One Voice, Multiple Tongues: Dialoguing with Boko Haram

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Using “official” documents from the government and Boko Haram and other fundamentalist Islamic groups in Nigeria, this study examines the prognosis of the dialogue option between the Boko Haram fundamentalist Islamist group and the federal government of Nigeria. To achieve this, the study compares the stated and inferential motives of Boko Haram with Nigeria’s pluralist nature and argues that insofar as Boko Haram remains an internal dialogue within Islam, especially in northern Nigeria, and an offshoot of a process derived from socioeconomic and political imbalances in contemporary Nigeria, the government could dialogue with Boko Haram on the second issue but would breach its own constitution and legal codes on the first.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Dialogue, Fundamentalist, Nigeria, Salafism, Terrorism, Wahhabism

INTRODUCTION

By comparing the stated and inferential motives of the Boko Haram fundamentalist Islamic group with Nigeria’s plurality, this essay examines the prognosis of any dialogue between the Boko Haram fundamentalist Islamic group and the federal government of Nigeria. The study, while not pretending to be a tour de horizon of either terrorist activities in Nigeria or the nation’s development trajectories, used “official” documents from the group, its opponents, and the Nigerian state to weave a narrative that locates Boko Haram within the larger construct of global fundamentalist Islam and a nation that is increasingly globalized. Among other things, the essay argues that given its metamorphosis, Boko Haram can be effectively understood in two ways: as an internal dialogue within Islam, especially in northern Nigeria, and as an offshoot of a process derived from socioeconomic and political imbalances in contemporary Nigeria.

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The study argues further that while the government can play a fundamental role in the second by revamping the nation’s socioeconomic and political systems, its influences on the first, as the activities of Boko Haram itself have shown, are limited.

In order to do this, this article depends essentially on a number of sermons produced over a 10-year period (1999 to 2009) by Muhammed Yusuf, founder of Boko Haram, and his main opponent, Jafar Adam.¹

Both members of Boko Haram and anti–Boko Haram in northern Nigeria circulated these sermons, which were recorded and distributed freely on CDs, DVDs, and leaflets during the period. These are today difficult to find as the police summarily arrested distributors and consumers, who were considered either members or, at the very least, sympathizers of Boko Haram. Fear of arrest and persecution has therefore necessitated a mopping of these resources from the streets, thus denying many Nigerians the privilege of understanding the provenance and objectives of Boko Haram. Notwithstanding, copies were obtained from sources that had earlier contacts with these documents but were deliberately not declared in this essay for security reasons. A content and context analysis of these documents and those obtained from newspaper reports, government records, and extant literature was done to arrive at the conclusions that Boko Haram is, on the one hand, a protest within fundamentalist Islamic groups in Nigeria and, on the other hand, a protest against a Nigerian state that is increasingly seen as corrupt and ineffective in delivering socioeconomic development, especially in northern Nigeria.

Given these conclusions, this study examines the possibility of government interventions in the two areas and seeks to know:

1. If a government whose fundamental laws made it a secular state can reform Islam without breaching its own laws;

2. To what extent Nigeria’s effort at curbing Boko Haram’s activities over the past few years made it complicit in the internal dialogue involving fundamentalist Islamic groups in northern Nigeria;

3. If a revamped socioeconomic and political system could resolve the debacle between fundamentalist Islamic groups in northern Nigeria or exacerbate it;

4. If the present agitation by fundamentalist Islamic groups can be described as “grievance-driven” or “greed-driven.”

The essay is divided into five sections. This introductory section, which sets out the main arguments, is the first. In the second section, the study locates Boko Haram within fundamentalist Islam in Nigeria, and the third section presents both the stated and inferential objectives of Boko Haram. In the fourth section, the study examines the feasibility of dialogue with Boko
Haram by juxtaposing the group’s objectives with the nation’s corporate goal as a secular state, and, in the last section, this study submits that (1) internal contradictions exist in Boko Haram’s objectives; (2) these objectives are unattainable in a pluralistic Nigeria; (3) Boko Haram is driven by greed rather than grievance; and (4) dialoguing with Boko Haram is a sheer vacuity from which nothing can be gained.

**BOKO HARAM AND FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAM IN NIGERIA**

The growth and development of radical Islam in Nigeria is often discussed along the lines of the *jihad* and proselytizing work of Uthman Dan Fodio, who settled and established Islam across the Sudan.\(^2\) Even if data on the death and devastation associated with Dan Fodio’s jihad are unavailable and therefore could not be compared with Boko Haram’s, the horrific nature of Boko Haram’s attacks on both the United Nations’ House in Abuja and the Catholic Church at Mandala in Niger State is unprecedented.

In its contemporary manifestations, radical Islam in Nigeria can best be traced to the proselytizing works of Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzakky (originally named the Muslim Brotherhood but later changed to Muslim Students Society of Nigeria [MSSN]), Ahmad Gulan (Ahmadiya Movement), Nasir Kabara (Khadiriyya), Abubakar Gumi (Izala), Isiaku Rabiu (Tijaniyya), and Dahiru Bauchi (Tariqqa).\(^3\) These men, at different times, founded and led different groups with Salafi-Wahhabis Islamic inclinations across northern Nigeria. Salafi-Wahhabism derives from Sunni Islam, unarguably the largest branch of Islam, whose adherents believe in the sayings and living habits of prophet Muhammad. Ideally, all Muslims can lay claim to being Sunnis, as anybody who can demonstrate that neither his action nor his belief is against the prophetic Sunnah can be considered as a Sunni Muslim.

The Qur’an, compiled by prophet Muhammad’s companions (*Sahaba*) a few months before the prophet’s death, is accepted by all Muslims as injunctions of God as revealed to the holy prophet. However, many matters of belief and daily life that derived directly from the practices of Muhammad and his first followers were not recorded in the Qur’an. These traditions have been compiled and are called Hadith. Collectively, both the Qur’an and Hadith formed the core of Islamic faith. Although Wahhabism is oftentimes regarded as derogatory—hence Salafi-Wahhabism is often used—Salafism or Salafi-Wahhabism, a movement within Sunni Muslims, is “a school of thought which surfaced in the second half of the 19th century as a reaction to the spread of European ideas,” and “sought to expose the roots of modernity within Muslim civilization.” As a Sunni-based Islamic movement, Salafi-Wahhabism advocates for a return to the original ways of Islam as practiced by Prophet Mohammed and his companions. It comes from the phrase “*as-salaf as-saliheen,*” which refers to the first three generations of Muslims, starting with
the Prophet and his companions. In addition to aspiring for a unified Islamic state based on the Sharia (Islamic law), Salafi-Wahhabism is a purer form of Islam, stripped of cultural and national associations. Salafi-Wahhabism regards political involvement as un-Islamic.4

The six core beliefs of Sunnis are: (1) reality of one God Allah, (2) existence of angels of Allah, (3) authority of the books of Allah, (4) following the prophets of Allah, (5) preparation for and belief in the Day of Judgment, and (6) supremacy of Allah’s will or the belief in predestination good or bad is from Allah alone. In addition to these articles or pillars of Sunni belief (iman), At-Tahawi’s Islamic Theology, one of the key documents of Sunni Islamic theology, enumerated 105 other creeds that Sunnis must subscribe to.5

Although different, these aforementioned groups claimed to be following the paths prescribed by Allah in the Qur’an and Hadith of Prophet Mohammed. As shown above, there are other beliefs; however, the two main prescriptions of these paths are leading a pious, religious life and the enthronement of an Islamic government.

Of these men, Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzakky, who studied economics in the 1970s at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, was the most influential. El-Zakzakky, inspired by the Islamic activism in the Middle East, especially Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan, where there was age-long agitation to establish an Islamic state, founded the MSSN. Even as a student, he had many followers. The core of the MSSN’s teaching was that Muslims should live according to the dictates of the Qur’an and shun immorality. Some members were so carried away with their beliefs that they tore their certificates upon graduation from the university. El-Zakzakky, the leader, although a first class student, never used his certificate; he worked for the greater propagation of Islam instead.

It was as a result of this rigid or extreme adherence to Islamic belief that these groups are regarded as fundamentalist Islamic groups. Fundamentalism, as used here, describes any demand for a rigid adherence to orthodox belief or practice as a way to ensuring continuity and accuracy in the belief or practice. This is in spite of any changes or contemporary understanding of such belief or practice.

El-Zakzakky later began to romanticize with the idea of implementing Sharia in Nigeria after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.6 However, in the early 1990s, some of his followers broke away, having denounced the leader’s Shiite ideology. These breakaway groups were displeased with the leader’s pacifist approach and were ready to bear arms in their quest to implement the Sharia in Nigeria. One of the most popular of these breakaway groups is the Kano-based Jama’atul Tajdidi Islam (JTI),7 which is not limited to northern Nigeria, as it recruited young and idealistic members from schools, mosques, and cities across Nigeria. Besides preaching the duty of living a pious and religious life to all its adherents, the fulcrum of the JTI’s advocacy was the implementation of Sharia in Nigeria.
Apart from its leader, other renowned members of the JTI include Aminu Gusau, Hussein Bauchi, and Ahmed Shuaibu. Up until the time he broke away from the JTI to found Boko Haram, Muhammed Yusuf was JTI’s *amir* (leader of the faithful) for Borno State.

Other breakaway groups include the Talibans, a group of young radical university students who caused a stir in 2003 when they struck in Yobe State, killing policemen, burning down police stations, and attacking Christians. The Kala Kato, a strictly scripturalist group led by Isiyaka Salisu, who stated that only the Qur’an provides a reliable guide for Islamic worship, and that members of his group “don’t use Hadiths as a guide to the way we worship Allah. We restrict ourselves to what the Qur’an says.” There was also the Darul Islam, a puritanical group led by Bashir Abdullahi Sulaiman, who also espoused that isolation, practiced by his group, is geared toward practicing the Islamic faith “in the most discreet form as possible,” ensuring that he and his followers did not mix with the many sinful people of this world. As a result, members of Darul Islam refrain from educating their children except in Islamic and Quranic education. As its leader noted: “... We believe that what obtains in Western Education schools is haram... For instance, children in common schools are taught that man originated from an ape; this differs from the knowledge we believe in, i.e., that man was created by God, through Prophet Adam.”

The original date of Muhammed Yusuf’s breaking away from the JTI and his establishment of Boko Haram is contentious. However, insights from sermons by Yusuf indicate that the group might have been founded between 1999 and 2003. But, irrespective of Boko Haram’s origin in Nigeria, by the summer of 2009, when its members clashed with police, it had certainly become a popular name in the country.

As noted in CDs, DVDs and leaflets produced by the group early in its development, the group was founded as the “Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad.” Owing to its teachings and attacks on Western education, it was nicknamed Boko Haram by inhabitants of Maiduguri—a Hausa expression, which literally means, “Western Education is religiously forbidden” for Muslims. Boko Haram, from inception, had two cardinal objectives: the restoration of Islam and Islamic practices to its original, pristine state based on the Qur’an and Hadith of Prophet Mohammed and the enthronement of the Sharia in Nigeria. However, following the murder of its leader, its objectives transmuted to include (1) the release of its members held in different police custodies and prisons; and (2) the prosecution of the police officers responsible for the extra-judicial killing of its members in July 2009, including its leader, Muhammed Yusuf, who was murdered while in police custody.

As a group, Boko Haram derives its hatred for Western education partly from a longstanding negative attitude toward Western education among Muslims in northern Nigeria, and partly from the Salafi-Wahhabi trends that...
dominated Nigeria from the mid-1970s. Although the leaders and exponents of the Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines were educated, most especially from the two universities in Mecca and Medina, they nevertheless preached against education for any of their members. They were also fiery preachers who took advantage of their educational backgrounds and careers in government to organize different groups in a more modern fashion, including legal registration as corporate bodies. These groups not only established extensive networks of modern Islamic schools but also secured scholarships, especially from Saudi Arabia, with which members studied at higher institutions, especially in the 1980s and 1990s.

While sheer eloquence and proficiency in spoken Arabic, with an equally impressive command of Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines, ensured that these religious leaders had large followers within the country, their international supports, which derived essentially from Islamic leaders and governments across North Africa, Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East, made them important players in Nigeria's socioeconomic and political space. With international supports, they built and maintained mosques and Arabic schools as well as engaged in philanthropy. By doling out scholarships and funding community projects, these religious leaders turned their international clout into political tools. These opportunities, although limited, were distributed within closed groups. In this way, they maintained their hold on the masses and used this hold to negotiate their importance in the political space. This led to some members becoming players in the government, the economy, and the military, while a vast majority was on the outside. Tension, especially among the younger generation, who regarded the older generation as similar to the politicians and military class they reviled, began to develop. This led some of these young ones to start new groups, initially, within the existing ones. In this way, two “generations” of fundamentalist religious groups—the older (first) and younger (second) generations—emerged.

Intergenerational discourses within the groups began to take new turns, as the younger generations accused the older generations of softening the core Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines. More often than not, the youth wings (the younger generation) accused the older of being lax, corrupt, and compromising, especially with the political elites. For the most part, the youths advocated a revival, an internal jihad, within Islam to rescue the religion from corruption. They demanded a strict adherence to the arcane Salafi-Wahhabi teachings. New groups led by these young men emerged where comfortable accommodation was not found. The internal politics either fractured the groups, with one claiming to be youth wing and the other, the elders, or led to the emergence of new groups.

The development in both the Izala and JTI groups is quite illustrative. By the 1990s, violent altercations became noticeable in the Izala group, and the group fractured into groups A and B. As far as the JTI was concerned, internal politics fractured the group and both Jafar Adam and Muhammad Yusuf broke away from the JTI to found their respective groups.
Although Adam and Yusuf differed in many respects, they both made huge successes of their enterprises and attracted thousands of followers to their groups. Adam was highly learned in both the Islamic and Western education, while Yusuf was a self-educated semi-illiterate. Unfortunately, both were murdered—Adam in the hands of assassins and Yusuf in the hands of the Nigeria police.\(^{16}\)

Both adhered to the strict Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines and attracted large followers. Despite their adherence to strict Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines, Adam differed from Yusuf in two areas for which Yusuf became popular: Western education and employment in any government not implementing the Sharia. Despite these, Adam, like other Salafi-Wahhabis, discountenanced Western substitution of gender roles, which the Salafi-Wahhabis saw as allowing for permissive sexual mores, and allegedly brought into Islamic societies by European colonialists through modern, secular education. For Yusuf, Muslims were duty-bound to wage unrelenting war against Western (secular) education.\(^{17}\)

It must be noted that although media reports presented Yusuf’s thoughts on Western education as forbidden, the views he expressed in his sermons on Western education deserves some nuanced understanding. Yusuf, in his sermons, argued that as long as Western education brings anti-Islamic socialization, it is religiously forbidden for Muslims. He stated that any education that impacts knowledge different from the Qur’an and Sunna should be rejected\(^{18}\) and that where any knowledge neither supported nor contradicted the Qur’an and Hadith, Muslims were at liberty to either accept or reject such knowledge on their own merit or as circumstances might dictate.

Although the above appears simplistic, a closer look at Yusuf’s examples shows that they have, however, deeper dimensions. For instance, advances in the sciences—medical, technological, communication, human security, and so forth that are not found in either the Qur’an or the Hadith are forbidden, even if such knowledge was nonexistent during the time of Prophet Mohammed. A few examples from Yusuf illustrate the issue.

In one of his sermons, Yusuf argued that modern science taught that rain falls through condensation and saturation of vaporized water, a teaching that contradicts Qur’an chapter 23 verse 18, which says: “And We sent down water from the sky according to (due) measure, and We caused it to soak into the soil; and We certainly are able to drain it off (with ease).”\(^{19}\) Yusuf, in his outright rejection of this scientific explanation, explained that Prophet Muhammad in the Hadith noted that whenever it rained, he would go outside and touch the rain because it was fresh, that is, created anew by God. Without as much as citing the specific portion of either the Quran or Hadith to support his teaching, Yusuf also condemned the view that the earth was spherical. Similar to his view on rainfall, Yusuf also condemned the time scales that measure the age of the earth and the various deposits within it. As against scientific claim of four billion years, Yusuf called attention to Qur’an chapter 41 verse 9, which states that God created the earth in just two days. In addition, Yusuf noted
that Allah, in chapter 50 verse 38 of the Qur’an affirmed that God created the universe in six days as against one billion, six hundred million, three minutes, and one second years, as claimed in the big bang theory.  

On human creation, Yusuf faulted Charles Darwin’s evolution theory by asserting that Qur’an chapter 23 verse 12 holds that human beings were made of clay and not evolved from lower forms of life and are still evolving. In yet another teaching, Yusuf countered chemists’ claim that energy is not created and cannot be destroyed. He called attention to the Quran in chapter 55 verses 26 and 27 that only God is eternal and uncreated. He went further to assert, “Everything/everyone on earth perishes. Only the face of your Lord of glory and honor endures.”

Yusuf’s teachings are many. For Yusuf, Muslims should reject all aspects of Western education that contradict the Qur’an and Hadith and accept only those that support or do not contradict the Qur’an and Hadith. Similarly, Yusuf, like other Salafi-Wahhabis, also rejected the coeducational system, as he claimed it brings about mixing of males and females in the same learning environment. These ultra-Salafi doctrines, with its heavy reliance on Ibn Taymiyya—a fourteenth-century Islamic scholar regarded by Salafi-Wahhabis as one of their most prominent authorities—endeared Yusuf to many, especially the impoverished and uneducated Muslims, across northern Nigeria.

Adam, from 2003, became the most vocal critic of Yusuf, though he used to be an ardent believer in Yusuf’s teachings before departing in 2003. Using open-air sermons, recorded messages on CDs, DVDs, and leaflets; Adam berated Yusuf on two grounds—Yusuf’s teachings on Western education and services within the Nigerian government. He believed Yusuf’s teachings on these two issues were gross misunderstandings of the teachings of the prophet as enshrined in both the Qur’an and Hadith. At the height of his criticism, he accused Yusuf of misleading and extorting his followers. Adam also revealed that Salafi-Wahhabis met with Yusuf eight times to correct and persuade him to abandon his teachings. In one of the meetings held in 2004 at Saudi Arabia, Yusuf was said to have admitted his mistaken views, though he was reluctant to admit this to his followers. Adam adduced Yusuf’s refusal to admit his mistaken views to his followers as resulting from fear of losing the economic gains associated with large followership.

Just like his views on Western education, Yusuf’s view on employment in Nigeria’s government is also crookedly presented in the media. For Yusuf, employment in a non-Sharia government in Nigeria is tantamount to participation in sports—for instance, being a supporter of a sports’ club; fans tend to develop affection for good sports men and women irrespective of whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. Yusuf also compared this to watching movies and argued that in most movies today, Muslims are always cast in the role of a hateful villain and non-Muslims in the role of the lovable heroes. So, by avoiding employment in government, except a government hinged on the Sharia,
Muslims will be separated from corrupt infidels. In many of his recorded sermons, Yusuf condemned many things as religiously forbidden.

Given the inability of leaders of fellow fundamentalist Islamic groups to rein in Yusuf, especially because of his teachings and large followership, a clampdown on Yusuf's activities by the police was interpreted as an attempt by other fundamentalist Islamic groups to achieve by other means what they could not achieve through dialogue in Saudi Arabia. The more the encounter between Boko Haram and the state security apparatus, the stronger the real or perceived meddlesomeness by the state in the internal dialogue among fundamentalist Islamic groups became in the mind of Yusuf and his followers. This view became even stronger when an unknown gunman murdered Adam and Yusuf was killed while in police custody. The inability of the police to find the killers of Adam and the refusal by government to allow Yusuf's killers to stand trial served to cement the views that the elders in Islamic fundamentalist groups in northern Nigeria sacrificed these young men, using the police. It is with this mindset that Boko Haram focuses the full wrath of its attacks on police and other state security apparatus.

Although this study focuses particularly on Boko Haram, it must be stated that Boko Haram is not the only group espousing these views, as others had merely gone underground, especially since the Nigerian state started a crackdown on Boko Haram. Groups such as the Maitatsine, Kala Kato, and Darul Islam also hold similar views as Boko Haram and are different from Boko Haram only in their holding of a conciliatory view to Western education and working for a (Nigerian) government not founded on the Sharia. Despite these differences, they also shared the general objectives of internal reform in Islam and the establishment of Sharia in Nigeria.

CDs, DVDs, and pamphlets that were widely and openly distributed by the duo of Yusuf and Adam at the height of their engagements have disappeared. The chief executive officer of Gbajumo Records, a prominent music distributor in Oshogbo, revealed that the fear of being accused of supporting Boko Haram and possible police arrest have forced not just record distributors and marketers but also preachers and consumers of many Islamic records (including Yusuf and Adam's, which used to be widely available in early 2000s) into the background.

Today, Boko Haram is no longer a monolithic group as it has morphed over the years. In its original incarnation, the group had its roots in a northern millenarian tradition, demanding justice against corruption within the Islamic establishment. After the death of Yusuf and the coming on board of Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram took upon itself a global terrorist outlook and has since followed closely the known global jihadist movement. “It is no longer a single group,” according to political analyst Hussaini Abdu, “... My feeling is that there are different tendencies. There is the traditional one, that Yusuf and now Shekau leads, but there are also emerging groups capitalizing on the insecurity...
in the country.” Shekau was the second-in-command of Boko Haram under Yusuf. He took over the leadership of the group, however, following Yusuf’s death. It can be argued that while Yusuf made Boko Haram a fundamentalist Islamic religious group, Shekau made it a terrorist group.

According to Johnnie Carson, US Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of African Affairs, Boko Haram is now composed of “at least two organizations, a larger organization that is focused primarily on discrediting the Nigerian government and a smaller and more dangerous group that is becoming increasingly sophisticated and increasingly lethal.” Peter Pham also noted that Boko Haram has evolved into a transnational threat with links to other terrorist and violent extremists groups in North, West, and East Africa. A clue to this view is the group’s February 2013 kidnapping of seven French tourists from a wildlife reserve in neighboring Cameroon. Although without any evidence, Nigerian intelligence services reported that some members of Boko Haram were recruited and trained in a southern Algerian camp as far back as 2006 by one Khaled Bernaoui, an Algerian.

BOKO HARAM: BETWEEN STATED AND INFERENTIAL OBJECTIVES

In their study on understanding civil wars, Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis argue that while a group’s stated objectives may point to a certain level of grievance, its activities oftentimes reveal its unstated or inferential objectives. For these scholars, these other objectives, rather than the group’s stated objectives, are the real objectives. This proposition, which also identifies the conditions under which rebellion becomes viable, is also applicable to terrorism, most especially Boko Haram’s terrorist activities in Nigeria.

As Collier and Sambanis argue in this seminal work, it is not the stated grievances per se that drive rebellion, rather the atypical opportunities that rebellion provides for groups to profit through overt conflict (terrorist) actions. These atypical opportunities, which include looting, banditry, and stealing, make rebels not different from robbers and pirates. In essence, rather than a group’s stated objectives, it is the profitable preeminence (of several underhanded activities) that rebellion brings that drives civil wars. A number of cases gave credence to the above submission. Notwithstanding the fit of Collier and Sambanis’s distinction between stated and inferred goals of insurgent or rebel movements, the model is liable to a reductionist interpretation, which may not necessarily reflect the actuality of the insurgent or rebel’s goals. In spite of this, notable examples, in the case of Africa, range from the Niger Delta’s militancy to the Liberian Civil War. In both cases, rather than the groups’ stated claims of agitation for environmental degradation and nation building, opportunities to derive profits from pipeline vandalism, kidnapping-for-ransom, and oil bunkering to illegal diamond mining, gunrunning, and drug trade were the main motives for rebellion.
Can these propositions above apply also to Boko Haram? To proffer an answer to this question, it is important to isolate Boko Haram’s stated objectives from what can be called its inferential objectives. It is with this in mind that this study engages the question of whether or not the government of Nigeria should dialogue with the group.

As orchestrated by Yusuf in his sermons and as opined by other Boko Haram’s spokespersons, especially on YouTube online videos after Yusuf’s death, it was revealed that Boko Haram originally aimed at two things: revamping the perceived or real corruption in Islamic practices, especially among the socio-religious and political elites in northern Nigeria, and the establishment of Nigeria as an Islamic state. Following the death of Yusuf, Boko Haram’s objectives expanded to include engaging the state security structure (with attacks) for the death of Yusuf; seeking the release of group’s members in police custody and also justice for the slain leader, Muhammad Yusuf. Other stated objectives of Boko Haram are conversion of President Goodluck Jonathan from Christianity to Islam and the eviction of non-Muslims from northern Nigeria.

In order to attain these objectives, Boko Haram, like other fundamentalist Islamic groups, believed that pious living and moral examples would not deliver any of these objectives—only force of arms would. As a result, the group’s modus operandi has included bombings and arsons, lootings, robberies, shootings, and kidnapping. They have used improvised electrical devices (IEDs) to make bombs with which they killed people and destroyed government and international organizations’ facilities, churches and mosques, schools, and markets, among other places. Besides its attacks on the police headquarters and the United Nations’ building in Abuja, Boko Haram, in January 2010, attacked the Dada Alemanderi ward in Maiduguri, killing four people. It attacked a prison in Bauchi on September 7, 2010, where over 700 inmates were set free, among whom were members of the group. In December 2010, the group bombed a market, leading to the arrest of 92 of its members, while a governorship candidate, his brother, and four police officers were assassinated. A plot to plant a bomb at the venue of the All Nigerian Peoples Party was foiled by the police on March 29, 2011. On April 15, 2011, the Maiduguri office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was bombed, and many people fleeing the scene were shot at. A Muslim cleric opposed to Boko Haram’s activities was assassinated on April 20, 2011, while police officers in Maiduguri were ambushed in Maiduguri. On the April 22, 2011, the group freed 14 prisoners in a jailbreak in Yola. The group launched a series of bomb attacks across northern Nigeria on May 29, 2011, leaving not fewer than 15 dead bodies. The most daring attacks of Boko Haram remain the attacks on the United Nations’ building and police headquarters; however, attacks on churches, mosques, markets, schools, and universities have left scores of dead bodies and property worth billions of dollars behind.
Victims, numbering in the thousands, have included Nigerians and non-Nigerians, Christians and non-Christians, males and females, old and young. Although no reliable data exists, Vanguard, a leading newspaper in Nigeria, noted that Boko Haram has killed 4,000 Nigerians since 2009. These included Christians, Muslims, members of the police and military, university professors, innocent students, and even children. The Chief of Army Staff recently put the figure at 3,000, while the Human Rights Watch claimed that Boko Haram killed over 450 people between 2009 and 2012. Data on the proportion of Christians and Muslims killed by Boko Haram is also unavailable; however, president Jonathan of Nigeria claimed that the insurgent group has killed more Muslims than Christians. This view, contested by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, two umbrella bodies of Christians in Nigeria, runs contrary to patterns of attack of the insurgent group. For instance, Boko Haram has attacked more churches and Christian schools than mosques and Muslim schools or other institutions. In terms of space, the recent development in Mali has shown that Boko Haram’s activities have transcended Nigeria, as victims have been driven across Nigeria’s frontiers into Cameroon, Niger, and Mali. In addition to these, Boko Haram has also claimed linkages with al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, a claim Nigeria’s security operatives helped popularize despite tenuous linkages and absolute difficulties in ascertaining these claims.

It is well known that terrorists use activities that are capable of inducing fear on proxy targets to call people and government attention to their objectives. To what extent are Boko Haram’s stated objectives achievable in a pluralistic nation like Nigeria? Put differently, given Nigeria’s multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural nature; can Boko Haram achieve any of its objectives? In the remaining part of this section, this study determines what can be called Boko Haram’s inferential objectives. The argument here is that while Boko Haram’s stated objectives may point in one direction, its activities point elsewhere. As Colliers and Sambanis had noted, insurgents are, at most times, driven not by any atypical grievance, as they are wont to claim, but by an atypical opportunity or for profits from insurgency. In relation to Boko Haram, the group’s stated objectives can be divided into (1) original and (2) incidental objectives. While the original objectives describe the group’s objectives of rebirth in Islam and the Islamization of Nigeria through the Sharia, the incidental objectives relate to such objectives as the release of members and justice for its slain leader. It is pertinent to ask at this point what qualifies as objective grievances between Boko Haram’s original and incidental objectives.

In most pluralistic societies, no government determines internal changes within groups (whether ethnic or religious). In the spirit of secularism, an important component of Nigeria’s constitution is that religious groups are at liberty to direct their affairs, and the government lacks jurisdiction over internal politics within religious groups. From the standpoint of Islamizing Nigeria
to the objective of moral rebirth in Islamic practices in (northern) Nigeria, the government would be circumventing the nation’s constitution if it makes any attempt at interfering in the internal changes within any of the religious groups. As far as the government is concerned, its role is limited to providing a level playing field for interfaith dialogue among religions.

For most Nigerians, the relative backwardness of northern Nigeria compared to other parts of Nigeria stems, on the one hand, from imbalances in the socioeconomic and educational development of northern and southern Nigeria and, on the other hand, from corruption within the northern political class. As already shown, the objective of ridding the north of corruption has assumed the status of an internal dialogue within different Islamic groups in northern Nigeria, and it underlined the call for rebirth within fundamentalist Islam in the region. While this is commendable, it is, however, incorrect to seek government support in using a religious platform to achieve this. It must be noted that internal dialogue within religious groups, such as the above, is not peculiar to Islam alone. Christians have also expressed concerns about the number of Christians who are either undergoing trials or who are in jail for one corrupt practice or the other. Early in 2013, for instance, the Catholic church in Nigeria announced that it was suspending its membership of the umbrella body for all Christians in Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria.38

To the extent that Boko Haram aims at achieving internal revival within Islam (in northern Nigeria) as a countermeasure to corruption in the region, its objective can be said to be altruistic and in the national interest. However, does being altruistic and being in the national interest also make such an objective a grievance? Following this, it is safe to posit that (1) since Boko Haram agitates for the Islamization of Nigeria, it sets itself against the nation’s constitution and the government, which owes other Nigerians the right to be protected from Boko Haram or any group agitating for similar objective(s); (2) to the extent that Boko Haram is gaining broad support for its objectives at the expense of other (moderate and fundamentalist) Islamic groups, the government reserves the right to rein in Boko Haram (or any group with similar objectives) in the interest of other citizens, especially as Boko Haram’s stated objectives breached the nation’s constitution. Given these two positions, the clamping down on the activities of Boko Haram by security operatives in 2009 or at any other time cannot be termed meddlesomeness, but a step in ensuring national security.

As far as its incidental objectives are concerned, the government must ensure justice for the murder of any Nigerian, including Yusuf. In addition to this, arrested members of Boko Haram must be brought to trial and, if found guilty, punished accordingly. A situation whereby suspects are kept in police custody for a long time and without trial breeds injustice. It is from this standpoint that Boko Haram’s incidental objectives constitute an objective grievance.
From the above, can it be argued that Boko Haram is a reaction to an internal and intra-religious dialogue? Understood in this way, it therefore becomes a kind of “monologue,” a protest initially directed against Islam and Muslims, which spread to the entire nation as a result of a real or imagined state meddlesomeness in the dialogue. While Boko Haram’s incidental objectives can constitute legitimate grounds for objective grievance, its original objectives cannot. Thus, it can be argued that Boko Haram’s objectives—original and incidental—cannot explain the group’s terrorist activities, insofar as the original objectives gave birth to the incidental and not vice versa.

Since it has been decided that Boko Haram’s incidental objectives cannot produce its original objectives, it can then be concluded that Boko Haram is deploying terror to force not only other fundamentalist Islamic groups but also other Nigerians (Muslims and non-Muslims) to accede to the group’s original objectives. From this standpoint, it can be argued that the deployment of terrorism presented Boko Haram with opportunities to negotiate power and other cherished ideals in its engagement with other fundamentalist Islamic groups. It is therefore not any objective grievance per se that drives Boko Haram but an atypical opportunity for profitable gains.

BOKO HARAM: A DINNER WITH THE DEVIL

Given the expositions above, can government still dialogue with Boko Haram to end its terrorist activities? Before answers can be proffered to this and other questions, a number of other issues have to be determined. For instance, it has to be decided whether or not the government can speak on behalf of Boko Haram’s opponents—other Nigerians—without breaching the constitution. Also, it has to be decided whether or not circumstances that could warrant objective grievances abound more in northern Nigeria than in any other parts of Nigeria. If the answer to this last question is in the affirmative, it must also be decided whether or not the approach adopted by Boko Haram can ameliorate the circumstances.

The import of finding answers to these questions is that it enables us know whether or not dialoging with Boko Haram holds any potential to rein in the terrorist group or any other groups with similar objectives. The logic here is that if grounds exist to foster terrorism, it is of little consequence whether or not the government reins in Boko Haram, as groups with similar objectives will rear their heads immediately as Boko Haram disappears from the scene. Boko Haram and other fundamentalist Islamic groups aim primarily at sanitizing Islam, most especially in its engagement with socioeconomic and political developments in northern Nigeria. Hence, its agitation is not directly connected to the government in Nigeria. Negotiating with Boko Haram on its original objective of revamping Islam and implementing the Sharia in Nigeria has constitutional implications. The implications deal not just with the secularism
clause of the constitution but also contravene the fundamental rights of other Nigerians in the areas of rights to religious freedom, freedom of association, and lawful assembly. As enshrined in all nations’ constitutions, if the rights and privileges of a part of a nation contravene the rights and privileges of other parts, the rights and privileges of the part becomes of no consequence. This implies, from the standpoint of the law, that the government would be breaching the constitution by imposing on other Nigerians the views held by a group. So the government cannot act in religious matters on behalf of either Boko Haram or other religious groups (fundamentalist or moderate) in Nigeria.

From the two previous sections, it is argued that only an atypical opportunity to profit from organizing and financing terrorist acts can explain Boko Haram’s activities. What then explains the ready acceptance of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria? To answer this question, this study argues that a number of factors make terrorism more feasible in northern Nigeria than in any other parts of the country. These conditions include poverty and illiteracy, fundamentalist Islam, and a general fascination with Islamic/Quranic education, as well as support from sympathetic (or sometimes diasporic) organizations or from hostile governments. Given these conditions, organizing and financing terrorist activities in northern Nigeria becomes easier for a group like Boko Haram.

In most cases, poverty and illiteracy ensured that people, most especially youths, are easily recruited into insurgent groups, as wants and deprivations made them willing tools and accessories. The role of religion or faith in this process is often underestimated in the literature. However, where socioeconomic and political problems are couched in religious texts by zealots and validated by the political class, religion becomes a resource that holds a strong potential in controlling the masses. As the case of Islam in northern Nigeria has shown, promises of heavenly bliss after a sojourn in a sinful world makes the hearts and minds of the poor, uneducated, and unsuspecting listeners crave for that which could not be achieved in the present. In this simple but oftentimes complex and unsuspecting manner, religion preys on socioeconomic and political problems to radicalize the poor. Proliferation of churches and mosques in Nigeria is a clear pointer to the fact that evidence of a religious explanation to the nation’s socioeconomic and political woes has long been underway.

While this process abounds everywhere in the country, why is the case of northern Nigeria different? As it is generally known, northern Nigeria was insulated from Christianity and Western education during the colonial period, and it was shortly before independence that the duo of Christianity and Western education became widespread in the area. The imports of this on the religious universe of northern Nigeria are legion, but the most salient is that the religious universe remains noncompetitive. Islam, for a very long time, enjoyed a monopoly, and when Christianity made its forays into the area, its impact was limited.
It is in this way that the second condition—a general fascination with Islamic education to the detriment of Western education—becomes important. In a study that examines the impact of internal migration on human development in Nigeria, the author finds that of the 3,000 northern Nigerian internal migrants interviewed, about 87 percent still prefer Islamic and Quranic education to Western education. Reasons for this preference include (1) cost, (2) content, which they considered as anti-Islamic, and (3) access. Paradoxically, these people also testified that Western education places their holders in apposite position for employment in government and industries and situates them on a high social pedestal. A cursory look at Nigeria’s 1999 labor force statistics shows that 70 percent ofarians work in the agricultural sector, while the remaining 30 percent work in the industry and services sectors. The unemployment rate for the same period stands at 24 percent of the total population, and this increased by 5 percent in 2011. 2010 estimates revealed that 70 percent of Nigerians lived below the poverty line of 1 USD a day. According to Nigeria’s Federal Office of Statistics and the Central Bank of Nigeria, a higher poverty rate and poor standard of living abounds in northern Nigeria more than in any other part of the country.

Taking this weak economic outlook together with a political narrative that explains socioeconomic and political woes in purely religious terms, it is clear that the differences between northern and southern Nigeria are far more complex than earlier thought. The introduction of Sharia in northern Nigeria immediately after transition to civil rule in 1999 is the height of this narrative. This, among other things, validated religious zealots’ argument that socioeconomic and political woes amid Nigeria’s human and material resources abundance is a result of sinning. Put differently, the political class simply validated the religious narrative and thereby cemented a process long established by religious zealots. Nigeria’s dependency on crude oil exportation to the detriment of other sectors of the economy, which makes the nation’s economy susceptible to global trade in oil, endemic corruption within the political class, and hosts of other factors necessitating Nigeria’s weak sociopolitical and economic outlook simply disappeared from the table. and the development of groups exhibiting fissiparous tendencies simply completes the radicalization process in northern Nigeria. From the above, a region such as northern Nigeria would normally wean more insurgents and terrorists than a more competitive southern Nigeria.

Another condition that made insurgencies possible in northern Nigeria is support from diasporic or sympathetic organizations or support from hostile governments. As noted in section two, diaspora financing or support from sympathetic organizations or from hostile governments plays important roles in the ability of fundamentalist Islam to leverage power through the building of mosques and Arabic/Islamic schools as well as embarking on philanthropy. This sets religious groups even higher than the government. More often than
not, diaspora organizations validate groups’ activities through the provision of financial support, training, and logistics. In the particular case of Boko Haram and northern Nigeria, it is unclear if diaspora organizations have played any part. What is not contentious, however, is the fact that sympathetic organizations and hostile governments have played important roles. Salafi-Wahhabis in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Libya have played important roles in the training and education of Salafi-Wahhabis in Nigeria. Evidence abounds that sympathetic organizations and hostile governments across the Middle East, North Africa, and Saudi Arabia have provided financial, training, and logistical support to many radical Islamic groups in Nigeria from the 1970s to today. These sympathetic organizations and governments built mosques and Quranic schools as well as provided scholarships for university education and other monetary gifts to radical Islamic groups across Nigeria.\(^42\)

Although the narratives from the Nigerian state is that al-Qaida’s support for Boko Haram, especially since coming to power by Shekau, has been massive and relates essentially to financing, training, and logistics; this is, however, unclear and unsubstantiated, as no one is ready to volunteer information for fear of a possible arrest. Importantly, single stories from military establishments without corroborating evidence, as experience has shown, are necessarily to spike up the military budget, demonize insurgent groups, and protect the regime. Until recently, evidence of Boko Haram’s possible link with al-Qaida remains anecdotal and never goes beyond unsubstantiated claims in the newspapers and on YouTube online videos by Boko Haram itself.

Two other important conditions that gave rise to Boko Haram in northern Nigeria are Nigeria’s atypically weak security capacity and social cohesion. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria’s security system is poor. As Mrs. Egbeyemi, head of the human trafficking section of the Nigeria police force, noted, at Boko Haram’s infancy, Yusuf had unfettered access to top security operatives and made large recruits, even from the police, into his group. A situation whereby security operatives accept a religious explanation for socioeconomic and political problems is, to say the least, pathetic. In a damning acceptance of intelligence and security failure, President Goodluck Jonathan also admitted that not just members of the security operatives but also members of the National Assembly and Federal Executive Council are members and/or supporters of Boko Haram.\(^43\)

Northern Nigeria, unlike its southern counterpart, is polarized into Muslims versus non-Muslims and Hausa/Fulanis versus non-Hausa/Fulanis. This situation shows a lack of ethnic and religious cohesion. This should not be confused with ethnic and religious diversity, but fractionalization based on ethnicity and religion. Another example of the negative impact of fractionalization is the Jos crisis. Although a number of factors explain the crisis in Jos, the popular narrative is that the crisis results from ethno-religious intolerance. This mono-causal explanation obscures, for instance, the economic basis of the crisis.
As Oyeniyi noted, although the crisis is essentially between Hausa/Fulani settlers who are predominantly cattle herders and the Christian natives/hosts, comprising Birom, Anaguta, and Afisare peoples, who are essentially farmers, competition over access, control, and distribution of land pitched the indigenous peasant farmers against the settler cattle-herder population over the years. This competition took on a religious dimension with the creation of Jos North Local Government under military rule. Located in the Hausa-Fulani-dominated Muslim community, the local government is essentially seen as created for the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, and efforts by the indigenous population to establish any presence in the local government was rebuffed by the Hausa-Fulani. While in the case of Jos, there is no evidence of ethnic fractionalization; religious polarization, however, exists, with the indigenous population being essentially Christian and the Hausa-Fulani settler population being Muslim.

While diversity reduces polarization, polarization makes ethnic and religious tolerance difficult as the larger group considers the smaller an irrelevant pest that is, at the very least, tolerated but not accepted. So, for Muslims in northern Nigeria, Christians and other non-Muslim citizens are simply to be tolerated. The introduction of Sharia, the numerous calls for dialogue and general amnesty for Boko Haram by many from northern Nigeria arose from this mindset and are essentially championed by direct and indirect supporters or sympathizers of Boko Haram.

As expressed by Hussein Solomon, Boko Haram was a response to local grievances in Nigeria, a representation of a deep and popular dissatisfaction with deteriorating living standards in Nigeria, a disaffection with a corrupt political elite that is not responsive to people’s needs, and an alienating Nigerian state that has reinforced sectarian divisions and is unable to articulate a notion of Nigerian citizenship transcending divisions of language, ethnicity, religion, and region over the years. This very apt description lent credence to the view that terrorism found fertile ground in northern Nigeria because of many other factors, in addition to religious reasons.

Terrorism and the orgy of violence that are today synonymous with Boko Haram actually started with Yusuf, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain whether or not Boko Haram of today is what Yusuf had envisaged. However, it must be asserted that not until its confrontation with the police, Boko Haram under Yusuf focused primarily on the group’s two cardinal objectives. Things changed, however, with the series of crises that led to Yusuf’s death. From this point, Boko Haram, under Shekau, became a terrorist group. Notwithstanding this, it can be asserted that there is continuity in the evolution of the group since Shekau’s takeover.

In terms of teachings, not much is available under Shekau, but the group’s ideologies have remained the same. In no fewer than five YouTube online videos, Shekau reiterated the fact that he remained committed to the ideals of
Boko Haram as enunciated by Yusuf. In July 2010, Shekau appeared in a video claiming leadership of the group and threatening attacks on Western influences in Nigeria. Later that month, Shekau issued a second statement expressing solidarity with al-Qaida and threatening the United States. Barely 24 hours after the inauguration of a committee to dialogue and negotiate with Boko Haram, Shekau released a video denying his group’s knowledge of any ceasefire and dialogue with the federal government. In yet another video obtained from Shekau by the AFP, Shekau noted, “Let me assure you that we will not enter into any truce with these infidels. We will not enter into any truce with the Nigerian government.” On the claim that his group had agreed to a ceasefire, he said, “The claim that we have entered into a truce with the government of Nigeria is not true. We don’t know Kabiru Turaki. We have never spoken with him. He is lying.” Kabiru Turaki is the chairman of the committee set up by government to dialogue with Boko Haram.

Shekau, in the same video, announced his group’s support for the July 6 attack on a government-owned school in Yobe, which witnessed the gruesome murder of at least 29 schoolchildren. “We fully support the attack on this Western education school in Mamudo,” he said in the video. Shekau, who described all “Western education schools” as a “plot against Islam,” noted further that the group’s incessant attacks on schools were aimed not to kill “children and young girls or old women, but their teachers that teach Western education. We are supposed to kill them in the presence of their students.”

From the above, it can be argued that Shekau continued with the group’s ideology as enunciated by Yusuf. From Yusuf’s teachings to the group’s current activities, it can also be argued safely that Yusuf had envisaged a confrontational Boko Haram and not a pacifist group. This has continued unabated under Shekau. It can also be argued that high-handedness in the government’s treatment of Boko Haram contributed to the group’s radicalization under Shekau. In essence, it can be argued that Boko Haram under Shekau differs only by degree from the group Yusuf led. Since there is no teaching of Boko Haram since Shekau’s leadership, Yusuf’s teachings remain the only official sources through which insights into the group’s activities can best be measured. It is on the basis of the above that this study seeks to know if dialogue is an option to rein in Boko Haram. In addition, the study attempts to know the impact that dialoging with Boko Haram or general amnesty for the group would have on Nigeria’s national image and security.

A general principle in conflict resolution and peace building is dialogue. Dialogue allows for the unmasking of the identity of any insurgent group and its grievances. It also affords mediators the opportunity to get parties in any conflict to see their agitations in new and, oftentimes, proper perspectives. Above all, dialogue reveals root causes of conflicts. It is for these reasons that dialogue is indispensable to conflict resolution and peace building. Can dialogue be applied in a case such as this?
Undoubtedly, dialogue will unmask the identity of Boko Haram. It will certainly reveal the root causes of the groups’ agitations and ways to combat them. It is also important for accountability and justice, most especially for victims of Boko Haram’s activities. It will afford the government ample knowledge of factors that could aid other groups with fissiparous tendencies, not just Boko Haram. As noted earlier, both Boko Haram and victims of its activities deserve justice. Boko Haram cannot refuse others what it allows itself. The group’s clamor for justice for its detained members and slain leader should also go hand-in-glove with justice for victims of its attacks. Just like Yusuf, the thousands of people who had lost their lives and property to Boko Haram also deserve justice.

Although dialogue in conflict resolution oftentimes leads to negotiation, and the terms, for the most part, are used interchangeably, dialogue differs from negotiation. Dialogue precedes negotiation, as it allows parties to any conflict to see their respective views. Does “the other,” as far as Boko Haram is concerned, also include government, other Muslims and non-Muslims in Nigeria? In so far as the objectives of Boko Haram directly challenge the fundamental rights of other citizens, government must ensure that such objectives are not realized. In other words, dialogue must be pursued, but not negotiation.

CONCLUSION

From the study so far, a number of issues are made clear. Boko Haram, notwithstanding its current manifestations, was and still remains an internal dialogue within fundamentalist Islam in Nigeria. Its original objectives set it on a collision course with other Muslims across Nigeria who do not share the group’s views about Islam. In addition, the group’s objectives are also against the nation’s constitution, which is a public issue. Its objectives impact or infringe on the rights of others (Muslims and non-Muslims) and contradict the national objective of secularism and pluralism.

It must also be asserted that internal contradictions exist in Boko Haram’s objectives. Its stated objectives fail to point to any objective grievance either to the group itself or to Islam in general. Despite disparity between its stated and inferential motives, its objectives are unattainable in a secular and pluralistic nation like Nigeria. To attain Boko Haram’s goal of Islamizing Nigeria is to invite anarchy, and, as such, the government reserves the right not only to protect the rights of others but also to ensure a strict adherence to the constitution over sectarian objectives of a fundamentalist group.

In addition, it can also be argued that the split in fundamentalist Islam reveals that Islam, even fundamentalist Islam, is not monolithic. In both moderate and fundamentalist Islam, a religious entrepreneur can gain materially by using popular sentiment to gather a large followership. In the political arena, such a religious entrepreneur can use his followership for political
advantage. A number of reports have linked Boko Haram to the incumbent political leadership of Borno State. The former governor, Ali Sherif Modu, was alleged to have entered into a pact with the leadership of Boko Haram to ensure his electoral victory. Upon his electoral victory, he was said to have reneged on the agreement, and in retaliation, the group took up arms in order to make the state ungovernable for the governor. Modu has vehemently denied having any pact with the group, but this view, even if it is true, cannot explain why Boko Haram has spread to states other than Borno.

Notwithstanding the above, socioeconomic and political deprivations, which could serve as an impetus for the development of fissiparous tendencies, abound in northern Nigeria, although these are not peculiar to the region alone. As the case of Boko Haram has shown, these deprivations skewed the thin line separating greed from grievance in any analysis of the motivation for Boko Haram’s terrorism. However, it must be asserted that the relative differences between the north and south cannot be adduced to either ethnic hatred or religious differences between the two segments of Nigeria. So Boko Haram’s activities could not be explained as resulting from ethnic and religious reasons.

Although relative deprivation may skew the lines between greed and grievance in the Boko Haram discourse, will to power, especially among youths, which fractured different fundamentalist Islamic groups into splinter groups, clearly shows that given a level of objective grievance, it is the opportunity such grievance presents for groups and individuals to profit that drives terrorism and not the grievance per se. As the case of Boko Haram showed, this will to power relates more to internal politics within Islam than to the Nigerian nation.

Terrorism, irrespective of the case used, is a political strategy that can be logically processed and explained. As the case of Boko Haram showed, resort to terrorism is a willful choice made by the group for political and strategic reasons. As the case of El-Zakyzaky’s MSSN has shown, Boko Haram undoubtedly possesses a range of preferences or alternatives but selects terrorism as a course of action. For Boko Haram, terrorism is more efficacious than any other alternatives in achieving both its original and incidental goals. As is commonly known, organizations arrive at collective decisions through experience and observation. In the case of Boko Haram, the precedent set by the Niger-Delta militants and how the government dealt with the group set the pace for groups such as Boko Haram to engage in terrorism. As a rational choice, responsibility and accountability cannot (and must not) be dissociated from their outcomes. Negotiating with Boko Haram and granting general amnesty to the group under whatever guise throw responsibility and accountability out of the window.

Although the debate on whether or not it is right for the government to dialogue with Boko Haram is ongoing, it is the considered view of this study that dialogue is good, especially in conflict resolution. However, in the specific
case of Boko Haram, dialogue cannot lead to negotiation. The general call, most especially from northern Nigeria, for dialogue, negotiation, and a possible amnesty for Boko Haram takes no cognizance of responsibility and justice. Paradoxically, Boko Haram is calling for these two ideals for its slain leader and detained members. Whatever is good for the goose must be good for the gander. Boko Haram cannot, on the one hand, demand justice for its slain leader while, on the other hand, remaining unwilling to accept responsibility for its activities, especially for the lives lost and property destroyed in the course of its activities. As this study argued, dialoguing with Boko Haram, especially when the objective is to negotiate, is a sheer vacuity from which nothing can be gained.

As many have noted, Boko Haram has morphed into factions; it is wise for the government to know which faction is responsible for the bombing, kidnapping, arson, and death. Irrespective of the factions, many in southern Nigeria believe that Boko Haram is being sponsored by powerful northern politicians whose aim is to pressure President Jonathan into dropping any plans he may be harboring to contest in 2015. It must be noted that President Jonathan, a Southerner from the Niger-Delta, was vice president in 2007 while late President Musa Yar’Adua, a Northerner, was the president. Following Yar’Adua’s death, the presidency passed to Jonathan, who, in 2011 was voted in as president after having completed Yar’Adua’s term. As a policy in the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), presidency should be rotated between the North and South, and with President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Southerner, completing his eight-year term, it was expected that Jonathan would step down for a Northern candidate in 2011 rather than contesting the presidency. His refusal to step down elicited concern within the predominantly PDP-controlled northern Nigeria. There is now a serious concern among politicians from northern Nigeria that should Jonathan contest again in 2015, he would be creating a constitutional debacle, as the laws allow for a presidency of only two terms of four years. In order to prevent Jonathan from contesting in 2015, some members of the ruling PDP have challenged his candidature in court. The court, however, upheld his qualification.

With the legal hurdle, which may prevent Jonathan from contesting in 2015, cleared by the courts, northern interest in winning the 2015 presidential election faces an uphill task. Nigeria, it must be asserted, is a heterogeneous state, with more than 300 ethnic and language groups. Since party politics was introduced during the colonial period, they have revolved around issues of ethnicity and religion. The Obafemi Awolowo-led Action Group (AG) dominated political space in western Nigeria while Nnamdi Azikiwe’s National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) dominated eastern Nigeria and the Tafawa Balewa-led Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) dominated northern Nigeria. While Islam predominates in northern Nigeria, the South, comprising former western and eastern regions, is essentially Christian. These two factors have come to
shape Nigerian politics over the years. Hence, when a northern Muslim candidate is contesting for the presidency, to win support from the South, he must choose a southern Christian and vice versa. With the relocation of Nigeria’s capital from Lagos to Abuja, a number of Southerners have moved toward northern Nigeria. Essentially, this has impacted northern Nigeria’s socioeconomic lives. Among other things, it has altered religious and political lives of the zone, with the minority Christian population in northern Nigeria raising their voices with active support from Christian immigrants from southern Nigeria. In addition to this, we have also seen a tremendous increase in the number of Christians aspiring to political offices in northern Nigeria. The long-term effect remains to be seen, but what is clear is that the religious and political universe of northern Nigeria is being altered.

It is this admixture of politics and religion that shaped discussions on Boko Haram, with a majority from southern Nigeria asserting that the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency is aimed at ensuring that President Jonathan, a Christian from the South, does not emerge as president again in 2015, especially since President Jonathan has never disguised his intention to contest again in 2015.

A clear pointer to the fact that the above may not be correct is that Boko Haram’s activities have targeted the northern political establishment more than any other. This is even in spite of the fact that northern traditional Islamic and political leaders have presented a posturing that suggests that they hold the keys to dialogue with Boko Haram. The recent suicide bombing in Maiduguri, which narrowly missed the Shehu of Borno, second only to the Sultan of Sokoto in terms of traditional hierarchy, and the eventual attack on the sultan himself affirmed the submission that Boko Haram is an internal dialogue. It will therefore be fatally wrong to interpret Boko Haram as Islamic and northern. More sanguinely, Boko Haram’s ideological roots remain strong and show that the group sees the northern political and traditional religious oligarchs as part of the corrupt system they are fighting.

NOTES


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25. Adam al-Shaykh Ja’far Mahmud, Assertion and Self-Contradiction.


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35. Ibid.


45. Solomon Hussein, “Governance Reforms.”

