RESEARCH ARTICLE

Jihadi Groups and State-Building: The Case of Boko Haram in Nigeria

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The following article considers the extent to which the Nigerian jihadi group, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), also known as Boko Haram, is transforming its model of governance from domination by violence and force to governance through civil administration and public support. Drawing on over four years of research and programming in north-east Nigeria, the authors consider three aspects of such a transformation: the development of institutions, the propagation of an ideology and programmes to win over the hearts and minds of the wider population, and the role assigned to women and girls. The article finds that JAS has established little in the way of a civilian administration in the areas that have come under its control. Likewise, the movement has apparently made no concerted effort to project a vision of a future society or concrete benefits of the envisaged caliphate that would generate a level of public support. Moreover, the brutal treatment of women and girls belies any attempt by the movement to promote a positive vision of the role of women, even as wives and mothers. In this, JAS is seen to differ from a number of other jihadi movements that have relatively sophisticated approaches to generating popular support and recruiting members. The article goes on to suggest a number of reasons for JAS's failure to move towards a polity that is more consensual and less dependent on violence, as well as its implications for those who would seek to restrain the expansion and ideological reach of jihadist groups. It concludes by offering suggestions of how the government can seize the opportunity presented by this lack of a state-building strategy, in order to show the people of north-east Nigeria that it can offer a better alternative.

Introduction

Jihadist groups with the goal of building states based on the caliphate model typically prepare themselves for statehood while still fighting to control territory. Military assault, combined with tactics of asymmetric warfare, including suicide attacks, are the means through which territory is captured and local populations brought under control. The sheer prospect of success in realising a caliphate has also proved an effective tool for recruiting fighters (Petraeus 2016). However, establishing and maintaining a state requires more than military force and the vision of a caliphate. Since the majority of the civilian population may not have been radicalised into a jihadi worldview, ensuring

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their active participation, or at least compliance – if it is not to be achieved solely by force – will depend upon their perception of benefits. The prospect of Shari'a law, and the hope that it will deliver effective justice and a more principled form of governance than has hitherto been experienced, is one potential attraction of a jihadist regime. In addition, citizens will aspire to what is demanded of states everywhere: peace, security, justice, employment, education for their children, and so on.

Without support from a significant portion of the civilian population, any new state risks losing its population to mass out-migration, or risks expending valuable military assets on policing possible migrants. To move beyond control by force and create the conditions for a consensual and sustainable governance, a jihadi movement requires civic as well as military policies and institutions – eventually a parallel administration should emerge which administers territory and addresses the very grievances that have discredited and undermined the previous regime. Jihadi movements also need a narrative that convincingly projects the legitimacy of their rule to would-be citizens, as well as an ideological framework that justifies the moral rules of the new society. *Da'wah* (proselytising) campaigns typically perform this function; through da'wah instruction, civilians are taught to interpret religious texts as defined by the jihadi group.

This article considers the extent and conditions under which jihadi groups are able to transform their mode of governance, from ruling by force and violence to ruling with the support of a substantial proportion of the citizen population. This article draws upon over four years of research and programmatic interventions in north-east Nigeria carried out by the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), as well as wider literature, to focus on one major

jihadi movement: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), also known as Boko Haram, which operates in north-east Nigeria and the neighbouring countries of the Lake Chad basin.[1] Where a comparative perspective lends insight, the analysis also refers to state-building programmes of other jihadi movements. While the article is largely concerned with JAS, the questions it addresses are pertinent to other groups with ambitions to build states on the pattern of caliphates. The findings are therefore relevant to national and international actors that aim to prevent territorial expansion of such groups and diminish their ideological influence over civilian populations.

After providing a brief background, the article considers the extent to which JAS has been concerned with building the foundations of a non-military state, a question seldom addressed in existing literature. The analysis focuses on the civilian population rather than on combatants. The discussion considers three facets of non-military state-building.

Firstly, the article looks at the degree to which JAS has established a civilian administration to provide governance and services in controlled areas. Research conducted by the authors finds that institutions established to date do not amount to nascent state-building. They seem aimed at population control and instilling fear rather than governance or administration.

Next, it considers whether JAS is interacting with the civilian population in a way that promotes recruitment of fighters and engenders the loyalty, or at least consent, of civilians. Whereas jihadi movements in other areas of the world have developed sophisticated propaganda campaigns and extensive social services in order to win hearts and minds, JAS provides few concrete benefits to populations under its control. Rather, the

focus of its violence is primarily directed at non-combatants, alienating most civilians.

Finally, the article focuses on JAS's treatment of women and girls. Reformist rulers in Muslim majority countries, whether secular or religious, have typically used rules on women's comportment and dress to reflect and underline the moral rules of their new society (Kandiyoti 2005). Other jihadi projects laud women as supporters of jihad through their roles as wives and mothers, and hold out the promise of their active participation in building a society based on Shari'a. Despite some early pronouncements of this kind, which initially drew women to the sect, there is currently no concerted strategy to reach women and girls. Abduction, imprisonment, rape, and forced marriage have instead become the sect's hallmark.

The article goes on to analyse the reasons behind the group's failure to develop a clear state-building strategy. Unlike other jihadi groups, JAS has controlled territory for a limited time and, at present, seems more focused on military gain than governance. Furthermore, in contrast to its charismatic founder, the current JAS leadership appears to lack the vision, skills, experience and indeed the interest in governing a state. The article concludes with a consideration of the implications of these findings for the Nigerian government and the international community.

Background to JAS

Formed in 2002, JAS is an Islamist militant group based in Borno State, north-eastern Nigeria (Monguno and Umara 2014). In its early years, JAS protested against corruption and un-Islamic rule, and was therefore similar to other Islamist groups in its confrontation of secular state power (Onuoha 2015; Agbiboa 2013; Yusef and Ramey 2007; Tseleq and Ramey 2012). Its founder and leader, Mohammed Yusuf, attracted a local following through his fiery sermons, which denounced Nigeria's patrimonial governance system and promoted his vision of a society

free of corruption. His message resonated with a local populace disillusioned with earlier attempts to introduce Shari'a (Kyari 2014). Between 1999 and 2001 the governments of twelve northern states of Nigeria had introduced Shari'a law, ostensibly to address corruption, inequality and injustice (Ostien 2007; Casey 2008; Umar 2015). However, these efforts had fallen short of local expectations.

In contrast to the Nigerian government, Yusuf was seen as an advocate of the 'true' and proper implementation of Shari'a. Yusuf also garnered support from prominent members of the political and social elite who were keen to tap his growing following for electoral ends. However, his relationship with both the political class and the security forces deteriorated. In 2009, 800 of Yusuf's followers died following violent confrontations with Nigerian security forces (Zenn 2013; Mellgard 2015). Yusuf himself was arrested in July 2009 and killed whilst in police custody (Walker 2016a).

Following Yusuf's death, JAS supporters went into hiding until the movement's re-emergence in 2010 when Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's deputy, became the group's leader. Under Shekau's leadership, the movement re-grouped in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, and launched revenge attacks on police and security forces (Zenn 2014; Karlsson 2016; Kyari 2015). The first reported abductions of women and girls took place in 2013, when the families of officials and security agents were targeted in retaliation for detaining the wives and children of JAS leaders (Pearson and Zenn 2014). Subsequently, JAS began attacking civilians, both Christian and Muslim, and targeting public spaces, such as markets and schools.

In mid-2013, JAS was driven out of Maiduguri, largely through the efforts of youth combatants of the 'Civilian Joint Task Force' (CJTF). JAS fighters regrouped in remote rural areas to continue attacking neighbouring towns and villages. Simultaneously, Nigerian security forces

and CJTF members were accused of serious human rights violations, including deaths in custody, extrajudicial executions, torture, recruitment of children, sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (Amnesty International 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e; UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict 2015; Watchlist 2014).

In addition to expanding JAS's targets and attacks, Shekau has also cultivated relations with jihadi groups in other countries (Zenn 2013, 2015). In March 2015, JAS pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) and was renamed the 'Islamic State in West Africa Province' (ISWAP) (Zenn 2014b).

State-building: Institutions

It is not entirely clear whether Shekau's primary aim is to establish and maintain a caliphate as a territorial entity across parts of northern Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, as argued by some authors (Kaplan 2015; Dele-Adedeji 2014), or whether his ultimate aim is to be accepted as part of a global caliphate project. His statements after the JAS capture of Gwoza, Borno State in August 2014 imply that he sees his victories in Nigeria as a first step towards the global rule of Islamic law:

> 'Thanks be to Allah, who gave victory to our brethren in Gwoza and made it part of the Islamic caliphate... We did not do it on our own. Allah used us to captured Gwoza; Allah is going to use Islam to rule Gwoza, Nigeria, and the whole world... Allah commands us to rule Gwoza by Islamic law. In fact, he commands us to rule the rest of the world, not only Nigeria, and now we have started' (cited in Grossman 2014).[2]

Whether the movement's intentions are regional, international, or both, like any jihadi movement, JAS needs administrative as well as religious institutions through which it can govern populations, win additional recruits, publicise its successes, and finance future expansion. Given that JAS reportedly operates as a franchise, with individual cells having a considerable degree of autonomy (Amnesty International 2015a; Pantucci and Jesperson 2015; Pantucci 2014), it might be expected that institutions are also needed to maintain internal cohesion, coordination, and discipline.

Other established jihadi groups have used a range of institutions to govern the areas they control and, at the same time, signal their religious ideology. Among most movements, proselytisation (da'wah) is generally the first 'service' provided to a new territory. This is typically followed by the establishment of Shari'a courts and local and religious police (hisbah). In Syria and Iraq, IS has gone far beyond justice and policing and now provides a full range of services in strategic towns, including education, infrastructure, sewerage and sanitation, water, electricity, transport, and labour, among other services (Caris and Reynolds 2014). Human relations structures are also in place: a Public Relations/Tribal Affairs office handles citizens' demands in major towns, and humanitarian aid is delivered to vulnerable Muslim populations via the IS Muslim Services division. Relations with non-Muslim populations are also regulated, primarily through the Islamic dhimmi tax, payment of which allows them to remain in the caliphate (ibid).

IS has developed a sophisticated system of governance as a result of its longtime control of strategic towns and its ability to call upon a large number of local and foreign professionals. This is also the case for the Taliban in Afghanistan, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and a range of other jihadi groups which have controlled territory over extended periods (Gardner and El-Bushra 2015).

Has JAS begun to develop a similar institutional infrastructure? In the early years of JAS, it appeared that administrative institutions had begun to emerge. Some writers maintain that Mohammed Yusuf had been in

the process of setting up a parallel political organisation in order to 'replace the actual state'. Andrew Walker notes that Yusuf had a cabinet, a Supreme Council (Shura), specialised departments (Lagina), and various Amirs posted to Local Government Areas (LGA) (Walker 2012). Yusuf reportedly organised his followers into distinct roles, such as soldiers, recruiters, errand boys and organisers, who would help bring a crowd together whenever he went on da'wah missions (Onuoha 2014; Allamin, personal communication). Yusuf also had nascent social policies: reportedly he ensured that food was distributed to refugees and arranged affordable marriages for his followers. Other authors note that by 2008, Yusuf had put in place a rudimentary welfare system where members could work land acquired by the group, or take microfinance loans to begin small businesses (Osita-Njoku and Chikere 2015; Walker 2016a). Micha'el Tanchum holds that this 'alternative society' eventually formed a 'miniature state within the state', though it is debatable whether the administration developed at that particular time justifies this label (2012).

When Shekau emerged as leader in 2010, there was no indication that he would expand Yusuf's nascent administration. Indeed, rather than organising members or civilians, the group embarked on targeted killings.

Today, individuals living in JAS-controlled areas describe JAS 'governance' in terms of a set of rules, a police system and 'justice' (largely a mechanism for dispensing punishment). Residents report that an Amir is immediately appointed when a community is taken by JAS; he and his men are then responsible for governing. As part of the process, a set of rules is communicated to the population in leaflets, both in Kanuri and Hausa, and through town criers. Typically, the rules include the prohibition of smoking and drugs, an injunction that men must let their beards grow, that women should cover their faces in public and not move outside the household unless for a permitted

reason, and a ban on intermediaries between producer and consumer. The regulations are standardised and memorised by JAS followers, especially those in senior positions. 'Justice' comprises punishments handed out for breaking the rules, the severity of which depends on the adjudicator. Examples given by witnesses include: 30 lashes to a woman for selling children's clothes to neighbours; flogging or execution for anyone trying to escape the town; and stoning to death for alleged adultery (Amnesty International interviews 2015a; interviews by Allamin).

Religious indoctrination is an important part of the occupation. In the town of Damask in Bama LGA, for example, all school age girls and boys were reportedly placed in a large compound where they received systematic and intensive religious instruction. Initially, parents were pleased that their children were being taught the Quran, but in December 2015, 300 children disappeared from the compound. Furthermore, though interviews with children who had received religious instruction demonstrated a continuity in the subject matter taught by previous Quranic teachers, there was one important difference: JAS's instruction included injunctions to use violence against anyone opposing the teachings that they received, including their own parents (personal communication, Allamin).

The fairly limited evidence available about communities under JAS control suggests that the systems and structures imposed by the insurgents have gone little beyond the elements described above: the appointment of Amirs, the imposition of supposedly Islamic social mores (including often severe punishments for transgressions), and religious preaching and proselytisation (da'wah). Reportedly, taxes on vehicles have also been imposed. There is mention of provision of credit to young men, who are then required to join the group (Mercy Corps 2016), but no evidence of wider policies or programmes in support of livelihoods. Indeed, restrictions on movement in JAS-controlled areas and the effect of destruction and insecurity

in the local economy mean that livelihood opportunities of all kinds are severely constrained, and that in some areas, food is in short supply (Amnesty International 2015a; International Organisation of Migration 2016). Neither Shekau nor the JAS Shura appear to have appointed individuals with sectoral responsibilities, such as for the economy, water, agriculture, trade, or education. The institutions established by JAS appear to be aimed at maintaining control and instilling fear, rather than governance and administration in any wider sense.

Most analysts have concluded that JAS institutions do not amount to an attempt at nascent state-building. For example, Pérouse de Montclos notes that there has never been a JAS proclamation that sets out a political programme indicating how it will govern according to Shari'a (2015) and Pérouse de Montclos (2014b). In support of this position, Virginia Comolli notes that, despite the relentless advance of JAS under Shekau, '…there is no evidence indicating that any form of administration or governance is being implemented in this 'Islamic state' (2015: 161).

In summary, the JAS movement appears to lack the administrative structures to govern effectively beyond its current focus on control and compliance. Although the JAS commitment to implement 'real Shari'a' had mass popular support during the early years of the movement, it has not yet put in place the systems and structures for a political system based on Shari'a, nor shown any indication that it intends to do so in the future.

State-building: A hearts and minds campaign

Jihadi movements across the globe have used increasingly sophisticated and tailored propaganda, combined with programmes that demonstrate the benefits of membership, to recruit fighters and gain civilian support. Prior conditions of poor governance, rampant corruption, failures of justice and security, and lack of economic opportunity present considerable scope for winning over local populations with the prospect of improvement. Success in any of these areas can build or cement local civilian support for the jihadi project.

Other jihadi movements exemplify the various ways in which local support or compliance can be generated. One well-known example is the support given in Somalia by al-Shabaab to minority clans (Axiom Consultancy 2014; Landinfo 2011; UNHCR 2010) and its provision of services in areas not served by the Somali national government (Mwangi 2012). In Syria and Iraq, IS has provided fuel subsidies to gain the adherence of important tribes and used cash bribes to buy off tribal leaders. By monopolising the use of force and eliminating internecine conflicts, the group also provides residents of occupied cities with security (Fromson and Simon 2015). On the propaganda side, IS' message of 'inclusion' has induced some Sunni women and girls, as well as men, to leave their homes and travel to Syria, a testament to the sophisticated use of population profiling and social media (Brown 2014), and to the powerful impact of '*ummah* consciousness' messaging, a technique also used by al-Shabaab (Meleagrou-Hitches et al 2012). In Afghanistan, the Taliban provided a justice system that was speedier than the government system and untainted by corruption. Although many recoiled from the frequency of executions entailed in Taliban 'justice', it nonetheless won them support from sections of the population (Hirst 2009; Ladbury, CPAU and Smith 2010). In Yemen, the jihadi group Ansar al-Sharia has provided electricity, water, and education to communities under its jurisdiction (Petouris 2014).

In the case of JAS, a distinction can be made between the approach adopted by Yusuf and that of successive leaders. Up until the death of Yusuf in 2009, and for some two years afterwards, JAS violence was predominantly aimed at security forces rather than civilians. For this reason, most residents of Yobe and Borno states did not fear that the group was

going to harm them, and many were initially sympathetic to it (personal communication, Allamin). In fact, many residents were more afraid of the excesses of the security forces than of the insurgents. As Pérouse de Montclos notes 'While Boko Haram was, at least at inception, committed to not harming those who had not antagonised them and alerting people in areas where they intended to fight, the security agencies were known for their brutality in retaliation against the population for the actions of their opponents, especially where the agencies had incurred fatalities' (2014a).

However, JAS's policy of not harming civilians changed in mid-2011, when the group began targeting a wider population. Those attacked included religious scholars who preached against their ideology and traditional leaders who had reported them to authorities or confiscated their property whilst they were in hiding. Violence continued to be driven by a quest for vengeance, but now the targets included anyone who was perceived to have harmed JAS members or interests. The notion of *al-Qisas* (vengeance) also featured prominently in the recruitment strategy of JAS, especially among women, girls and young men who had lost relatives (Usman et al 2015); by joining JAS they were promised the chance to avenge the deaths of family members.

The concept of *takfir* – the denouncing of others as infidel because they reject the Quran and Sunnah – also came to play an increasing part in JAS ideology, and was used to rationalize an ever-widening perimeter of violence (Mellgard 2015). The insurgents used takfir to justify the killing of anyone who did not accept the JAS leader's interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. While at the outset takfir was used to justify the assassination of Christians and Muslim religious leaders who supported the government, it soon came to mean any person, whether Christian or Muslim, who did not join or accept JAS as a movement (Mellgard 2015). The philosophy became one of 'join

us or die' (Walker 2016b). As Thurston notes: 'Unlike other movements in the region... Boko Haram's leaders have consistently used extremely narrow criteria to define who counts as a Muslim. Boko Haram foot soldiers are, whether for ideological, material, or personal reasons, willing to slaughter those whom the leaders have designated unbelievers' (2016). Among those killed were thousands of men and women, as well as children (UN Children and Armed Conflict 2015; Amnesty International 2015–16). As all civilians, including women and children, became potential targets, the support and sympathy that the group had garnered inevitably began to drain away. Nevertheless, some residual sympathies remained as the group continued to present itself as the 'victim' and rationalised its actions as responses to losses it had suffered.

Another development that very likely influenced the changing tactics of JAS was the emergence of the aforementioned CJTF in 2013 in Maiduguri, in which thousands of young people were affected by the collateral damage of both the insurgency and the counter-insurgency activities of the Nigerian government's security agencies. These young men and women carried out searches of members of the general public, and went from house to house to identify persons suspected of being JAS members; they then handed them over to the government Joint Task Force (JTF). The formation of the CJTF radically altered the course of the insurgency by dislodging JAS insurgents from the cities to Krenowa in Marte LGA, then to the Sambisa Forest and border areas (Allamin 2016). Although CJTF methods were often brutal, the broader civilian population began to hope that JAS could be routed (IRIN 2013). Some support for the insurgents remained, particularly from close relatives of JAS fighters, those whose family members had been killed or had property destroyed by the security forces, or those receiving regular payments or loans from the group (Mercy Corps 2016; personal communication, Allamin).

However, the increasingly extreme ideology and brutality of JAS subsequently alienated most civilians. While many Nigerian Muslims may aspire for Shari'a to be the law of the land, they do not hold with a *takfir* ideology, the targeting of Christians, or the abduction or rape of women, girls, and boys. Nor do they support harsh punishments, which is not what most adherents see as the essence of Shari'a. As Pérouse de Monclos notes, many people want Shari'a, but alongside democracy and freedom of religion (2014b). Only a very small minority, and far fewer than in some other African countries, support harsh Shari'a punishments, such as the stoning of women who commit adultery or the amputation of the hands of thieves.

Although JAS pays its combat and non-combat members well, it provides few concrete benefits to the broader population (Walker 2016a; Mercy Corps 2016). According to Amnesty International and Allamin's interviews with residents in Borno and Yobe states, the economic situation of those in captured territory is dire. Since men have been killed or abducted, and given that women cannot travel, many households become dependent on children to collect or find food (Amnesty International 2015a). JAS makes no consistent attempt to engage with the needs of local people, even through propaganda. There is certainly no equivalent to the sophisticated 'welcoming' tactics of IS in Syria. While Shekau frequently quotes the Qur'an in his pronouncements, religious texts are selected to justify his previous actions or intentions; there seems to be no attempt to appeal to local people's grievances or to promise an inclusive *ummah* experience. Moreover, half the population – women and girls – are discussed in ways people find derogatory, disrespectful and unreflective of their reading and understanding of the Qur'an.

In summary, there is no evidence of the movement's promotion of a hearts and minds campaign to win the voluntary and sustained support of ordinary people. Not only does the group alienate the civilian population, there are many within its own ranks who are there under duress. The scale and nature of JAS abductions differentiates it from other jihadi groups with caliphate-building ambitions. Although the majority of abductees are women and girls, many men and boys have also been kidnapped (Zenn 2014a). Indeed, the paths members take to join JAS defy neat categories of 'voluntary' and 'forced', with many falling between these two extremes. Many have been coerced, pressured, motivated by circumstances, or simply joined JAS because this seemed the 'least bad' of available options (Monguno and Umara 2015; Mercy Corps 2016).

State-building: Treatment of women and girls

Reformist leaders in Muslim majority countries, both religious and secular, have frequently used laws controlling women's comportment and dress to represent and advance the moral rules of the new society that they aim to establish. This phenomenon has been documented of reformist state leaders across the Middle East and South Asia (Kandiyoti 1991; Najmabadi 1991). Jihadi movements have generally emerged in patriarchal societies, in which gender roles are already rigidly differentiated. With their core aim of establishing a state based on a 'purified' form of Islam, jihadi movements use the imposition of strict controls on women's dress, movement, and behaviour to communicate the greater purity of the new Muslim state.

In jihadi state-building projects, women thus function as symbols of wider social and political purity (Bloom 2016). At a more functional level, all jihadi groups expect women to undertake the daily tasks required to maintain an army of fighting men (such as providing sex, cooking, cleaning, caring for children). Some women, often widows or particularly vulnerable women, may be selected for operational roles – hiding and transporting weapons, gleaning intelligence, or helping with recruitment (Ladbury 2015). Since

2002, jihadi groups have also used women as front-line combatants and are increasingly using women and girls as suicide bombers. However, despite the 'elevation' of women to the ranks of combatants, no jihadi movement has ever appointed a female leader or permitted women to participate in discussions on matters of policy, strategy, or theology (Ladbury 2015).

Given the subordinate role consistently assigned to women in all jihadi groups, including JAS, how are these movements able to attract the support and participation of women and girls under conditions of little or no agency and heightened seclusion?

Jihadi movements have commonly used two strategies to attract women. The first, seen in caliphate-aspiring movements across the Middle East and Africa, is to project a positive and central role for them in the struggle for the realisation of the new caliphate. Women's role as mothers and wives is consistently lauded in sermons, publications, videos and social media. The message is that 'our' women contribute to jihad, not through physical combat (although, as noted, this may sometimes be the case), but by supporting their jihadi husbands and bringing up the next generation of fighters. Women whose sons have been killed are particularly lauded as the mothers of 'martyrs'. Ladbury argues that this message gives women an elevated sense of their own importance – as opposed to their counterparts in many secular states (2015).

The second way in which women and girls are drawn into the jihadi enterprise is through the promise of participation in the building of a society based on Shari'a – a new venture in which the contribution of women is both valued and necessary. The use of social media by IS to target Sunni Muslim women from diverse countries to come to Syria shows how such a prospect of inclusion can attract even well-off women and girls in western countries. 'The participation promise incentivises women to join Islamic State even though their role is strictly non-military. It conveys a sense that there is more to the "caliphate's" jihad than fighting and that, for women, there is a specific state building role' (Rafik and Malik 2015).

In contrast, the JAS strategy neither lauds women as the mothers and wives of fighters, nor recruits them for a positive role in a new Islamic society. Mohammed Yusuf did make pronouncements on women; for example, he promised to address the unacceptable behaviour of men who abdicated their responsibilities by marrying and then divorcing their wives. He also encouraged his spokespeople to talk to the women's section of the mosque and to answer their queries, and instructed men to take their wives for Quranic education and bring them to public gatherings where he was speaking (Usman et al 2015). This emphasis on women's Quranic education contrasted with prevailing social norms at the time. Indeed, the opportunity for religious education seems to have been one of the attractions of JAS to women. One young woman interviewed said, 'I didn't have many expectations. I just wanted to learn more of the Quran and my religion' (Mercy Corps 2016).

Since his assumption of leadership in 2010, Shekau has never made a positive statement regarding the potential contributions of women and girls to jihad or to the new caliphate. There is no evidence that social or other media have been used to encourage women and girls to join the movement or persuade them of the benefits of an inclusive, welcoming *ummah*. On the contrary, the abduction, imprisonment, forced marriage, and rape of women and girls, both Christian and Muslim, have now become hallmark customs of JAS, while the use of girls as suicide bombers has continued to increased (BBC News 2016). Recent figures indicate that of the 151 suicide attacks JAS members carried out in 2015, one in five were by children, 75 per cent of whom were girls (UNICEF 2016).

The use of women and girls as camp followers and suicide bombers is not unique to JAS, though what distinguishes them is that the rhetoric of the 'purity' of 'our women'

and the duty, entrusted to men, to guarantee women's welfare and protection are entirely absent. Indeed, given that JAS fighters raped women and girls as they attacked and occupied their villages (International Alert 2016), the high incidence of abductions and forced marriages/remarriages (Amnesty International 2015), and the degrees of coerced recruitment (Mercy Corps 2016), the lines between 'our women' and all other women and girls are blurred. Bloom argues that JAS aims to set itself apart both from other terrorist organisations that benefit from willing female participation and from other Islamist movements in north-east Nigeria (2006). As she states: 'Other Salafi groups have advocated for women's education and have coexisted with the Nigerian secular state – by emphasising its differences with such movements, Boko Haram portrays itself as the vanguard of "true Islam"' (Bloom 2016).

While their brutal and retrogressive treatment of women and girls may be an effective marker of uniqueness, it is clearly not an approach that encourages the voluntary engagement of women and girls in JAS's cause (Human Rights Watch 2014). Some women do become converts and supporters, but evidence indicates that they are a minority. Within JAS camps and controlled areas, young women appeared to have gained status by carrying out the roles they were assigned: by undertaking tasks (for example recruitment of other girls and women, burning down homes) or by becoming teachers and preachers to other women (Mercy Corps 2016). As Walker notes, like child soldiers elsewhere in Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Lord's Resistance Army in the Central African Republic and Uganda), some women come to accept their new lives so thoroughly that their old ones are completely erased (2016a). For example, one teenage girl, who had been abducted, forcibly married to a commander and then rescued by soldiers of the Nigerian army, said she longed for her husband and wished she was still with him, although she also believed she had been brainwashed.[3] For the majority of women and girls, however, there is nothing in the JAS message to induce their voluntary cooperation or support.

In summary, there is little evidence of any intention on the part of JAS to win the hearts and minds of women by offering them a clear, positive, and socially-sanctioned role in the realisation of a new society. JAS cannot hope to win the support of women or communities in general through abductions, forced marriage, and rape. The notion of Shari'a bringing about a 'purer' and better society is belied by JAS's treatment of women, men, and children. Rather, the group has instrumentalised women as weapons of the insurgency. As with young men, it has preyed on the vulnerabilities of women and young girls to attract them into its fold. This approach has largely consisted of the propagation of the ideology of retaliation – for the deaths of husbands, sons and brothers, and the offer of marriage – to respond to the needs of women for economic security and social security (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Why has JAS failed to develop a strategy for governing?

There are several possible reasons for why movement has not elaborated a wider civic strategy. One is the limited time that they have controlled territory. It has been only seven years since the killing of their former leader in police custody, the event that triggered the escalation of violence. It is even more recently, since 2013, that JAS-associated groups began to take control of a significant geographical area (part of which has been subsequently regained by the state). The expansion was contingent upon other factors: their continuing access to arms, some of which may have come from Nigerian military sources, a ready flow of voluntary and conscripted combatants, support from other jihadi movements, and the operational weakness of the Nigerian military. Compared to other jihadi groups, JAS has had a relatively short amount of time to mature into

an organisation with a civic state-building agenda and, as part of this, to evolve a strategy regarding women.

It is notable that other jihadi groups that have developed functioning governance systems and social policies (including those directly aimed at women) have done so after a long maturation phase. The Taliban in Afghanistan, for example, had its roots in the Islamic resistance against the Soviet Union between 1979 and 1989, followed by seven years of civil war. When the Taliban took Kabul in 1996 and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, it was after 17 years of armed combat – a period that also allowed for the development of parallel state institutions in areas they controlled (Dorronsoro 2009; Giustozzi et al 2012; Semple 2015; Guistozzi 2015). Similarly, al-Shabaab is a veteran of the Somali conflict with far more experience of implementing its own form of governance than other groups, including the Somali Federal Government (International Crisis Group 2014; UNHRC 2010). Furthermore, although Islamic State's Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the formation of a caliphate stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq only in June 2013 (Glenn 2016), the movement could draw on its earlier state-building attempts as the Islamic State of Iraq from 2006–8 (Fromson and Simon 2015). The JAS movement, in contrast, is still in an early military phase, with its leadership focused on military gains, rather than on implementing institutions and winning over the population, whether women or men.

That JAS has not maintained continuous control over a strategically important urban centre may also account for a lack of emphasis on state-building. Other authors note that jihadi groups tend to expend energy on governance only in cities and towns that are strategically important for the continuation of their military campaigns. Thus, IS has rolled out its full governance programme – involving a range of administrative and religious institutions – in the strategically important

Raqqa, but have expended few resources on governance in coastal Latakia (Caris and Reynolds 2014). When JAS was chased out of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in 2013, it was forced to operate out of camps in the vast Sambisa Forest area and to make attacks on surrounding towns and villages. It could be argued that expending energy and resources on state-building in such a vast area with a sparse population would not have contributed to the military strategy, and may not have been practically effective.

Why has there been so little energy expended on a campaign to win over civilians in areas of JAS control? One possibility is that the current JAS leadership lacks the vision, skills, and experience to develop from a military movement to a civic one and implement practical plans for state-building. Yusuf was a charismatic and persuasive orator. Although it engaged in violence, the JAS of his era also allowed for dialogue and engagement with the government. However, the moderates within the group, being easier to identify and locate, were killed by security forces in 2009 or eliminated by the group itself in the years afterwards (International Crisis Group 2014). Thus there is widespread perception in the region that the original JAS was hijacked by political and military interest groups that perpetrated violence mainly for material and political gain (interviews by Allamin). The current JAS strategy seems to be wholly focused on violence: to continue to take territory through a terror campaign in the north-east; to encourage like-minded groups to carry out attacks in other parts of Nigeria; and to link with Islamist militant groups across state borders, particularly in the Chad-basin area of neighbouring northern Cameroon, southern Chad and the Niger Republic (Mark 2015; Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme 2014–15).[4]

Despite talk of forming an Islamic caliphate, the pronouncements of Abubakar Shekau have done little to indicate how such a caliphate would be put in place, where its borders would be, how Shari'a law would

be interpreted, or what improvements citizens of the new state could expect in their lives. In contrast, the Taliban, al-Shabaab, and IS have developed state-building skills over a long period. When they have lacked necessary skills or, in the case of IS, lacked the sheer number of professionals needed to run a functioning state, they have publicly advertised for foreign professionals to join them (Agron 2015). In contrast, there is little evidence of JAS either having access to such skills, or making efforts to acquire them.

The allegiance that JAS has pledged to IS could certainly change this situation. IS has a wide range of well-educated professionals with the skills to support JAS to combine its military strategy with a state-building programme, as well as an effective outreach strategy using social media (Gates and Podder 2015). As already noted, there is evidence that IS is helping JAS with their media strategy (BBC Monitoring Africa 2015). If this proves to be the beginning of partnership, JAS's capacity may develop to the point where it is able to plan and implement a state-building programme. If so, we might expect that, alongside, or replacing, the violence meted out to women and men classified as 'enemies', there would be a parallel 'hearts and minds' campaign aimed at potential supporters. However, there is little evidence of this occurring at the time of writing.

We must also ask whether carving out and governing a physical state in West Africa has ever been a priority aim for the JAS leadership. The early focus was on the rigorous and universal imposition of Shari'a in the existing state. More recently the apparent disinclination and unpreparedness to administer a caliphate is perhaps because the acquisition of territory came largely from the movement's reaction to its expulsion from urban areas rather than as a proactive strategy. In short, the primary reason for the lack of a state-building plan and a strategy to win civic support may be that contributing to global jihad has always been a more important goal than establishing and building a physical state.

Conclusions

Jihadi movements worldwide typically try to do several things at once: expand the territory under their control through military conquest, implement their interpretation of Shari'a law, earn global recognition amongst fellow jihadis for ideological purity, and instill fear internationally through use of terror tactics and violence. However, as several authors have pointed out, these aims cannot necessarily be pursued together and are often contradictory (Lia 2015; Fromson and Simon 2015). Thus jihadi movements often face a 'governance dilemma', which arises because it is difficult to combine the administration of territory and compromise necessary to gain popular support with global recognition as an ideologically pure jihadi group that, if necessary, will enforce its writ through limitless violence. Movements with substantial resources such as IS may not have to make a choice about which option to pursue; those with fewer resources such as JAS may need to prioritise.

This article has sought to analyse some of the governance dilemmas faced by the JAS movement in northern Nigeria, and to understand why it appears to have neglected the state-building route taken by other jihadi movements. While these movements are creating administrative and governance institutions, providing services and other benefits to civilians, and implementing proactive strategies to ensure women are encouraged to feel ownership of the jihadi project, the JAS approach has alienated civilians. Indeed, its tactics have been characterised by attacks on communities, most notably in the widespread abductions of women and girls, at levels not seen by other jihadi groups (BBC News 2014; Zenn and Pearson 2014).

Much of this can be attributed to the comparatively short length of time JAS has been in direct conflict with the state and controlled territory. Other jihadi groups may simply have had longer to plan and implement a strategy of civilian engagement, and had the expertise within their ranks to put

a state-building strategy into effect. The explanation may also be one of priorities. If the JAS leadership has always seen the movement primarily as contributing to the realisation of Allah's rule globally, this would account for the sheer brutality of the group and the scant attention given to winning over civilians or to establishing relationships with political elites.

In the medium term, it appears that the JAS leadership is content to promote itself as a 'brand' that is able to attract a range of militant groups to act on its behalf, knowing that individual terror acts over a wide area will command national and international attention.

Recommendations

A major limitation of the current study is the lack of in-depth information on the structure of JAS since the death of Yusuf, and how it has governed in the stronghold around the Sambisa Forest. With sustained military pressure on JAS, continued liberation of captured populations, and reported fissures in the JAS leadership, opportunities will open for future research that provides insights into these issues and sheds further light on the JAS state-building project.

However, it is already clear from the evidence available that JAS's continued reliance on violence, and the lack of a clear state-building plan, presents an opportunity that the Nigerian government and others would be wise to exploit. At present, the populace is unsure as to where it can place its trust and loyalty. Despite their revulsion at JAS brutality, many people in the north-east are also profoundly disenchanted with the government. Indeed, research by CIVIC (2015) found that, although civilians feel JAS has perpetrated the majority of harm against them and their families, the myopic military focus of the Nigerian government and their allies on defeating JAS has resulted in very serious human rights abuses and collateral civilian harm. The priority for the government and its allies is therefore to show that

the Nigerian state offers a convincing alternative, both to their previous experiences and to what is offered by the JAS movement. Further action is also necessary to address people's material needs and the underlying issues of corruption, inequality, and women's disenfranchisement that have driven JAS support and recruitment. A purely militaristic approach will not address the deeper causes of disorder, as these are rooted in governance and developmental deficits. Instead, a more holistic range of interventions is needed. This would include combining military-centric tactics that abide by human rights, humanitarian law, and the rules of engagement, with efforts that focus on winning the hearts and minds of the population. Effective media campaigns to counteract fundamentalist ideology and communicate real government commitment to change need to be matched by action. This action should prioritise putting in place real security for the peoples of the north-east, building institutions that work – including educational ones for a generation of children who have missed out on schooling – and addressing grievances. The latter includes taking strong measures to prevent and sanction institutionalised corruption, and ensuring inclusive economic growth and regeneration that addresses widespread inequalities between individuals, groups, and regions. Allegations of human rights abuses must be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. Action is also required to address the widespread marginalisation of women, girls, young men, and boys. Policies and programmes need to be designed and implemented with the different experiences and needs of women, girls, men and boys in mind, in order to tackle gender-based violence and encourage the meaningful participation of all in rebuilding their communities and states.

There are indications that the Nigerian government increasingly recognises this need for a comprehensive response, but pressure is needed to ensure that action follows. At the time of writing, the government

is developing a plan for the north-east to rebuild infrastructure, strengthen institutions, and address the chronic under-development that has characterised the region even before the insurgency. In concert with the World Bank, the European Union, and United Nations Development Programme, the Nigerian government has developed a post conflict peace-building assessment that documents the needs for comprehensive development (World Bank et al 2016). However, it is not clear when these proposed programmes would actually be implemented. There are growing concerns about delays in the inauguration of the Presidential Committee on North East Initiatives (PCNI) and protracted discussions on the enactment of the legal framework for the planned North East Development Commission (NEDC). The fiscal contraction facing the Nigerian state also poses challenges for full-scale implementation of the plan.

These circumstances indicate that an incremental approach on the part of the government may be most effective. However, as Nigeria and its partners move forward, it will be important to coordinate around human security in a way that is respectful of human rights, integrates a gendered perspective, includes the provision of development services and infrastructure, and implements measures to demobilise and reintegrate former insurgents in ways that are sensitive to community concerns. While the challenges are enormous, the failure of the insurgency to offer the vision of a better future to the long-suffering citizens of north-east Nigeria is also the opportunity for the government to prove it can offer a new social contract that addresses needs and aspirations that have been neglected for so long. In responding to this, the government would not only impede the flow of recruits into JAS and prevent the formation of similar groups, but also ensure the wellbeing of its citizens.

Competing Interests
The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Notes
[1] Although the term 'Boko Haram' is more widely used outside north-east Nigeria, the authors will use the term Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) throughout this article in conformity with principles of conflict sensitivity. 'Boko Haram' is not the name the group uses to describe itself, but rather a label assigned to it by the media, usage of which has become widespread. The term is deeply resented by the group itself. Further, the authors believe that the term 'Boko Haram', which is often translated as 'western education is sinful' perpetuates a particular stereotype of the group that understates the complexity of its origin and aims.

[2] Different translations exist for the report. See full text of declaration in http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/167248-boko-haram-leader-shekau-claims-captured-gwosa-now-islamic-caliphate.html.

[3] See several news reports: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/rescued-nigerian-girl-longs-boko-haram-husband-160205073808809.html, http://in.reuters.com/article/nigeria-women-girls-idINKCN0VE0FH, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36041860.

[4] In its regular Conflict Briefing Notes, the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme, a DFID funded programme, charts developments relating to JAS and analyses the group's political significance.

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