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## Boko Haram insurgency: Tactics and evolving operational strategies in Northern Nigeria

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#### Abstract

Boko Haram, which translates from Hausa to mean ‘Western Education is forbidden,’ has ignominiously attracted negative attention and publicity from many quarters in Nigeria and the international community at large. Indeed, the organisation is arguably one of the significant security concerns confronting the Nigerian State. This has undoubtedly created an atmosphere of fear and terror, especially among Nigerians in the North. Generally, their activities threaten the very fabric of the country’s unity, prosperity, and stability. The paper is a desk study, drawing heavily from secondary sources of data and analysing it using the thematic method. It examines the evolution, operational, and tactical transformation of Boko Haram from a small, localised group into a violent Islamic insurgent group with better coordination and sophistication. Findings show that the strategic and tactical flexibility of the group’s operations is peculiar to all asymmetrical warfare. It, therefore, recommends that the Nigerian government intensify its counter-insurgency war while also exploring the option of expanding the counter-insurgency war beyond the military option to include addressing the socio-economic realities in Northern Nigeria, such as unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, insurgency, Islamic State, Northern Nigeria, terrorism



### Public Interest Statement

Boko Haram, which has Hausa origin means ‘Western Education is forbidden,’ and has ignominiously generated a lot of negative attention and publicity from many sectors in Nigeria and globally. The study addresses the tactics and operational strategies of Boko-Haram in the Northern Nigeria. Though many scholars have carried out studies in this subject matter but they have only been concerned about the causes and effects, neglecting the tactics and the operational strategies by the Boko-Haram insurgency which this work is out to address.

### Introduction

Religious violence is not a new phenomenon in Northern Nigeria. It has been an unfortunate part of Nigeria’s chequered post-independence history and political experiment (Kukah, 1999). To be sure, Nigeria’s unending quest to resolve her ‘National Question’ since attaining flag independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, consistently sabotaged by convoluted federal and political structures, remains the root cause of all sectorial conflicts in the country. This conundrum accounts for numerous losses of lives and property in the country. Indeed, this legacy of violence and wanton killings has, in recent times assumed dangerous and troubling dimensions, particularly in Northern Nigeria, through the campaigns of the Boko Haram group (Osaghea, 2002). In effect, the dramatic escalation in intensity of this mayhem has attracted the interest of scholars and policymakers around the world.

Some scholars attribute the high incidences of violence in Northern Nigeria to political instability in the country, rooted in corruption and misgovernance/leadership failure (Lalude, 2005; Osasona, 2022). Other scholars have argued that economic marginalization and lack of social inclusiveness have fuelled militancy and accounted for the spate of violence in that region (Mbah, 2016). The latter argument is often justified based on the northeast, where the operations of Boko Haram are more pronounced being the most impoverished region in the country resulting in massive human insecurity (Dowd, 2017). Still, other studies have ascribed the combination of politics and poverty to the Boko Haram debacle (Onapajo, 2012). Admittedly, what cannot be faulted by any of the above studies is that Boko Haram is the most besetting security challenge currently confronting Nigeria with serious implications for the political, economic, and social structures of the state. A close look at these underlying causes of violence in Nigeria shows that they are well articulated under the Sustainable Development Goals initiative. For instance, SDG 1 addresses the issue of poverty, SDG 8 targets inclusive-sustainable economic growth, SDG 11 draws attention to the safety of cities and human settlements, and SDG 16 aims to promote peace, justice, and accountable institutions at all levels (Azumah, 2015).

However, what appears to be the most tenable and agreeable factor explaining the outbreak of unrest and hostility in Northern Nigeria is ethnoreligious cleavages in the country (Fasakin, 2017). Nigeria is aggressively divided along ethnic and religious lines, a notorious legacy of colonial administration’s divide-and-rule strategy, which continues to feature prominently in the country’s post-independence history. In short, the evolution of Boko Haram, an extremist Islamic group based in north-eastern Nigeria which began its full operations in 2009, following a riot in Maiduguri that killed over 800 people (D’Amato, 2017), is attributable to this phenomenon of religious bigotry. Even though the specific goals and demands of Boko Haram are controversial, the central idea driving its campaign in the country includes the repudiation of the state’s secular identity, abhorrence of Western education, and the quest to Islamise the nation (Aghedo and Osumah, 2012). Accordingly, the sect’s mission statement betrays the overriding agenda of Islamisation of the country:

We will never accept any system of government apart from the one stipulated by Islam because that is the only way that Muslims can be liberated. We will not respect the Nigerian government because

it is illegal. We will continue to fight its military and the police because they are not protecting Islam. We do not believe in the Nigerian judicial system and we will fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities (Agbiboa, 2013).

There are controversial analyses about the root of the Boko Haram insurgency as well as its enduring existence. On the one hand, some emphasise its Salafist ideology while most emphasise structural elements such as religion, politics, and economy (Aleksander and Popławski, 2019). *Salafi ideology is an important ideological component of the global jihad*. According to Baffa, Vest, Chan, and Fanlo (2019), Islamic fundamentalism is part and parcel of the Salafi ideology. Therefore, it is not strange that Salafi-jihadist groups present their narratives in historical and religious frameworks, infusing them with the ideas of Muslim resilience, injustice, and religious justification for violence to achieve socio-political objectives and defend Islam. In addition to these concerns, Salafi-jihadists often tend towards extremism by expressing their concerns against socio-political and economic grievances (Ike et al, 2022; Thurston, 2017). This buttresses why young Muslims turn to Salafi-jihadism for diverse economic and socio-political reasons. Salafist-jihadist terrorist groups pledge allegiance to AL-Qaeda or ISIS. Boko Haram is a Salafi-jihadist group that operates in northern Nigeria. The organisation believes that politics has been hijacked by both corrupt Muslims and other infidels (religions). Therefore, its Salafist Jihadist ideology goal is to overthrow the Nigerian government and then create a pure Islamic state ruled by Sharia law (Kozera and Poplawki, 2019).

To be sure, this overriding mission of Boko Haram has defined its entire operation since its inception. It has targeted the institutions of the Nigerian state at various levels, attacked both indigenes and non-indigenes; Christian churches as well as mosques in the North kidnapped students and burnt down schools in the process, broken into prisons, and destroyed police stations as well as military barracks, attacked bus stations as well as gas stations, assassinated leaders who are opposed to their mission, and threatened to make the country ungovernable (Jonathan, 2015). Consequently, Akinola (2015, 1-2) argued that an estimated ten to twenty thousand local and foreign nationals have lost their lives to Boko Haram's violent attacks in the period covering 2005 to 2015. Campbell and Harwood (2018) note that over 37,530 have been killed in incidences involving Boko Haram between June 2011 to June 2018. It bears mentioning that many thousands of others have been seriously injured, uprooted from their homes, internally displaced, and or forced to take refuge in neighbouring countries (Akinola, 2015).

In achieving these heinous missions, the sect has, especially in recent times, engaged in highly sophisticated and coordinated approaches. They have evolved from using firearms during riots to planting explosives to suicide bombers, guerrilla warfare, and recently to high-scale kidnap as forms of instrumentalisation of violence (Beccaro, 2018). According to Perouse de Montclos (2016, p. 879), Boko Haram has evolved through four principal phases of recruitment, as strategies to spread their ideology: firstly, a period of preaching (*da'wah*), riots and uprisings under Mohammed Yusuf covering the period, 2003 and 2009; secondly, degeneration into terrorism under Abubakar Shekau covering largely 2010; thirdly, a transition into a guerrilla-like movement after the declaration of emergency rule in North-Eastern Nigeria in 2013; and fourthly, an expansion of attacks after the launch of an international coalition made up of the armies of the countries in the Lake Chad region in 2015 (Kinsey and Krieg, 2021).

On this note, the article seeks to contribute to the existing literature on Boko Haram by identifying innovative patterns and recurring strategies of the group's operations in Nigeria vis-à-vis their international counterparts. It focuses on the interacting patterns or the relationship between Boko Haram's evolving strategies and the prospects/advancement of the group. It argues that the current

strategies and indeed, evolutionary patterns of international terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) can become a constant model to both understand and predict Boko Haram's evolving strategies for the instrumentalisation of violence. Based on this analytical premise, the Nigerian government and its security agencies, in conjunction with their international security partners, can determine with a level of accuracy the future strategies of Boko Haram and pre-empt any imminent dangers they may pose (Albert, 2021). Therefore, this article seeks to advance literature by establishing the link between Boko Haram's operations and the campaigns of other international terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, observing familiar patterns, and thereafter making recommendations that could help tackle future policy direction to accommodate these emerging trends.

Following this introduction, the article proceeds with the literature review where conceptual clarifications of terrorism, insurgency, strategy, and tactics are done. It is followed by an analysis of the evolution of the Boko Haram movement from a religion to a terrorist group. The third section presents the methodology adopted in the study. The fourth discusses the theoretical framework adopted in the study. The fifth section addresses the results and discussion of the findings of the study which underscores the underlying causes of Boko Haram's terrorism in Nigeria and the operational dynamics of the sect. The last segment concludes the essay while proffering policy-relevant recommendations linked to specific SDGs.

## 1. Main Text

### i. Conceptualizing Terrorism, Insurgency, Strategy and Tactics

#### *Terrorism*

Perhaps, no concept in recent times has been subjected to the rigour of academic scrutiny as the concept of terrorism. Terrorism has affected negatively the socio-economic development in the society (Joshua & Chidozie, 2021) and this has led to more interest academic research. This interest could be attributable to the fact that the subject of terrorism affects every stratum of human society. Despite the avalanche of existing literature on the subject matter, scholars, policymakers, and students of international relations alike have yet to arrive at a consensus on a comprehensive definition of terrorism. To be sure, what accounts for the lack of consensus about terrorism is commonly seen in the mantra, that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist (Iyekekpolo, 2016). Thus, terrorism has been viewed from different perspectives by various scholars, often mirroring the motivations of the terrorists, depending on the academic orientation of the former. Indeed, terrorism could be motivated by politics, economics, ideology, religion, and culture.

Okoli and Lenshie (2022) view terrorism as premeditated violence intended to have a psychological influence on politically relevant behaviour. This definition agrees with that of Casaca (2017, 29), who argues, that the only scientific understanding of terrorism revolves around the use or threat of physical harm to achieve a disproportionately large psychological effect. For Kydd and Walter (2006, p. 52), terrorism is the use of violence against civilians by non-state actors to attain political goals. Talibova and Wayne (2017, p. 5) observed that terrorism is 'violence or the threat of violence by a non-state actor directed at non-combatant targets, designed to influence an audience beyond the specific target, for some political purpose.

In a specific context, Phillips (2015, p.227) inferred that 'the key elements in widely accepted definitions of terrorism include: intentional violence, that the violence is used to spread fear in a wider audience and political motivation'. It becomes apparent from the above definitions that the variable of political motivation underpins every act of terrorism. This has led Ozdamar (2008, p. 90) to conclude that there is a modest agreement in the literature about defining terrorism as a form of political struggle,

although no real consensus has emerged. The United Nations-sponsored working definition of terrorism sums up this general agreement on the underlying political motivation for terrorism. It will guide our understanding of the concept in this study.

Without attempting a comprehensive definition of terrorism, it would be useful to delineate some broad characteristics of the phenomenon. Terrorism is, in most cases, essentially a political act. It is meant to inflict dramatic and deadly injury on civilians and to create an atmosphere of fear, generally for a political or ideological (whether secular or religious) purpose. Terrorism is a criminal act, but it is more than mere criminality. To overcome the problem of terrorism, it is necessary to understand its political nature as well as its basic criminality and psychology. The United Nations needs to address both sides of this equation (Parli and Fischer, 2020).

### *Insurgency*

While there is no accepted definition of terrorism in international law, insurgency, as a concept, by its very nature is very ambiguous. This is because many revolts including terrorism and insurgency could be fought by various methods such as counter-insurgency, political and economic sabotage, propaganda, and other forms of unconventional warfare like a guerrilla war. DOD (2007, p.1) defines insurgency as an organized movement intended to overthrow a duly constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. For the avoidance of doubt, the definition of insurgency advanced by the United States Department of Defense (DOD) will guide the view portrayed in this study. Galula (1958, p. 4) defined insurgency as “a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order.” This definition focuses more on the methods and outcome of the actions taken by the insurgents rather than the motivation or morality behind the attacks. This, to a large extent, describes the general understanding in the literature regarding the Boko Haram group, whose motives have been very sketchy.

### *Strategy*

Strategy in the context of this study is taken to mean the arrangement by which a terrorist group seeks to engage and use its resources to achieve its politically determined purpose (Olaniyan and Asuelime, 2014). Strategy in this sense will precede the operations of any terrorist group and will, to a reasonable extent, define the success or failure of such operations. Drawing this inference, Anjide and Momoh (2022) argued that when terrorism has succeeded, it was because they were used within the framework of a wider strategy (Agbiboa, 2013). Similarly, Cronin (2007) alluded to the intricate relationship between strategy and terrorism. He concluded that terrorism’s strategic logic is to draw sufficient energy from the nation-state to enable a weaker, non-state actor to accomplish its political aim (Aghedo and Osumah, 2012). To illustrate, Talibova and Wayne (2017, p.12) claimed that a strategy of provocation could be initiated to incite the enemy to respond to terrorism with excessive violence, which in turn radicalizes the population and moves them to support the terrorists. We saw this play out in the case of the Boko Haram sect; thus, distinct strategies could lead to different tactical choices.

### *Tactics*

Since strategy is involved in planning an attack, tactics should depict the methods employed during the execution of the attack. The essence of deploying appropriate tactics during operations by terrorist groups is to enable the organizations to achieve their stated or intended objectives. Drake (1998, p.54) was, therefore, correct to maintain that certain operations may require a greater degree of strategic planning while others may not. The result is the maximization of resources to achieve stated or identified

objectives. The tactics of terrorist movements include but are not limited to the following: armed robbery to gain supplies of weapons and money; military operations, or rather operations against the military, such as snipping, planting mines, etc. to raise the costs of repression; and kidnapping, selective assassination, and indiscriminate attacks in public places. These, in our assessment, depict the modus operandi of the Boko Haram group. It is essential to mention that terrorism as a tactic has been adopted by states. However, terrorism studies have been broadly silent on state terrorism. This constraint is based on the absence of an empirical understanding or investigation of the extent and nature of state terrorism (Blakeley, 2009). The absence of state terrorism from academic discourse promotes state hegemony, functions to promote particular kinds of state hegemonic projects, creates a legitimising public discourse for foreign and domestic policy, and deflects attention from the terroristic practices of states (Jackson, 2008).

ii. **Characterising the Boko Haram Insurgency: From Religion to Animosity**

It has already been alluded to earlier that the grain of religious ideological construct is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. As revealed in the existing literature, religious ideology characterised the Uthman Dan Fodio conquest in Northern Nigeria before colonialism. Dan Fodio, framed his actions on ideological grounds while regarding traditional rulers as apostates and distorters of Islam. The overturning of political Islam with the advent of colonialism piled up grievances against the status quo and efforts towards establishing the doctrines of political Islam continued among extreme Islamists (Akinola, 2015). These radical Islamists, with their grievances, metaphorised different Islamist groups under different political administrations after Nigeria's independence. Popular among such groups is the Maitatsine movement of the 1980s which sought to frame political goals with religious ideology. Little wonder why several pieces of literature compare and sometimes link the development of Boko Haram to the Maitatsine movement of the 80s (Casaca, 2017).

Although different works have offered some fascinating historical accounts of the Boko Haram phenomenon, a brief overview of these accounts is not out of place. Therefore, while tracing the genesis of Boko Haram and other religious, and ideological movement falls out of the scope of this chapter, it nevertheless aids the analysis of characterising the transformation of the subject matter.

There is discordance among existing literature as to the start date of the Boko Haram phenomenon; however, there is the consensus that the group garnered consciousness with a strong religious ideological mantra (Price, 1977). It emerged to facilitate the adoption of pious traditional Islamic practices in northern Nigeria. The group believes that the partial implementation of Sharia law and its subordination to the constitutional law of Nigeria mocks genuine Islamic doctrines.

Emerging from such a religious ideological stand-point and in a bid to influence the adoption of full Sharia law, the advocates of the movement marinated themselves in the local politics of Borno State, to the extent that Late Alhaji Buji Foyi a major financier of Boko Haram was made a commissioner for religious affairs. In contrast, Muhammed Yusuf, the founder of the sect was made a member of the Borno State Sharia Board. However, the resultant disappointment in the political class and the unfulfilled aspirations of Yusuf laid the foundation for a violent Islamic movement.

Yusuf and his followers withdrew support for the political class, while his followers migrated to Kanamma in Yobe State to live an isolated life away from 'modern immorality' in the pursuit of a life committed to Islam (Drake, 1998). Several clashes ensued between the sect and the police between 2003 and 2009. This culminated in the July 2009 police raiding of the Boko Haram members' residences in Bauchi State. It resulted in five days of rioting which spread from Bauchi into other states (Yobe, Borno, and Kano). Yusuf was captured and later found dead while in police custody (Casaca, 2017). This

formed the genesis of the radicalization of the sect (Cronin, 2007).

The deaths of Mohammed Yusuf and Alhaji Buji Foi in 2009 made members of Boko Haram flee into neighbouring countries (Niger, Chad, Cameroun, and Libya among others) where new sanctuaries were set up. It also created an avenue to affiliate and receive training from already established transnational terror groups such as al-Shabaab and al-Qaida in the Maghreb (Price, 1977). The resurgence of the Boko Haram sect in 2010 ushered in a monster that was to be the biggest security threat to the Nigerian state in its Fourth Republic. The group's operational tactics and objectives were transformed to reflect its growing links with international terrorist groups. It consequently evolved in its scope first from the local to the national, then to the regional level, while holding the ambition to metamorphose into the international level at large.

The initial plan to see the implementation of Sharia law within the localities of northern Nigeria took the form of violence and assassination of the political class as well as those perceived as involving in anti-genuine Islamic practices. With the constant crackdowns by the military, Boko Haram shifted anger towards the federal level and it showed its expanding range of targets when it first struck the Asokoro area of Abuja on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2010 and later struck the National Police Force headquarters and the United Nations building on June 6 and August 26, 2011, respectively (Agbiboa, 2013).

The initiative to expand the goals of the Multinational Joint Task Force to that of tackling Boko Haram terrorism in 2012 in the Lake Chad region, coupled with the need for survival among others shifted the sect's attention towards the region and further expanded the range of targets for the sect. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, the group launched its first attack outside the borders of Nigeria, when Six assailants kidnapped seven members of a French family in Dabanga village, in Cameroon (Pham, 2016). The group's introduction of hostage-taking, and kidnapping for ransom in 2013 (Akinola, 2015), and the capturing of territories in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states in 2012 signaled a shift in their agenda from influencing the adoption of traditional Islamic practices within the context of Salafism to a conventional terrorist (Aghedo, 2014). The kidnapping strategy became relevant in generating additional funds that were germane to the operationalisation of the sect. The pledging of allegiance to ISIS in 2015 and the resultant sophistication in propaganda and outreach substantiate the shift to a conventional terrorist method characterized by kidnapping, hostage-taking, bombing, and suicide attacks among others (Akinola, 2015).

The sect launched approximately 2418 attacks in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region between 2009 and 2017 and killed over 20328 people in the same period (Iyekekpolo, 2016). As evident in the table below, Nigeria and Cameroon recorded the highest number of attacks between 2009-2017, with 2087 and 233 attacks respectively.

**Table 1. Boko Haram Attacks/Suspected Attacks by Country 2009-2017. Source:**

Countries	Number of attacks
Burkina Faso	1
Cameroon	233
Chad	33
Mali	1
Niger	63
Nigeria	2087
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2418</b>

## 2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, the study engages secondary data publicly available for its intellectual exploration. While primary data has its place in research, the importance of secondary data cannot also be overruled. For this study, secondary data was adopted as it allows for the performance of longitudinal analysis which connotes that the studies are performed or spanned over a large period (Jackson, 2008). As such, it is deemed adequate for determining the different trends and evolution of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria. (Boslaugh, 2009). Secondary data utilised for this research were derived from already existing data derived from books, official statistics, journals, newspapers, official documents, and online publications of relevant agencies amongst others. These data are carefully interpreted using thematic analysis. This method will enable us to interpret the content, structure, and designs of similar literature to create a systematic synergy in the language, history, and cultural background of the Boko Haram sects. By so doing, the evolving patterns and recurring strategies of the group's operations will become clearer.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the resilience theory. Resilience as a concept is abstract and vague. According to Tierney (2015), there seems to be some ambiguity that allows for a spectrum of interpretations and also resists precise definitions. Resilience refers to “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully” (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014). Resilience theory, therefore, argues that “it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it” (Moore, 2022). There are various strands of the resilience theory. They are the shame resilience theory, family resilience theory, community resilience theory, and organisational resilience theory. Disputably, this theory is often connected to individuals. However, this study shows that it can be applied to organisations inclusive of terrorist organisations such as Boko Haram. Just as individuals develop resilience, organisations also rebound from and adapt to the challenges they face. According to Everly (2011), “organizational resilience can be thought of as “a ‘culture of resilience,’ which manifests itself as a form of ‘psychological immunity’” to incremental and transformational changes.”

The concept of resilience in academic documents on terrorism describes solutions to threats of terrorism and legalises counter-terrorism actions as positive. Contrary to the general stance, this study does not discuss resilience as the solution to the threat of terrorism. In this study, resilience is operationalised as the ability of terror groups to continue to take optimum risks and deal with difficulties. It connotes how operational resilience is adopted by terrorist groups for the sustenance of their existence despite counterinsurgency efforts of the national government and the global war against terrorism. This theory is deemed applicable as it discusses resilience as the basis for the sustained existence of the Boko Haram groups despite the various counter-insurgency strategies adopted by the governments of Nigeria. The culture of organizational resilience dwells critically on behaviours which include persisting in the face of adversity; practising and demonstrating self-aiding thought patterns; putting effort into dealing with challenges; mentoring and providing support to others; and showing decisiveness amongst others (Moore, 2019). In this light, Boko Haram has adopted innovation, increased its activities amidst counter-terroristic actions, and sailed through strategic challenges.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

### i. Al-Qaeda: Structure and Strategies

An evaluation of the analysis of al-Qaeda is essential to understanding the nature of their terrorist attacks. Al-Qaeda's ideology is rooted in Islamism. It advocates the restoration of Islam's lost glory



and the purification of Islam as in the time of the first four caliphs and Prophet Muhammad. As such, jihad is the first goal on its list. For al-Qaeda militants, Jihad has only one meaning which is the Holy War. Jihad emphasizes having courage and steadfastness to convey the message of Islam and removing treacherous rulers from power. The al-Qaeda outlook only refers to “the struggle in the name of Allah.” The organization’s militants consider there is no harm in protecting and proselytizing the Islamic religion by force of arms (Barber, 2015). The concept of “martyrdom” is the crucial idea of al-Qaeda ideology. Al-Qaeda demonstrates its identity as “the true believer” by referring to the existence of “the infidels”. Like Boko Haram, Muslims who hold ideologies that do not conform with those of al-Qaeda are not “real Muslims,” they are sinful, a threat to Islam, and must be killed. Similarly, the long-term objective is to demolish democracy. Democracy is a part in any government that helps in the participation, unity and development (Chidozie, & Orji, (2024). In this direction, democracy must not be demolished. Actualising these negative goals through any cruel means of destruction that brings absolute victory is acceptable to al-Qaeda’s militants and ideologies. The group conducted indiscriminate and brutal attacks against other Islamists and the civilian population, relying on suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices (IED) in Afghanistan and Iraq. Al-Qaeda progressively engaged in kidnappings of both local and western nationals which brought in much retribution (Abubakar, 2016). Many separate commentaries on the essence of al-Qaeda have been expressed. For instance, al-Qaeda is not an organization but a worldview. Like other anti-globalisation movements, al-Qaeda is made up of nationally, politically, and ethnically different groups of militants that subscribe to an ideology. This posits that al-Qaeda is a perception, ideology, and thinking. It is a logically organised terrorist group or structure that is involved in numerous bloody terrorist activities all over the world. The current strategies adopted by international terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda could be a model for the understanding and prediction of Boko Haram.

A major structural characteristic of the group is its huge network and its complex structures with other terrorist organizations active in other countries. The internal structure of the group has experienced various transformations till it reached its present form. First, mujahids were created where individuals enlisting as fighters receive guerrilla training. They also had their economic, social, technical, and martial needs satisfied. After this time, the groups supporting Afghan resistance transformed into a transnational terrorist network inspiring other groups, transforming al-Qaeda into a global jihadist movement, uniting Muslims against non-Muslims. From the above, it is clear that the structure of the organisation is self-adapting, flexible, and decentralised. The group has leaders that are active at various local levels. The duties and responsibilities are not well defined and precise. At time, the duties and responsibilities overlap (Gunaranta, 2010).

The organizational structure of these groups has made efforts to counter their operational capacity extremely difficult. While some of these groups, such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, are organizationally independent, others, such as ISIS and Qaeda affiliates, are organizationally dependent and rely on either a hub-spoke or an all-channel group structure.

## ii. Underlying Causes of Boko Haram Terrorism: A Multi-Perspective

There is no single factor that can be alluded to as the underlying cause of the Boko Haram security menace in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region at large. However, several factors have been paraded in scholarly circles as the essential ingredient breeding and sustaining the Boko Haram terrorism in the area. Although these factors are distinct in explaining the Boko Haram menace, they do at times overlap (Tonwe, 2012). This section seeks to provide a multi-perspective of the underlying causes that are breeding and sustaining Boko Haram terrorism in an orderly manner through a thorough analysis

of existing literature.

Akinola (2015, p.3) rightly posits that to understand the underpinnings of the Boko Haram sect, it is 'crucial to situate their existence and operations within the historical contexts. Hence, in tracing the underlying factors breeding Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, the first place to turn to is history. In this regard, we pose the question, are there any grains of Islamic fundamentalism in the historical makeup of northern Nigeria before the Boko Haram menace?

In his account, Akinola (2015) reveals that Islamic fundamentalism is not a new phenomenon in northern Nigeria. He argues that the conquest of Uthman Dan Fodio, the systemic Islamization of Africa, and the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate laid the foundation for Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria.

However, the colonization of the established caliphate and the superimposition of colonial governors merely confined the agitations for a full, Islamic society as outlined in the pre-colonial era (Aghedo, 2014). After colonialism, the confined agitations gradually materialised in the newly independent Nigerian state forming themselves into distinct Islamic movements like the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), The Izala Movement, The Kala-Kato, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria among others (Akinola 2015, p.3). Consequently, these movements solidified their presence and increased their activities with greater intensity under a democratic popular government in 1999. Unequivocally, the grains of Islamic fundamentalism existed in northern Nigeria before independence and continue to form the foundation for extremist Islamic sects among which is the Boko Haram terrorist group. To this end, the impact and influence of earlier fundamentalist groups cannot be underrated (Weeraratne, 2015).

Akinola (2015) further insists that local political gaming in northern Nigeria is, in fact, another causal factor of Boko Haram terrorism. Iyekekpolo (2016) argues that insurgency does not happen in isolation of political opportunities. Political opportunity in this sense implies the consistent element of the political environment that provides inducements for people to assume collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure. Akinola (2015) gave a vivid description of how Boko Haram sects emerged within the context of the political opportunities presented in the local politics of northern Nigeria. The state of the environment cannot be separated from the security of any society (Osimen, Fulani, Chidozie, & Dada, 2024). Similarly, the happenings of insecurity in the West African Sub-region can be linked to the terrorism by Boko-Haram in Nigeria (Chidozie, Osimen, Newo, & Bhadmus, 2024). With the return to a democratic constitutional regime in 1999, politicians of the north campaigned with the promises of implementing full sharia in the region. This campaign promises to fit into the agenda of an existing religious sect under the leadership of Yusuf (Pham, 2016). Chukwudi, Gberevbie, Abasilim, and Imhonopi (2019) emphasised the responsibility of the government in ensuring stability in their society.

With the hope of actualizing the implementation of full sharia in Borno state, Yusuf and his followers enmeshed themselves in the local politics of Borno state. They were given various political appointments by Governor Ali Modu Sheriff (Weeraratne, 2016). The failure to implement the full Sharia practices as promised in election manifestoes turned Yusuf into a major critic of the system. This process isolated the group and further cemented the foundation of a violent Islamic terrorist group. To this end, the role of patronage politics and its political underpinnings that enhanced the rise of Boko Haram is undeniable (Pham, 2016).

The next casual factor of Boko Haram's terrorism that can be identified in the literature is military unprofessionalism. As Yusuf became a major critic of the system and withdrew into isolation with his followers, there were several clashes between the sect and Nigeria's security forces which led to the subsequent military crackdown on the group (Oriola and Olabanji, 2017). The nature and manner

of the military crackdown on the (then emerging) sect is another perspective advanced in literature as the underlying cause of Boko Haram terrorism. In this regard, Weeraratne (2015) argues that the anti-insurgency campaign and the nature of the military crackdown further intensified the violence of the Boko Haram sect. Good governance and the embrace of democracy is vital in the success of any government (Chidozie, Aje, & Ogunnowo, 2020). Accordingly, the clampdown has been bedeviled by numerous allegations of shocking human rights violations against suspected Boko Haram militants (Oriola, 2016). In this direction, leadership style is very important in the achievement of success (Abasilim; Gberevbie, Osibanjo, (2019).

In Montclos's (2016, p. 880-883) view, through its ruthlessness, the Nigerian army itself contributed to Boko Haram's recruitment. Abuse by security forces is central to understanding the development of the sect as it gave rise to sympathy for the victims. The killing of Yusuf and other members of the sect which played a part in the radicalisation of the Boko Haram sect is not collateral damage but a norm (Oyewole, 2013). The Nigerian security forces see torturing as opium and are unable to professionally maintain law and order (START, 2018). Out of 2707 incidents that police intervened between 2006 and 2014, the police were held responsible for the death of 1561; while out of 32,292 victims of insurgency recorded by the Nigerian press, between June 2006 and March 2016, 16,133 were killed by security forces and 16,159 by the insurgents (Thurston, 2016). The unprofessionalism of the security forces unintentionally created sympathy for victims and also retaliation by other members of the sect. In other words, the sympathy generated from security forces' unprofessional conduct, in a way aided the recruitment process and further radicalised the Boko Haram sect.

The unprofessionalism of the security forces can be linked to another underlying cause of the Boko Haram insecurity challenge that populates existing literature – the poverty thesis. This perspective which links the socio-economic conditions in northern Nigeria, characterised by gross poverty, high unemployment, and illiteracy as the underlying cause of Boko Haram echoes the tenets of relative deprivation theory in explaining the Boko Haram terrorism menace. Indeed, with the increased unprofessionalism of the security forces, the Boko Haram sect soon appealed to the sentiments of the deprived and frustrated masses, who were also afraid of the brutality of the un-professionalised security forces. The real feeling of exclusion, fear, and dejection, are further pepped up by appealing to the religious sentiments of these citizens and blaming the wrong socialization and immoral religious social life as being accountable for the palpable level of corruption and socio-economic decay in the state (Oyewole, 2013). This makes the Islam-based ideology of Jihad against 'evil' highly acceptable to these aggrieved citizens who seek the opportunity to vent their anger on the state, and against all institutions which they believe to be facilitators of this "unjust" status quo.

Unequivocally, the high rate of poverty in northern Nigeria, the high rate of illiteracy, and poor socio-economic conditions account for the expansion and recruitment of the Boko Haram sect, however, cannot be justified as the ultimate cause of the Boko Haram insecurity challenge (Oriola and Olabanji, 2017).

From the preceding, it is evident that there is no singular underlying cause for the Boko Haram security menace, however, a combination of interlaced factors better explains the underlying causes of the Boko Haram terrorism. Thus Nwankpa (2016, p.11) rightly affirms that regarding Boko Haram terrorism, a combination of factors such as the extrajudicial killing of the members of the sect, 'the excessive use of force by the Nigerian military including collective punishment among other anti-people counterterrorism policies that alienate the people from the state and push them to the terror group' all help to sustain the Boko Haram terror.

iii. **Boko Haram's Operational Dynamics: An Unconventional Warfare**

The underlying conditions of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment levels have sustained the survival of Boko Haram. Nevertheless, the operational dynamics of the insurgent group have continued its existence and transformation into one of the deadliest terrorist groups in Africa. In this regard, the operational strategy of the insurgent group started with merely assassinations and gun attacks into fourth-generational warfare. The idea of the fourth generational warfare is not new as the strategic manifestation of the tactics is classic guerrilla warfare (characterised by ambushes, hit and run tactics, etc) lack of hierarchy, and a large network of financial and communication support among others.

Lind, et al. (1989) suggest that the contemporaneous evolution of insurgency is linked with contemporary irregular conflicts. Indeed, it is a combination of terrorist tactics, guerrilla, and traditional warfare tactics. The practical objective for the adoption of the niques of fourth-generational warfare is to weaken the opponent's resolve and morale leading to an imminent collapse. Thus, the characterisation of the fourth-generation warfare methodologies embraces: the lack of a definite battle line, the whole society embattle front battle-front -military and civilian societies are regarded as fronts, maneuvering which consist of a small force (START, 2018).

Boko Haram has re-formed, adapted, and remained enigmatic despite the Nigerian government's assault against it due to its internal group dynamics and leadership. The group's current operational and tactical onus reflects its leader's idiosyncrasy. With the death of its foremost leader Yusuf, the group was reconstituted under the more radical leader Abubakar Shekau in 2010 (Olaniyan and Asuelime, 2014). As a result, the control of an immediate terrain that limits access by the conventional army of the state is strategic in an insurgency.

Boko Haram has used local geography-the Mandara Mountains and Sambisa forest to sustain its struggle. The forest which spans about 518km<sup>2</sup> proves to be a strategic location in operations planning, coordinating, and providing shelter for the group. Beyond that, it harbours an abandoned military training facility (Camp Zairo) with military fittings which have been used as training headquarters and camps for the insurgents. Besides, Boko Haram has seized control of villages and towns in Borno State (Gwoza, Bama, Ngala, Gamboru) neighbouring Yobe (Buni Yadi) and Adamawa States (Gulak, Michika, Mubi) between July 2014 and February 2015. The group destroyed the bridge linking Maiduguri with the southwestern part of the state. It expelled military presence in territories captured replacing the Nigerian flags with their black jihadist flag. Within these periods, Boko Haram had control of over 14 local government areas, instating themselves as the de facto authority (Akinola, 2015).

As part of the operational scheme, the movement and maneuverings of an insurgent group remain valuable in sustaining its assaults; hence, the will of the opponent is given a decisive blow (Iyekekpolo, 2016). Boko Haram relies mainly on gun trucks, motorcycles, and pick-ups for troop lifts around the northeastern part of Nigeria. Most of these are for swift movements and supply gatherings. The group also moves with a small element of force for assault of approximately 10-20 combatants, akin to the sub-division of the military battalion platoon. The assault combatants are usually furnished with explosives and light arms and their mode of operations is a semblance of traditional tactics in urban areas. The military proficiency of the fighters suggests combat experience and mastery of professional tactics. Their mission is backed by surprise mobility elements and attrition.

Maneuvering helps them to avoid decisive battlefronts, with a continuous sustained attack in persuading the opponent. Such phenomena, however, have a central objective beyond preliminary guerrilla and terror action into a more consistent exhibition of violence. This ploy is encapsulated in Mao's sayings during the communist revolution:

When the enemy advances, we withdraw,

When the enemy rests, we harass,  
When the enemy tires, we attack,  
When the enemy withdraws, we pursue (Akinola, 2015).

Besides, the tactical adaptation of the insurgents has perhaps increased its advantageous position. Generically, these adaptations are either consciously or unconsciously formulated within a short period (Akinola, 2015; Pham, 2016). Besides, in the case of Boko Haram, tactical adaptation was conscious of a wider spectrum of factors. First, with the Nigerian government's war on terror- impediment and obstruction of the strategic objective of the group, the insurgents evolved a proficient way of decelerating the Nigerian government. The kidnapping of 214 Chibok schoolgirls on April 15, 2014, increased their force multiplier. Hence, leveraging on the schoolgirls and bargaining with the government, subsequently placed them in an advantageous position. This has hindered counter-offense by the Nigerian military in known Boko Haram camps for the fear of losing the girls. Secondly, the deployment of young girls in battle frontlines in the form of shields and suicide bombers presented Boko Haram with an advantage over the military. For example, Oriola (2016) observes that Boko Haram engages in female suicide bombings which account for at least three-quarters of the total number of suicide bombings that occurred between January and May 2015 by the group. The girls are generally assumed to be a valuable possession in Boko Haram's hands. This tactical adaptation is strategic because the laws governing war must be adhered to by the Nigerian military.

Furthermore, the group engaged in kidnapping for ransom meaning funding from 2013. The group on February 16, 2013, took hostage of seven expatriate construction workers at Jamarre. Similarly, on February 19, 2013, seven French nationals were abducted for ransom by the group with a payment of \$3 million (Adesoji, 2011).

External support for the Boko Haram group and the establishment of an international network with other Islamic insurgent groups- Islamic State in Iraq and Al-sham (ISIA), Al-Shabaab, AL-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which is an Algerian insurgent group is a key significant ploy by the group. Oyewole (2013) notes that the forged links with external groups have helped to re-create the group to its present configuration. For instance, he observed the group trained in Somalia with the Al-Shabaab, while others trained with the Goa in Mali. Apart from training, the group also benefited from the financial support of about N40 Million from the AQIM. The group's internationalisation is also linked to the global jihadist efforts in terms of 'insurgency doctrine, ideology, and symbolism' (Pham, 2016). This alliance might have helped in the provision of hard power and firepower for the insurgents in some ways. Moreover, the alliance abetted the dissemination of Boko Haram global propaganda, as Al-Andalus the AQIM media arm broadcasted Boko Haram propaganda (Weeraratne, 2015 p.15). Holistically, the operational strategy was mostly influenced by other insurgency and terrorist groups within and outside of Africa. This has created a violent Islamic insurgent group with better coordination and sophistication. Another operational dynamic of Boko Haram centers on its strategic ability to intermix with the local community in the Lake Chad region. Arreguin-Toft (2005) averred that, after attacks, the insurgent group quickly assimilates into the local population; therefore, this has substantial operational use, most especially for a local insurgent. The ability has enhanced its strategic advantage, with spying, intelligence gathering, and counterespionage as the bedrock of its offensive operational plan. This strategic ability helps them to assess the type of artilleries, strengths, and routines of the opposing force, with this operation having a semblance of reconnaissance.

In comparison, Maurer (2018) shows that intelligence partly accounts for the strategic success of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIA). On the other hand, Boko Haram has also, formed

an information-centric framework that relies on the locals for strategic information. The framework highlights the role of civilians in information sharing. In other words, timely information about the opponent's tactic is an integral part of warfare, knowing that the opponent's plot is more important than the defender's plan. For example, the insurgents pay the al-majiri to provide intelligence on Nigerian soldiers' movement, and transport arms as well as other supplies to their camps (Montclos, 2016).

More importantly, an insurgent group can employ the use of terrorism as part of its insurgency plan (Montclos, 2016). The use of terrorism has become an integral part of the Boko Haram operations. This enables the group to create an atmosphere of terror and insecurity within the Lake Chad region which is its immediate theatre of operations and beyond. For instance, the group has coordinated bomb attacks in Maiduguri town, the UN building in Abuja with about 80 people injured and 25 dead, the 2011 Madalla church bombing with about 32 killed, and the 2010 Jos bomb attacks on the eve of Christmas (Agbiboa, 2013).

Arreguin-Toft (2005) argues that the use of brutality substantially enhances the success of insurgents; moreover, brutality characterizes assaults on a non-combatant populace. Again, the insurgents employ the use of terrorism as it allows them to fight with few and limited resources (since resources are strategic in sustaining and expanding insurgency) as well as a tool for compelling the support of the local community. Also, Galula (2006) asserts that blind terrorism is the first and most important ploy in an insurgency. Insurgents engage in arson, and assassination to attain publicity and substantial psychological results at the least cost.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has contributed to the volume on the Boko Haram terrorist group. It consistently maintains the position that the group's tactics and evolutionary strategies are in tandem with that of other terrorist groups around the world such as Al-Qaeda. The paper establishes the link between Boko Haram's operations and the campaigns of other international terrorist groups, observing that there are familiar patterns. As a result, it concludes that Boko Haram's tactics and evolving strategies are consistent with those of their counterparts abroad and can provide sufficient clues to local and international coalition partners on how to neutralize the former's campaigns of terror. In the event, Boko Haram's instrumentalisation of violence in Nigeria can be effectively tackled when future policy direction accommodates these emerging trends.

However, the complex nature of Boko Haram's operations, given the evolving sophistication of the group's campaign, will warrant a comprehensive blend of military and non-military approaches to defeat them. This paper, therefore, offers the following recommendations:

The Federal Government of Nigeria will have to make concerted efforts to de-politicise the Boko Haram group because top government officials are alleged to be supporting the group. This can be done by strengthening existing institutions and other relevant law enforcement units to prosecute those found guilty. However, the federal government must be perceived to be an impartial umpire by ensuring that every form of military and police brutality is halted. This is important because the radicalisation of the Boko Haram group resulting in the mass recruitment of new members has been attributed to highhandedness by the Joint Task Force (JTF). By so doing, the fuel that stokes the fire of Boko Haram's ideology can be mitigated while restoring confidence in the activities of the security agencies.

Again, the fight against Boko Haram over the years has been seriously hindered by conflicting counter-insurgency methods by local and international response groups. By effectively harmonising these operations, Boko Haram's campaigns can be checked and future threats averted.

Added to the above is that the socio-economic structure and underdevelopment of Northern

Nigeria provide a fertile ground for both the spread of anti-western propaganda and the recruitment of Boko Haram fighters. Indeed, poverty and illiteracy which characterise northeastern Nigeria will continue to undermine the military efforts at eradicating Boko Haram, except there is a complementary strategy to help the people of that region escape poverty and receive a good education. This can be tackled most effectively by aligning the country's development plan with the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, by implementing SDGs 1 (end poverty in all forms) and 4 (quality, equitable, inclusive, and lifelong learning opportunity and education), the twin issues of poverty and illiteracy leave the region's youth vulnerable to the indoctrination of the sect can be arrested. Similarly, by integrating SDG 5 (empowerment of women and girls and improved gender parity), the menace of using young female population groups as shields and suicide bombers can be effectively eliminated.

Similarly, we must emphasise that Muslim clerics in Nigeria can play an influential role in communal mobilisation and resistance against Boko Haram by evolving a counter-ideological narrative to dissuade young Muslims from joining the group. This, in our assessment, can puncture a deep hole in Boko Haram's operational strategies since the sect thrives on doctrinal imperatives as the foundation of its establishment. This counter-ideological strategy can be more effective if the social media platforms are engaged apart from the various Islamic worship centers in the country.

In all, Boko Haram terrorism must be perceived as an ongoing global jihadist war and not just a local problem. This approach will not only inform policy directions in the country but will enable the effective mobilisation of all available transnational resources to arrest the mayhem.

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The authors do not have any conflicting interests.

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This work is not a part of any student thesis or dissertation submitted to any university for the award of a degree.

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