

Boko Haram



Key Leaders/Members

Abubakar Shekau
Emir (Leader)

Sanni Umaru
Spokesperson/Senior militant

Momodu Bama (deceased 2013)
Deputy Emir

Mohammed Yusuf (deceased 2009)
Founder

Homebase: Northern Nigeria

History

Boko Haram is a militant jihadist group fighting for the implementation of *Sharia* (Islamic law) in Nigeria. Initially growing out of a group known as the Nigerian Taliban, the group that would become Boko Haram was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002. In 2009, the organization fully transformed into the jihadist group it is today, with the use of the name Boko Haram becoming more common. Boko Haram roughly translates from the native Hausa language meaning “Western education is forbidden/sinful.” Current Emir Shekau attempted to rebrand the organization in late 2010 under the name Jama'atu Ahlu-Sunnah Lidda'Awati wal Jihad, or “Group of the Followers of the Prophet for Propagation and Holy Struggle.” However, the organization remains most often referred to as Boko Haram.

The Nigerian government has launched multiple campaigns to combat Boko Haram with little progress beyond disrupting individual plots and killing or capturing individual members or leaders. In recent years, the organization has perpetrated frequent attacks, including major attacks such as the Christmas Eve 2010 series of bombings targeting Christian churches which left dozens of civilians dead and an August 2011 bombing of the UN building in Abuja. The group is also responsible for a series of suicide bombings, the first use of the tactic within Nigeria.

Current Intent & Capability

Initially founded as a domestic Salafist organization, Boko Haram's ideology has evolved in recent years closer to the global jihadist ideology professed by al-Qa'ida and its affiliates. The targeting of the UN building in Abuja on August 26, 2011 highlights this shift. In late December 2013, Boko Haram Emir Shekau released a statement claiming, “our operation is not confined to Nigeria, it is for whole world, tomorrow you will see us in US.” This was the first public expression of explicit intent to target the US Homeland. This comes approximately one month after the US State Department added Boko Haram, and its splinter group Ansaru, to the list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) on November 13, 2013.

Boko Haram's growing intent to broaden its targets beyond Nigeria are mirrored by a steady increase in capability demonstrated by Boko Haram's ability to launch more complex and successful attacks, even outside their primary base in Northern Nigeria. This capability could be augmented by rumored connections to al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other militant jihadists operating in Northern and Western Africa.

Future Outlook

While both Boko Haram's intent to target the West, including the US Homeland, and its capability to launch larger attacks have grown, it has still not succeeded in perpetrating an attack outside of Nigeria. In the near future the threat from Boko Haram is more likely to expand from a domestic threat to a regional threat, unlikely to reach the US Homeland. However this could change with increasing capability or given access to personnel already in the West (such as inspiration of homegrown violent extremists). Another event to watch for is the possibility of Boko Haram pledging loyalty to al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and requesting to become an official al-Qa'ida affiliate.