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1.3.1. Boko Haram, including JAS, ISWAP and Ansaru

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: October 2021

[Main COI references:Targeting, 2.1; Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.1]

A number of armed groups are operating on the territory of Nigeria, among which Boko Haram is considered the most powerful one. Boko Haram is a Salafi-jihadist group fighting for the replacement of the secular Nigerian state with an Islamic one based on a strict compliance to the Sharia law, throughout the country. It operates in the North East of Nigeria, in particular in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, exerting violence against westerners, Christians and Muslims considered 'infidels'. Boko Haram still exercises control in some areas in the North-East region. It has further expanded its activities in the North-West and in Niger state in the North-Central region.

Since its rise in 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has adversely affected some 15 million people, displaced over two million people and caused an estimated 20 000 to 30 000 deaths. As a result of brutal tactics deployed by Boko Haram, a group called Ansaru, which is reportedly linked to Al Qaeda, broke away in early 2012. In 2020, Ansaru conducted its first attacks in five years in Kaduna state.

The indiscriminate killings of civilians and, in particular, of Muslims caused divisions within the Boko Haram. In 2016 Boko Haram split into two factions: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad (JAS), led by Abubakar Shekau, and the Islamic State - West Africa (ISWAP), led by Abu Musab al Barnawi. However, this distinction is often not reflected in media reports, which refer to Boko Haram.

JAS is characterised by the use of more violent methods and continues to perpetrate systematic attacks against both Muslims and Christians. Anyone who does not support the group is perceived as a supporter of the government and may be targeted. It is reported that the group is more active in south-central Borno, including in Maiduguri, and along the Cameroonian border. It also has bases in the north-western part of Nigeria, particularly Niger state. On 19 May 2021, JAS's leader Abubakar Shekau with his troops were ambushed and captured by ISWAP in the Sambisa Forest. It is estimated that JAS has 1 500 – 2 000 members.

ISWAP (also now known as ISIS-WA) has criticised the targeting of Muslims, focusing its attacks on Christians and persons not abiding by Sharia law ('infidels'), military structures, government and security personnel, traditional leaders and contractors, and has tried to gain the support of

local communities by providing services. However, attacks of ISWAP in 2020 suggested a shift in its stance against targeting Muslim civilians. In the same context, a source indicated that ISWAP seemed to shift its focus towards targeting unarmed civilians rather than governmental, military, and INGO targets, becoming a deadlier faction than the original Boko Haram and than JAS. This faction's stronghold lies in Lake Chad and the group has a permanent presence in the Alagarno forest. Its influence also extends into the northern Borno countryside, and southwards into Yobe state and parts of south-central Borno. It has a presence around Maiduguri and its operations extend into North Adamawa. ISWAP is also building the capacity of radical groups in the north-west of Nigeria. ISWAP has become politically entrenched and seems to pose an even larger challenge to the Nigerian military than the remainder of Boko Haram/JAS. It is estimated that ISWAP has 3 500 to 5 000 members and it is both militarily stronger than JAS and expanding its reach.

In its insurgency, Boko Haram has committed widespread human rights violations across Northern Nigeria, such as: suicide bombings, massacres, burning down of entire villages, attacks on places of worship and schools, and the killing of people in such sites; attacks on IDP camps, cruel and degrading treatment following sentences by its 'courts', extrajudicial executions, political assassinations, abduction on a massive scale, including of children, forced displacement, child recruitment, grave violation of the rights of women and girls such as slavery, sexual violence, forced marriages and forced pregnancy, etc.

Illegal checkpoints on roads have become a daily occurance, particularly in northern Borno. While in previous years Boko Haram commonly used bombings, in recent years it has shifted towards armed assault and hostage taking. Reportedly, approximately 90 % of those kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2020 were taken from roads that are main supply routes. The new strategy of the Nigerian state forces of concentrating their troops in 'super camps' and IDPs in 'garrison towns' has enabled Boko Haram to expand its activities in rural parts of the country. In 2020, it was further observed that cooperation and collaboration between (motorcycle) bandits and Boko Haram factions continued in several northern states. Both ISWAP and JAS dispose of millions of rounds of ammunition, thousands of assault rifles and assorted firearms, and hundreds of military vehicles, including armoured tanks and self-propelled artillery. Nigerian armed forces have used air strikes to target training camps and hideouts of the group. In 2020, violence continued to escalate.

Boko Haram has a decentralised structure composed by a number of cells and hierarchical layers. The primary sources of funding of Boko Haram are extortions, robberies and looting, cattle and livestock rustling, Islamic donations, local enterprises, kidnappings for ransom, arms smuggling and bank robberies.
Several incidents and killings of those who tried to leave or refuse to join Boko Haram are reported.

Boko Haram was added to the UN Security Council sanctions list in 2014. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the group ranked as the second deadliest terrorist group in 2019. February 2020, ISWAP was included in the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaeda UN sanctions list. In December 2020, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC concluded that there is reasonable basis to believe that war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed by Boko Haram since July 2009.[9]

[9]**Statement of the Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, on the conclusion of the preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria, 11 December 2020, https://www.icc-cpi.int/nigeria, Preliminary examination: Nigeria https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=201211-prosecutor-statement, https://www.icc-cpi.int/nigeria [back to text]**

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