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BOKO HARAM: TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, FREEDOM FIGHTERS OR RELIGIOUS FANATICS? AN ANALYSIS OF BOKO HARAM WITHIN NIGERIA, AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE AND THE NEED FOR COUNTER TERRORISM RESPONSES THAT INVOLVES PROSCRIBING THEM AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

The adoption of Sharia law and the creation of an Islamic government are prominent motivations for religious terrorism within the current climate. Throughout history, Nigeria has been exposed to ethno religious violence and political discontent and has recently seen an escalation in associated violence threatening its sovereignty, territorial integrity, peace and stability. This paper explores Boko Haram, a Nigerian Islamist sect, responsible for numerous attacks in northern and central Nigeria on infrastructure and people. The origins and ideological motivations of this group are examined and compared to the current wave of religious terrorism in relation to tactics, leadership and objectives. Parallels and relationships are drawn between Boko Haram and other proscribed terrorist organizations such as al-Qa'ida, al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Somalian al Shabaab. This paper defines Boko Haram as a terrorist organization, as opposed to religious fanatics or freedom fighters, other common views about this group. This paper takes an Australian legislative approach to defining terrorism and terrorist organizations and examines Boko Haram against a contemporary terrorist organization proscribed by the Australian Government, AQIM, to substantiate claims that this organization demonstrates features common among terrorist organizations. Future prospects of this group, including potential expansion and listing them as a terrorist organization by the Australian government for national security, are presented.

Keywords

Boko Haram, Terrorism, Nigeria, Islamism, Australia, Counter Terrorism, National Security

INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram can be understood as an Islamist insurgency that has risen from political and religious discontent within Nigeria (Adasoji, 2011; Onuoha, 2012; Soloman, 2012). This extremist sect threatens the security, sovereignty and stability of Nigeria, particularly northern Nigeria, by a range of high profile attacks on the military, police, schools, political figures and other infrastructure (Nicoll, 2011; Think Security Africa, 2011). Group evolution and differing interpretations regarding motivations, presented challenges in defining this group from a local, national and international perspective (Walker, 2012). From various viewpoints Boko Haram can be considered as; a terrorist organization, freedom fighters or religious fanatics. Through an examination of the origins and philosophy of Boko Haram, comparisons with established terrorist organizations such as AQIM, and against the Australian definition of terrorism, Boko Haram can be described as a terrorist organization with both political and religious motives. Providing that intelligence continues to support links and cooperation between Boko Haram and other proscribed terrorist organizations, listing the group as a terrorist organization in the near future is necessary for an international counter-terrorism approach and to continue to secure Australian interests at home and abroad in the future (Adesoji, 2011; Devlin-Foltz, 2010; US House of Representatives Committee, 2011).

Origins and philosophy of Boko Haram

Boko Haram are a Nigerian militant Islamist sect which seeks political and religious reform within Nigeria specifically the adoption of Sharia law with beliefs based in the practise of Orthodox Islam (Bagaji et al, 2012 ; Onuoha, 2012; Soloman, 2012; Walker, 2012). This interpretation of Islam abhors and rejects western civilisation and education as sacrilegious and the name 'Boko Haram' derives from this belief (Adasoji, 2011; Anonymous, 2009; Onuoha, 2012; Soloman, 2012). This fanatical Islamist sect recruits from the northern provinces of Nigeria targeting disaffected youths, unemployed university students and street children (*Almajiris*) by addressing grievances and radicalises its members (Nicoll, 2011; Onuoha, 2012). This group threatens Nigeria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, peace and stability by targeting symbols of authority within Nigeria as well as committing a broad range of crimes such as robberies and acts of vandalism, however, their influence appears localised at this stage with developing operational links to international terrorists organizations in relation to training (Anonymous, 2011; Roti, 2012; Think Security Africa, 2011a; University of Nigeria, 2012; US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, 2011).

Boko Haram manifested post the independence of Nigeria in 1960 which saw a shift of power to the Christian south, the success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 which saw Sharia law adopted, the return of civil rule and democracy in Nigeria in 1999, as well as a strong promotion of orthodoxy and Wahhabi doctrine in the 1990's within Sub-Saharan Africa (Adasoji, 2011; Nicoll, 2011; Soloman, 2012). Within Nigeria, religion has played a crucial part in politics and society pre and post-independence, with religion and state seemingly inseparable, therefore in the last three decades Nigeria has experienced recurrent religious and ethno-religious hostilities and conflicts (Bagaji et al, 2012; Isichei, 1987). Boko Haram can be seen to have risen out of a change in political landscape and sponsored by political discontent with political and religious aims (Anonymous, n.d; Bagaji et al, 2012; Walker, 2012).

The Nigerian Director of Defence Information, Colonel Mohammed Yerima, has identified that the emergence of Boko Haram originated as early as 1995 under various names, such as Ahlulsunna wal' jama'ah hijra, however rose to notoriety in 2009 (Onuoha, 2012; Soloman, 2012). This group originated by the creation of a separatist community that espoused hard-line Islamic principles after embarking on a *Hirja*. However they soon evolved into a group that were perpetrating many acts of violence (Walker, 2012). Boko Haram, or 'People committed to the Prophets teaching for Propagation and Jihad,' was founded by Muslim cleric Mohammed Yusuf and operates in the North-eastern states of Nigeria, primarily Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe (Adasoji, 2011; Onuoha, 2012; Think Security Africa, 2011b). Locals refer to the sect as the 'Nigerian Taliban' (Thin Africa, 2011a). Since 2009 and the death of their leader, attacks perpetrated by this group have grown in lethality and sophistication and the group has become increasingly cell-like in structure, killing 253 people in January 2012 (Soloman, 2012; Think Security Africa, 2011; Walker, 2012). The sect has engaged in targeted killings, kidnappings, shootings, fire bombings, bombings including IED's, VBIEDS and suicide bombing (Onuoha, 2012; Think Security Africa, 2011b; Walker, 2012). Target selection has evolved from a focus on Nigerian Security Forces to also include politicians, military, police, critical infrastructure, civilians, government infrastructure, schools, churches and a UN building (Gruenbaum , 2009; Soloman, 2012; Think Security Africa, 2011b). There is a synergy between the tactics and targets of Boko Haram to their objectives, for example the assassination of a candidate for the governor of Borno from the All Nigeria People's Party whose beliefs did not align with the political objectives of this group (Nicoll, 2011; Think Security Africa, 2011b).

Defining terrorism and examining Boko Haram from an Australian Perspective

An act of terrorism as defined by the Commonwealth of Australian Government under the Criminal Code Act 1995 Section 100.1 and the Security Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Act (C'th) 2002, Part 5.3, Terrorist Division 100, would consider Boko Haram to have committed acts of terrorism under sub section 2, 2b and 2c but not sub Section 2a of the legislation. They have intended to advance a religious and political cause by committing act 2b under this section (that is orthodox Islamism and the establishment of Sharia law), and have done these actions with the intent of influencing by intimidation a government and the public, thus demonstrating an act of 2c (by aiming to intimidate the Nigerian government to creating Sharia law and

intimidate the Christian public) (Adasoji, 2011; Nicoll, 2011; Soloman, 2012). Boko Haram have also fulfilled sub Section 2 by causing serious harm that is physical harm to a person (Anonymous, 2009; Onuoha, 2012). Acts committed by this group have not been advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action that is not intended to cause serious harm that is physical harm to a person. From this perspective the Australian definition disregards the idea they are freedom fighters, average criminals or religious fanatics, alternative arguments regarding the definition of Boko Haram (Fischer, 2011). Although taken from an Australia perspective it is important to understand that defining terrorism is a matter of perspective, with over 100 definitions worldwide, however essentially most definitions involve the inclusion of elements such as; the use of violence, targets non-combatants, creates a state of fear, aims to influence, intimidate or coerce and being motivated by political, social and ideological objectives (Aly, 2011). Boko Haram's actions would be considered terrorism under most definitions that present these core elements.

As an organization and defined in section 102.1(1) of the Criminal Code, Boko Haram would meet the requirements to be defined and proscribed as a terrorist organization. There is evidence Boko Haram have engaged in preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the perpetration of terrorist acts (Anonymous, 2009; Security in Nigeria, 2011; Walker, 2012). Boko Haram however is not proscribed as a terrorist organization by the Australian Government. Defining Boko Haram as a terrorist organization would assist in an international counter terrorism approach and securing Australia's security, Australian's and Australian interests nationally and internationally in the future. The Australian Counter Terrorism White Paper (2010) identifies a real and enduring threat from international terrorism in the form of violent jihadist movements to Australia compromising predominately of groups associated with al-Qa'ida and similar views (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010). Scholars, Algerian Intelligence and the Nigerian government have identified that Boko Haram have participated in training with, and has links to, extremist groups such as AQIM and al Shabaab in Somalia (US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, 2011). There is a potential, based on intelligence produced by Algerian intelligence, supporting the fact that the group could become an incubator for international terrorism, expand, join the global jihadist movement and associate with al-Qa'ida (Adesoji, 2011; Devlin-Foltz, 2010; Onuoha, 2012; Solomon, 2012; US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, 2011). The White Paper in 2010 acknowledged the rise of affiliated groups within new areas such as Yemen and Somalia that have offset counter-terrorism success in other areas internationally, and Algerian government intelligence has highlighted links with Boko Haram and Somalian al Shabaab (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010; House of Representatives, 2011). Until late 2011 the international community did not acknowledge the threat of Boko Haram to international interests, however a report issued in November 2011 by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, highlighted Boko Haram's intent and capability to attack western interests (Adesoji, 2011; US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, 2011).

Identification and proscription of Boko Haram within Nigeria as a terrorist organization can influence the success of Australia's efforts to curb terrorism internationally by early detection and prevention. Boko Haram's actions have security implications internationally, regionally and locally and there is a need for identification of this threat and mitigation through counter terrorism efforts (Adesoji, 2011; Onuoha, 2012). There is real potential for Boko Haram to join transnational jihadist movements providing an international security threat, as well as providing an avenue for the radicalisation of African nationals within Australia, especially with an increase in the use of the internet by Boko Haram, with the internet being a popular tool in informing, indoctrinating and radicalising individuals (Aly, 2011; Adesoji, 2011; Onuoha, 2012; US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, 2011). Australia already has a bilateral relationship with Nigeria and also provides aid for social and sustainable economic development for communities fostering international cooperation (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2008). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics there are approximately 3646 Nigerian-born residents within Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Africa has also increased in importance in relation to Australia's migration scheme with 248,699 African born residents within Australia recorded in the 2006 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). The Counter-Terrorism White Paper has also identified the threat of people raised in Australia becoming influenced by the jihadist message and generating attacks locally (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010).

Comparison of Boko Haram and Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

As identified in the Criminal Code Act 1995 Section 102.1(1) a terrorist organization can be listed in accordance with a proscription process set out in sub sections 102.1(2),(3) and (4). The Australian government has documented under the Criminal Code Regulations 2002 Schedule 1 a list of proscribed terrorist organizations. AQIM is a proscribed terrorist organization by the Australian government and can be compared to Boko Haram for the purpose of illustrating similarities and the future need for Boko Haram to be proscribed. Further this comparison is fruitful as intelligence from Algerian intelligence identifies coordination between these groups (Australian Government [National Security], 2010; Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, 2011; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence 2011). Factors for proscription through this legislation include engagement in terrorism, ideology and links to other terrorist groups or networks, links to Australia, threats to Australian interests, proscription by the UN or likeminded countries and engagement in peace/mediation processes (House of Representatives Committee, 2006). In relation to listing organizations, Boko Haram does engage in terrorism, intelligence has shown links to other terrorist groups and networks as part of a global jihadist movement, AQIM and Somalia al Shabaab, and has no links to Australia or Australian interests comparable to AQIM at this stage, however there is the potential (Australian Government [National Security], 2011; Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, 2011; Walker, 2012). Boko Haram however has demonstrated a threat to western interests as detailed in the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence (2011) report on Boko Haram. Three of Boko Haram's members are also listed by the United States as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224 (Adedoja, 2012; Lobe, 2012; *Oluarotimi*, 2012; Starr, 2012).

As a group, both organizations have similar motivation, being fundamentalist militant Islamist groups, and use violence to achieve religious and political objectives of creating an Islamic state with Sharia law (Australian Government [National Security], 2010; Jones, 2005; Soloman, 2012). This is identified in the Australian National Counter Terrorism White Paper with the global Islamist movement being a threat to security interests (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010). Both groups can also be seen to coerce or influence by intimidation their respective governments in aim to advance their causes (Australian Government [National Security], 2010; Soloman, 2012). However their modus operandi can be seen to differentiate, with AQIM prominent within Algeria and the Sahel region of northern Mali and with ties to a larger al-Qa'ida network while Boko Haram consists of much smaller loose cell networks within a faction of a country (Australian Government [National Security], 2010; Onuoha, 2012). Both groups tactics are consistent with the tactics utilised by the religious wave of terrorism that employs suicide bombings and mass casualty attacks, however their general targets differentiate with AQIM also targeting western symbols and influences in Algeria, Mali and Niger as well as Algerian government and military interests, and Boko Haram targeting Nigerian interests, infrastructure and symbols of authority (Australian Government [National Security], 2010; Rapoport, 2003; US House of Representatives, 2011; Walker, 2012). The Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities of United States Africa Command has provided intelligence that members of Boko Haram have trained with AQIM (US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, 2011). It can be seen that both groups display characteristics of the current wave of religious terrorism and possess similarities, however on organizational scale, capacity and transnationalism nature AQIM can be seen to be more advanced than Boko Haram (Walker, 2012). AQIM can also be seen to harbor stronger anti-west ideals (Walker, 2012). Boko Haram has the capacity, if it continues coordinating with transnational organizations such as al-Qa'ida, to pose a similar security threat to Australia as AQIM, particularly if a stronger international anti-west sentiment is adopted as western interests have already been targeted by the attack on the UN headquarters in Nigeria in 2011 (Adesoji, 2011; US House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence 2011).

Boko Haram within the historical context of terrorist organizations

Terrorism can be placed contextually throughout history by various sects to achieve objectives through the use of violence (Aly, 2011; Hoffman, 1998; Lutz & Lutz, 2008; Rasler & Thompsom, 2009). The modern manifestation of terrorism can be described and contextualised by Rapoport's four waves of modern terrorism activity to assist with understanding terrorism within a global environment focusing on ideological motivations

(Aly, 2011). Each wave is distinguished by political and social circumstances within the international environment, patterns in objectives and tactics as well as impact on social and political structures and can be used to support the notion that Boko Haram are indeed a terrorist organization as they illustrate elements associated with the fourth religious wave of terrorism (Aly, 2011; Rapoport, 2003; Rasler & Thompson, 2009).

Boko Haram can be seen to exhibit similar tactics and motivations as the current wave of terrorism 'religious'. Religion acts as an ideological force, legitimiser and unifier of this group and aims to achieve one of the three primary religious goals; establishment of a religiously pure state, establish religious governments or destruction of Earth (Aly, 2011; Gregg, 2004; Johnson, 2011; Rapoport, 2003; Rasler & Thompson, 2009). Boko Haram can be understood to aspire to achieve the creation of a religious government via religious reform (Onuoha, 2012; Solomon, 2012). Religious terrorists such as al-Qa'ida are inspired by interpretations of a text that commands the creation of religious rule, in relation to Boko Haram this can be seen as the Qur'an and orthodox militant Islamism via the assertion of Sharia law (Aly, 2011; Gregg, 2004). Tactics utilised in this wave heavily involve the use of mass casualty attacks and suicide bombing, characteristic of the tactics used by Boko Haram (Anonymous, 2012; McConnell, 2012; Rapoport, 2003; Rasler & Thompson, 2009). This aligns with religious views and objectives in relation to Islam 'martyrdom' (Rapoport, 1984). Groups within the 'religious wave' organizational structure involve members with the same religious interpretation and include a spiritual leader, distinct from other waves organizational structure to which is parallel to the structure of Boko Haram (Aly, 2011; Security in Nigeria, 2011). Other sects within this wave as identified by Rapoport (2003) include al-Qa'ida and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). In a pre-modern context parallels can be drawn with Boko Haram and the Assassins (1090-1275 AD) which also targeted prominent political and state figures that didn't recognise their version of Islam in aim to establish an Islamic state (Aly, 2011; Horsely, 1979). A comparison of Boko Haram contextually throughout history can be seen to support the notion that Boko Haram are indeed a terrorist organization and utilise similar tactics as other religiously motivated terrorists organizations modern day.

Future prospects of Boko Haram

It is highly probable that Boko Haram will continue to commit acts of terrorism and sectarian violence due to their ideological belief, current ability to gain funding, organizational structure, government deficits, ineffective counter-measures by the Nigerian government, economic marginality and ability to recruit (Anonymous, 2011; Soloman, 2012). Nigeria is a religiously heterogeneous, ethnically diverse, highly polarised country and the government is ineffective in dealing with non-state groups such as Boko Haram, with Devlin-Foltz (2010) describing the potential for this situation to be an incubator for international terrorism (Anonymous, 2011). Anonymous (2011) states that Boko Haram could springboard into the remaining parts of Nigeria and that eradication is increasingly difficult with the wider security force being infiltrated and corrupted by Boko Haram members (Roti, 2012b; Soloman, 2012). Any productive efforts to label this group a terrorist organization internationally and effectively counter the group will transpire when governments such as the Nigerian, American, Australian government or United Nations acknowledge and proscribe Boko Haram as one (Soloman, 2012). The Australian government should use resources to analyse the possible threat of Boko Haram to national security and interests and proscribe Boko Haram as a terrorist organization, to support possible counter terrorism efforts if intelligence continues to support a threat to western interests and links between Boko Haram, AQIM and al Shabaab. Although Australia in particular has not been specifically a target of an attack by Boko Haram western interests have, and there is that potential, and the Australian government should prepare and take this potential threat seriously. Terrorist groups such as al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula have quickly escalated from regional targets to western international targets (US House of Representatives Committee, 2011). Adesoji (2011) asserts that due to the nature of global terrorism there is the ability for Boko Haram to gain support or be influenced by the current global jihadist movement.

CONCLUSION

Boko Haram can be best defined as a terrorist group, as opposed to religious fanatics or freedom fighters. Although seeming religiously motivated this group is also powerfully politically motivated. Boko Haram has risen from political discontent and a change in the political landscape of Nigeria. This group has committed acts of terrorism and several members are proscribed as terrorists, however the group is not as yet officially labelled as a terrorist organization. The Nigerian government is labelling the group criminals and a 'murderous religious

group', denying any benefits from the associated title and Islam as a legitimising tool. Through the inspection of this sect's philosophy and origins, and by comparing it against the Australian definition of terrorism and a proscribed terrorist organization AQIM, defining Boko Haram as a terrorist organization can be supported. The Australian government should take measures to proscribe Boko Haram as a terrorist group in the future in order to apply counter terrorism measures to protect Australia's security if Boko Haram continues to evolve and join transnational Islamist movements.

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