestic interests. Several

exceptions exist however, including the 2011 attack on the UN compound in Abuja, and recent

excursions into neighboring Cameroon. While it presently appears that Boko Haram mainly poses a

verbal threat to the United States due to lack of capability and will, the possibility still exists that if linked

to other radical Islamist groups, Boko Haram could facilitate or commit attacks against United States or

international interests. While uncertainty exists as to the depth or consistency of connections to other

movements, several cases of Boko Haram interacting with other organizations are documented.

Specifically, cooperation between Boko Haram, al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

and al Shabaab have been observed.[52] The U.S. intelligence community in 2008 stated that, "AQIM

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[49] Paden 2008.
[50] Campbell 2014.
[51] Ibid.
[52] United States. Cong. House. Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Committee on Homeland
    Security. *Boko Haram: Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland*. 112th Cong., 1st sess. H. Doc. 112-B. Dec.
    2011. Print.

traditionally has operated in Algeria and northern Mali and has recruited and trained an unknown, but probably small, number of extremists from Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria, Mauritania, Libya and other countries."[53] These links between Boko Haram and AQIM have also been confirmed by the Algerian intelligence services. Additionally, a news storm was created in March 2015 when Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS via an online video by Abubakar Shekau, suggesting that Boko Haram may become a 'franchised' branch of ISIS.[54] Furthermore, reports suggest that joint training between Boko Haram and other organizations could be occurring in Mauritania.[55] These reported connections between Boko Haram and various other radical organizations suggests that the United States should take a vested interest in the degradation of Boko Haram to prevent a potential pan-African terror network from developing.

The final argument for U.S. action in response to Boko Haram is concerned with U.S. interests and property in Nigeria. In terms of business relations, in 2012 Nigeria imported $6.5 billion worth of goods from the United States with $1.1 billion coming from agricultural imports while U.S. foreign direct investment in Nigeria was $8.2 billion in 2012, a 53.6% increase from 2011.[56] Additionally, in May 2007, protesters in the Niger Delta overran an oil pipeline, cutting Nigerian oil production by 30% while three pipelines were bombed later that month by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, further reducing production by 100,000 barrels a day for an Italian oil firm.[57] These combined efforts caused the price of oil to rise by $0.72 in New York.[58] Thus while these disruptions were limited in their

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Almasy, Steve, and Evan Perez. "Boko Haram Purportedly Pledges Allegiance to ISIS." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 9 Mar. 2015. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

[55] Zimmerman, Malia. "Terror Triumvirate: ISIS, Al Qaeda, And Boko Haram Training Together in Mauritania: Analyst." *Fox News*. FOX News Network, 23 Mar. 2015. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.

[56] Office of the United States Trade Representative. Nigeria Country Report

[57] *Boko Haram: Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland*

[58] Ibid.

effects, a well-coordinated attack on oil facilities by Boko Haram could cause substantial price shocks, especially due to fears of further regional instability.

All in all, it can be seen that the United States has a deep vested interest in the security of the Nigerian government and in combatting Boko Haram. The primary factors driving this vested interest are the role Nigeria plays in Africa as a regional and religious power, the possible internationalization of Boko Haram, and U.S. economic interests in Nigeria.

Policy Alternatives

Primum est ut non nocere
(First is to do no harm)

-Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689)[59]

Having discussed the factors in the cognitive process model, the analogous factors used by Boko Haram, and U.S. interests in Nigeria, a brief survey of counterterrorism alternatives will be conducted. After analyzing the broad policy alternatives, a specific recommendation will be made.

Policy Alternatives

Broadly, counterterrorism methods can be divided into two categories, military and non-military. A military response from the United States would consist of deployment of combat troops and operations. Within a military response, there are many specific strategies and policy adoptions. However, a military response from the United States against Boko Haram is highly discouraged for several reasons. First, while Boko Haram poses large indirect threats to the United States and its political goals in Africa, it currently poses no material, direct threat to the United States itself. Combat operations in Nigeria would take U.S. lives and property from safety and put them in immediate danger. Up to this point in time, Boko Haram's focus has been on Nigeria and its surrounding territory; attacks on international interests have been minimal. Secondly, combat operations in Nigeria would receive very little, if any international support as evidenced by the failure of the international community to rally around even more violent and deadly religious situations such as the Syrian civil war. In fact, they would greatly damage the United States' credibility and standing in the world, and likely produce

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[59] Smith, C. M. "Origin and Uses of Primum Non Nocere--Above All, Do No Harm!" *The Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 45.4 (2005): 371-77. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

responses from state and non-state actors, as in the case of the unilateral action the United States

undertook in Iraq. As a result of these factors, military responses will not be discussed since they are

strongly discouraged in the present situation.

The second broad category of counterterrorism responses can be termed non-military

responses. These can include a host of actions in various realms of society and government. For

example, the United States could initiate economic programs to boost opportunities in northern Nigeria,

or fiscal programs to help prevent funding of Boko Haram or fiscally isolate corrupt officials in Nigeria.

Non-violent responses could also be diplomatic. For example, negotiations with Boko Haram leadership

could be sought out. Additionally a non-violent response could be to push or help the Nigerian

government to pursue reforms. To aid the Nigerian military, non-combat troops could be deployed in

an advisory capacity or provide humanitarian aid. In summary, just like military responses can take

countless forms, non-military responses can be targeted toward many different social functions and can

be implemented in a variety of programs. A specific non-violent response for the United States to

undertake will be presented below.

Policy Recommendation

Above all, as Campbell suggests, given the political situation in Nigeria, the quote at the

beginning of this section should be the overriding theme for Washington in responding to Boko Haram.[60]

A non-military response which weighs costs and security benefits for the United States and is targeted at

addressing the three causes of terrorism as outlined in the cognitive process model is suggested. One

immediate term and two long term programs are suggested to respond to Boko Haram. The immediate

term program is to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict. The two long term

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[60] Campbell 2014.

programs are 1) encourage and facilitate culturally competent community policing strategies and 2) provide training and support to secure the Cameroonian border.

In the short term, the United States can only influence the conflict on the peripheries without exposing itself to greater danger. As a result, the only action that is recommended for the United States in the present moment is to provide humanitarian assistance. Northern Nigeria, and in particular Borno state, have been disproportionally affected by the conflict with Boko Haram (as evidenced by Figure 7). By 2015, over 1.5 million had been displaced by the conflict with Boko Haram.[61] The result of this has been a massive humanitarian crisis which has disproportionally affected children. Over 300 schools have been attacked or destroyed and reports have surfaced that Boko Haram has begun using children as human shields or soldiers.[62] As a result, an immediate effort should focus on providing safe areas for refugees and especially children. Additionally, less than 40% of health facilities in northern states remain operational, greatly exacerbating deaths from the conflict.[63] A second focus of humanitarian aid should be to establish emergency care facilities to help cover the shortfall of medical care. However, security of the humanitarian workers and facilities will be a major concern as they are likely to be a target for Boko Haram. As a result, the United States should continue to support UN resolutions establishing aid to the Nigerian government and work to ensure that humanitarian efforts will be protected. This aid could be administered through UN channels, in cooperation with other nations, or unilaterally.

As the time horizon lengthens, the United States has a greater capability to influence the situation. Washington's influence could be particularly helpful in addressing one of the major criticisms

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[61] Hinshaw, D., & Akingbule, G. (2015, Jan 05). Boko haram extends its grip in Nigeria; Islamist insurgency overruns villages and army base in northeast, reflecting failures of military, multinational efforts. *Wall Street Journal (Online)*

[62] Justice, Adam. "Nigeria: Humanitarian Situation is 'dire' under Boko Haram Threat." *International Business Times*. International Business Times, 30 Mar. 2015. Web. 06 Apr. 2015.

[63] Ibid.

and sustaining forces behind Boko Haram, namely the government's heavy-handed reactions. Given

that Nigeria has an ethnically diverse population, strengthening current community-based policing

strategies could be beneficial. Community policing can be defined as a partnership between the

community and police with open lines of communication and a dedication by both parties to work

together.[64] President Obasanjo launched a community policing program in 2004 in several pilot districts

which saw moderate success. Even though community members reported a reduced fear of crime and

officers reported increased knowledge of communities under the community policing initiative, lack of

funding, high levels of corruption, and community distrust have all greatly hindered further

implementation. [65,66] In fact, by 2010 only 2.8% of police stations were fully practicing community

policing.[67] As a result, given the success but minimal implementation of community policing programs,

the United States, via USAID or another agency, should facilitate a program to expand community

policing strategies for the Nigerian police force. Additionally, if a cultural competency component is

included in community policing programs, tensions between the government police forces and citizens

could be further relieved. An example of a potential program is presented in the Appendix.

The final policy to adopt is concerned with isolating Boko Haram and helping to prevent it from

cooperating with other organizations. Recent developments have shown that Boko Haram has

expanded operations into northern Cameroon, threatening a regionalization of the conflict. This

suggests that a strengthening of the Cameroonian border with Nigeria is needed to prevent incursions

into Cameroon. Additionally, since many Nigerian refugees have relocated to Cameroon, strengthening

the border would help to protect humanitarian assets. The United States could accomplish this goal of

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[64] Mastrofski, Stephen D. "Varieties of Community Policing". *American Journal of Police* **12** (3) (1993): 65-77
[65] "Community Policing: The Nigeria Experience." United Kingdom Department for International Development,
      2010. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.
[66] Okeshola, Folashade B., and Patience E.U Mudiare. "Community Policing in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects."
      American International Journal of Contemporary Research 3.7 (2013): 134-38. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.
[67] "Community Policing: The Nigeria Experience."

strengthening the Cameroonian border by offering training and resources via U.S. Customs and Border

Patrol or other federal agencies.

As previously stated, each of these policies seeks to engage Boko Haram to the extent the

United States' interests warrant involvement. The short term recommendation, providing humanitarian

aid, helps to reset the situational factors, thereby influencing the cognitive process. The first long term

recommendation, community policing programs, seeks to influence the socialization process and the

normative and moral filters. The final long term recommendation on the other hand influences the

rational decision-making process. Combining all three factors in the cognitive process will greatly

degrade individuals' desire to support Boko Haram and will help to degrade their capabilities over the

long term.

Concluding Remarks

*The terrorist is fundamentally an altruist: he believes in serving a "good" cause
designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency – whether real or
imagined – that the terrorist and his organization purport to represent*[68]

-Bruce Hoffman

Boko Haram emerged near the turn of the millennium from a radicalized youth group under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf. However, the factors and events leading to the group's inception can be traced back before the creation of the Nigerian state.

The first section of this report proposed a cognitive process model to frame how and why individuals may join a terrorist organization. This model combines environmental factors (in the short and long term) with psychological and rational factors to illustrate how individuals make decisions under bounded rationality. This model was then used to analyze the long-term socialization and short-term situational factors at play. It was also shown that the differences established in Nigeria's early history were carried through and reinforced by British colonization, ultimately leading to an unstable state. This state collapsed at the first disturbance, throwing the country into civil war. Emerging from this civil war was a government marked by military rule and rife with corruption, a trait that has carried through to today. However, after decades of repression, democracy reemerged. It was quickly challenged though by the ethnic and religious division of its people as well as the differences in political power and economic opportunity between the north and south.

These differences laid the groundwork for a violent radicalization of northern Nigerian Muslims. The result of this has been a trail of death and destruction affecting the 175 million Nigerians living in

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[68] Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2006. 37. Print.

the country. While these events have yet to directly affect the United States, they indirectly threaten our efforts in Africa and could greatly destabilize the most influential country in sub-Saharan Africa.

Policy alternatives for the United States to address Boko Haram include either military or non-military intervention, but given the current circumstances, it was determined that military intervention is inappropriate. The resulting non-military policies which are recommended for the United States to undertake include one short-term policy, humanitarian aid, and two long-term policies. These long-term policies are facilitating community policing programs with an emphasis on cultural competency and helping to isolate Boko Haram by strengthening the Cameroonian border.

As Nigeria stands following its first ever democratic transition of power to an opposition party, much work remains to be done. The government has thousands of citizens to protect, thousands more to provide for, and must do it in the most expedient and prudent manner possible. However, if newly elected President Muhammadu Buhari holds true to his promise that, "Boko Haram will soon know the strength of our collective will and commitment to rid this nation of terror, and bring back peace and normalcy to all the affected areas," the United States should aid in the fulfillment of this commitment and Nigerians should stand hopeful for a peaceful and unified country.[69]

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[69] Magnowski, Daniel. "Buhari Promises Campaign to Crush Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Bloomberg.com*. Bloomberg, 1 Apr. 2015. Web. 06 Apr. 2015.

Appendix

Table 1: Example of a Culturally Competent Policing Program.

Source:
Rice, Mitchell F. "A Framework for Utilizing Cultural Competency in Community Policing: Serving Immigrant and Culturally/Linguistically Diverse Communities." Counter Terrorism in Diverse Communities. Ed. Sıddık Ekici. Amsterdam: IOS, 2011. 166. Print.