

# What Boko Haram Really Wants

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What does Boko Haram really want? Answers to this tasking question have become more pertinent in the wake of the anarchic situation in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, consequent to the deleterious effects of the bitter vendetta being waged against the state by the Islamist insurgent group, Boko Haram – an extremist organization that is committed to re-arranging the social order as currently constituted. This question becomes more glaring when one takes a dispassionate view at the series of events that have led up to the current orgy of violence that is speedily taking its bloody toll on the North-East and its residents, and threatening to engulf the rest of the country; a macabre dance of death that has shown no signs of abating despite all that have been thrown at it.

A new twist to the gory trail of events that have been unfolding in the North-East since 2009 came to the fore a couple of weeks ago when Boko Haram gunmen swept through some towns along Nigeria's border with Cameroun and tightened its grip on large parts of Borno – its ancestral home – bringing a brand new message with them. Rather than sowing afresh the terror they have brought to swathes of North-Eastern Nigeria by attacking selected targets and pulling back – a guerrilla tactic that has defined their Modus Operandi since the onset of their bloody campaign – the jihadists insisted they were there to stay. The latest attacks have conformed to the group's preferred strategy of spreading panic and spilling blood with murderous raids, bombings and beheadings. The capture of the strategic Borno town of Bama – since disputed by the Nigerian authorities – has raised concern that the state capital, Maiduguri, where Boko Haram was founded and long one of its key targets, will be next to come under sustained attack.

Just like security watchers warned some weeks ago, what is playing out before everybody is the fact that Boko Haram, a group which originated in 2002 as a movement dedicated to exterminating all vestiges of Westernization in the North-Eastern part of the country, was on the verge of ending government control across the whole of Borno State and establishing its long-vaunted dream of an Islamic State. Gradually, but steadily, a group that was once derided as rag-tag and directionless has suddenly metamorphosed from being a guerrilla movement – that was once confined to Sambisa forest and its adjourning mountain caves – into a formidable military force capable of holding its own against Nigeria's security forces and their foreign collaborators combined, and consolidating on its gains. Mohamed Shekau's declaration in a video released in the wake of the brutal sacking of the town of Gwoza, that the area was “now part of the Islamic Caliphate, which now had nothing to do with Nigeria” (emphasis added), said it all.

Boko Haram seems to be serious about its earlier threat to enforce Sharia Law across the whole of the North-East, as depicted by the beheading of victims with chainsaws, floggings and mutilations. The group seems to be ready to prove to Nigerians and other concerned members of the global audience that it has the longer-term capacity or will to administer its new gains. Despite the crudeness of the system of governance – that lacks government departments and capacity to provide essential services – the group is currently trying to implement, it would be the height of foolery for anybody to give anything to chance.

Another ugly dimension to the new face of Boko Haram is its reported symbolic links with the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the world's most committed and fanatical radical organization operating in Syria and Iraq; a relationship that Intelligence sources say has burgeoned into a practical relationship with the latter offering advice on operational strategy and tactics. Obviously buoyed up by the rapid gains of ISIS in Iraq and other turfs – and now seemingly armed with more sophisticated weapons, such as armoured vehicles and artillery, observers say Boko Haram is beginning to operate more like a regular army in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe and their environs.

Boko Haram has obviously succeeded in breaking the long-held myth that the Nigerian military – as the supposed strong arm of the state – possesses monopoly of the legitimate use of force and the capability to protect her territorial integrity; a hollow claim that has been laid bare before all observers of the ongoing bloodletting in the North-East. The lucid and impetuous manner the group has been routinely routing the country's security forces is a critical case in point; military successes that have put further question marks on the readiness of the Nigerian army to protect the country's territorial integrity and serve the citizenry – a fact evidenced by the inability of the military to check the advancing insurgent forces, despite the bravery of individual soldiers and units, together with pledges of military aid from London and Washington. Reports are rife of mass desertions, refusals to fight, malfunctioning equipment and low morale within the ranks of the military. According to feelers, soldiers are sent into battle with just a few rounds of ammunition against well-equipped Islamists who are ready to die.

Some weeks ago, a group of soldiers were said to have refused direct orders to go and engage the insurgents, saying the militants were better equipped. The recent reports monitored on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that “some 480 Nigerian soldiers fled into Cameroon, following fierce fighting with Boko Haram militants, has added more salt to an already festering sore.

Speaking from a purely strategic standpoint, in the wake of the uncensored annexation of some part of Nigeria's territory by the insurgents – a shameful spectacle that could have been avoided in the first place – the Nigerian government in conjunction with its strategic partners in the ongoing war must act quickly and decisively to avoid a similar scenario, as played out in Iraq when rampaging ISIS forces rapidly overran large swathes of the country's territory and ultimately established a pariah state within another sovereign state. That is the potential scenario facing Nigeria as things currently stand. The implications of the dire security threat this latest twist to an already bloody affair poses to the security of Nigeria and its neighbours cannot be overemphasized.

The truth is that if the ongoing madness in the North-East is not carefully, expeditiously and exhaustively tackled, more horrible spectacles should be expected to rear their ugly heads in the foreseeable future. This is not doomsday prophecy, but an honest, dispassionate projection of what is to come if the ongoing dance of death is allowed to continue unaddressed. There are so many disenchanting groups in Nigeria like Boko Haram waiting for opportunities of their own to unleash their own brands of hell on the state and its citizens. All they need are the right triggers. For a country that has long been divided along primordial lines, the potentials for violent confrontations are as glaring as the break of dawn. Whether it is fundamentalist religious groups, fanatical nationalist associations, or other such groups, the probabilities of more violent groups springing up

to further challenge the legitimacy of the Nigerian State, grows with each gain made by Boko Haram in its bloody confrontation with the Nigerian State.

What Boko Haram really wants is obvious to all discerning observers: to annex a large parcel of territory from the Nigerian State and set up a separate Islamic state that will be strictly governed by Sharai Law. This has gone beyond insurgency, but a battle for the continued existence of the Nigerian State as currently defined; a war against the forceful partitioning of Nigeria by a group of extremists committed to achieving their declared objectives. If this ploy is allowed to play out, it will certainly mark the formal beginning of the end of the Nigerian State as presently constituted.

Here is urging those constitutionally entrusted with the sacred responsibility of ensuring the security and continued existence of the Nigerian State to do all within their powers to prevent this little cloud from metamorphosing into a gigantic squall. All possible means of deescalating this conflict must be embraced. This is no longer time to dilly-dally or stay pigeonholed in the box of indecision, but a time to rise up and expedite action on a situation that stands out as the greatest security threat the Nigerian state and its citizens have faced since the onset of the union. Time is of the greatest essence. God save Nigeria!