

**Policy Brief No 3**

# Comparative Perspectives on the Evolution of JAS Insurgency and Its Future Scenarios

## Background

A primary responsibility of the state to its citizens is providing security. In fulfilling this duty the Nigerian state has deployed security forces in response to the violence in the northeastern part of the country perpetrated by the proscribed insurgent group Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Liddaawati Wal Jihad (JAS), popularly known as Boko Haram (BH). The deployment of the Nigerian military forces, together with other security agencies, has not yet ended the insurgency. In addition, the security forces had to cope with several challenges including allegations of unprofessional conduct and human rights and international humanitarian law violations.

The emergence of the so-called 'Civilian JTF' is a pointer to the limited success of military operations. The group has continued to contribute to security efforts in the region and as a counteracting agent to radicalisation in the northeast. But it also has been accused of highhandedness and human rights violations.

In light of the deteriorating security failure in the affected areas, there is apparent consensus in public discourses that JAS insurgency cannot be ended by military means alone, and that negotiation is the more realistic way out of the current impasse. Therefore, it is imperative to understand

the evolution of the insurgency in order to identify possible scenarios for its future trajectory. What are the lessons learned from how similar insurgencies ended? What are the pitfalls and failures that should be avoided? What are the possible scenarios for the endgame of the JAS insurgency? What factors will affect the relative likelihood of these scenarios?

Based on two case-studies,<sup>1</sup> this brief summarizes the academic literature on the determinants of how insurgencies end. It also reviews the evolution of three comparable insurgencies, namely: the Islamic Group (Gama'a Islamiyya, GI) in Egypt; the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda; and the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Table 1 summarizes the key points of comparison among these insurgencies. Based on the academic literature on the end of insurgencies and the three case-studies, this brief presents possible scenarios for ending JAS insurgency, and evaluates the factors that will affect each scenario.

<sup>1</sup> M. Sani Umar & David Ehrhardt, (2014) Evolution of JAS in Comparative Perspectives, and Julie Sanda, (2014) The Effects of Security Measures on Youth Radicalisation, NSRP Project on Radicalization, Counter-Radicalization, & De-radicalization in northern Nigeria, NSRP, Abuja.

Table 1: Points of Comparison

|                                      | Egypt              | Uganda                         | Northern Ireland      | Nigeria |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Outcome                              | Government victory | Ongoing/<br>Government victory | Negotiated settlement | Ongoing |
| Regional concentration insurgents    | •                  | •                              | •                     | •       |
| Religious framing of insurgency      | •                  | •                              | •                     | •       |
| Porous borders & safe havens         |                    | •                              |                       | •       |
| Decentralised insurgent organization |                    | •                              | •                     | •       |
| Factionalised insurgent organization |                    |                                | •                     | •       |
| Centralized insurgent organization   | •                  |                                |                       |         |
| Weak government                      |                    | •                              |                       | •       |

First, the case of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GI) of Egypt was selected because of its similarity with JAS in their Salafi/Islamist ideological orientations, Muslim nativist rejection of Western culture, emergence in the context of general Islamic radicalism, and the patterns of confrontation with the state.

Second, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that started in Uganda and then spread into the neighboring countries is comparable to the JAS insurgency because of the regional concentration of the two insurgencies, their complex religious and ethnic dimensions, the porous borders around their respective areas of operation, and the decentralized organizational structure.

Finally, the insurgency by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) can help to inform our scenarios for JAS because of the regional concentration of the violence, the religious undertones of the conflict, the complex factionalisation of the militant groups, and the decentralized guerrilla tactics of the insurgent groups.

In addition to the comparability of the insurgent movements, the cases were also selected because they present different endgames that might happen in Nigeria: one government victory (Egypt); one transformed conflict that is still ongoing (LRA); and one case of a negotiated settlement (IRA). Examining the similarities and differences of these insurgencies can reveal the combinations of factors that lead to the different trajectories and outcomes.

### Key Findings from the Academic Literature

Theoretically, there are only a few possible outcomes to an insurgency:

- The insurgents may defeat the government
- The government may defeat the insurgents
- There may be a stalemate or negotiated settlement
- Instead of a distinct ending, an insurgency may transform into a pestering conflict.

Table B.1  
Outcomes as a Function of Where the Insurgency Took Place

| Outcome          | Americas | Europe | East Asia | Middle East | Sub-Saharan Africa |
|------------------|----------|--------|-----------|-------------|--------------------|
| Government wins  | 4        | 3      | 9         | 7           | 5                  |
| Mixed outcome    | 4        | 3      | 4         | 4           | 4                  |
| Government loses | 2        | 2      | 6         | 4           | 12                 |
| Ongoing          | 1        |        | 5         | 5           | 5                  |

Table B.1, taken from Connable and Libicki (2010, 166), indicates the number of insurgencies between 1934 and 2004.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Connable, Ben, and Martin C. Libicki. 2010. "How Insurgencies End". Available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG965.html>.

The table shows clear discrepancies in the outcomes of insurgencies in different regions of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa has a large number of government losses compared to the other regions. Moreover, it shows that government wins (28) are only slightly higher than insurgent wins (26).

Each of the four possible outcomes is dependent on structural and dynamic factors. Structural factors are the existing conditions in which the confrontation between a state and an insurgency occurs. These conditions are not easily alterable in the short time. They include the state capacity in both military and administrative terms, and the type of regime that controls the state. On the insurgent side, structural factors are the fighting capacity and organizational coherence of the insurgency.

The side with stronger military capacity can easily win over the weaker side, but this factor is complicated by the type of regime on the government side and organizational coherence on the insurgents' side. A regime that has the political will and capital to fight the insurgency resolutely can achieve victory; alternatively, the regime's lack of political will or capital can prevent it from devoting the necessary resources to achieve victory. Similarly, a tightly organized insurgency is more likely to achieve victory, whereas a loosely collection of bands of insurgents is more susceptible to defeat at the hand of a state with strong capacity and the will to fight.

Dynamic Factors are the conditions that can easily change as a result of the interactions between the two adversaries. They include conflict duration, strategic choices, and foreign interventions. Ordinarily, a quick decisive victory is preferable for both states and insurgencies, but a long and drawn out fighting is more likely to give victory to the insurgents, while a quick and decisive victory is more likely to favor the state. Two strategic choices affect the outcome of insurgencies. Enemy-centric strategy seek to crush the adversary by fighting resolutely and using indiscriminate violence, while population-centric strategy focuses more on political victory by winning the "hearts-and-minds" of the population, thereby draining support and legitimacy for the adversary.

Finally, the side that can mobilize more external support is more likely to win.

### Key Findings from the Case-Studies

The comparative analysis of the four insurgencies reveals important insights on both their evolution and endings.

The Egyptian insurgency demonstrates the central role of religious doctrine and ideological commitment in radicalizing movements into active insurgency, as well as providing the justifications for ending the violence if not the radicalism of movements. Table 2 summarizes the Egyptian insurgency:

Table 2 Egypt: Gama'a Islamiyya

- Outcome: government victory
- Duration: 1974-1997
- Variables that help to explain this outcome:
  - *Strong state capacity*
  - *Ruthless suppression by the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak*
  - *Cohesive nature of the GI, with strong leadership capable of imposing its decisions on the rank and file*
  - *Lack of popular support*

The victory of the Egyptian government was due to the high administrative and military capacities of the Egyptian state, the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak that was willing to use brute force while the insurgency was active, and to grant concessions and inducements once the ceasefire began. Indiscriminate violence against civilians and the brutal response of the authoritarian regime combined to repel the vast majority of Egyptians, and therefore made the GI receptive to the termination of the insurgency. Also relevant are the key features of the GI: cohesive organization, strong leadership, hierarchical structure and clear ideological orientation. These features enabled the GI to make its rank and file members to accept ceasefire.

The on-going status of the Ugandan insurgency (summarized in Table 3) is due partly to the long

duration that allows the LRA to avoid defeat by developing low-level, decentralized tactics that successfully exploited its fighters' knowledge of the terrain and the weaknesses of law enforcement in northern Uganda. But the LRA's successful post-1994 strategy was contingent on the tacit but active support of the Sudanese government in retaliation for the support Uganda gave to the independence struggle of South Sudan. The LRA's ability to stage attacks from an external safe haven has been one of the main reasons for its tenacity.

**Table 3 Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army (1987- )**

- Outcome: both ongoing and government victory
- Duration: >26 years
- Variables that help to explain this outcome:
  - *Low state capacity, Uganda as a democratizing anocracy*
  - *Geographically peripheral for Ugandan state*
  - *Unclear political aims of insurgency; use of religious framing*
  - *Mismatch state-rebel strategies: exclusively enemy-centric (state) and low-level, small-scale guerrilla tactics (incl. abductions) from safe haven outside of Uganda*
  - *Indiscriminate violence both by state and insurgents*

The evolution of LRA demonstrates the unacceptable hazard of failure to end an insurgency and allowing it to mutate into a pestering unrest ravaging innocent populations.

Similarly, the very long duration of the Irish Troubles led to a “mutually-hurting stalemate” in which neither side of the conflict benefits any longer. The tortuous path that led to the negotiated settlement of the Irish Troubles (summarized in Table 4) carries several important lessons. Despite all the difficulties of achieving negotiated settlement, it is still possible and preferable to the unacceptably high costs of allowing the continuation of a “mutually hurting stalemate.”

**Table 4 Northern Ireland: The ‘Troubles’ (1969-2007)**

- Outcome: negotiated settlement
- Duration: 29 years + 9 years peace process
- Variables that help to explain this outcome:
  - *Complex, multi-leveled, dynamic, and factionalised actors*
  - *Zero-sum political problem, use of religious framing*
  - *Involved states are liberal democracies; both strong and constrained*
  - *Low capacity local law enforcement*
  - *Strategic choices that led to mutually hurting stalemate*
  - *Extensive and influential external support*

The ‘spoiler’ problem of factions that will want to scuttle the process of negotiating a settlement should be envisaged and managed through government’s proper planning, generous concessions and convincing assurances of sincere desire to reach settlement, and equally convincing demonstration of government’s capacity and willingness to pursue more forceful strategy against the spoiler factions.

The different trajectories and endings of the three insurgencies briefly reviewed above provide some insights for understanding the JAS insurgency and how it might end.

**Table 5: JAS**

- Outcome: Not yet in sight
- Duration: since the early 2000 + two prior decades of Salafi radicalism
- Variables that may shape outcome:
  - *Complex, multi-leveled, dynamic, linked to religious identity*
  - *Long history of religious violence*
  - *Muslim-Christian divide in national politics*
  - *Zero-sum political problem, use of religious framing*
  - *Weak state capacity and apparent regime unwillingness to end the insurgency*
  - *Resorting to indiscriminate violence against the innocent*
  - *Extensive and influential external support*

To begin with, the average duration of insurgencies is fifteen years. If this pattern holds, then JAS insurgency (as summarized in Table 5) is still in its infancy. JAS recent takeover of major towns in Adamawa, Bornu, and Yobe states, as well as the reports of revolts by Nigerian soldiers are not encouraging developments.

In the course of operations against JAS, Nigerian security agencies have been criticised for causing harm and violating rights of the civilian populations through the excessive measures they sometimes employ.

Some youth in Maiduguri were found to have joined the JAS as a direct consequence of what they or their family members experienced in the hands of security agents, but mostly the overall effect of these excesses may have been in creating an environment in which potential recruits would emerge.

JAS shares a great deal with the Egyptian insurgency particularly the Salafi doctrinal orientation, the indiscriminate violence and suicide bomb attacks against government agents and agencies, as well as innocent civilians. The ideological justification of their violence with copious quotations from the Quran, and the brazen disregard of the traditional Islamic conceptions of lawful and unlawful conduct in combat are also common to the GI and JAS Insurgences.

But the similarities seem to end there. Notably lacking in the case of JAS is the strong organizational capability that enabled the Egyptian insurgency to recruit mass following through more peaceful strategies of grass-root mobilization rather than the forceful abductions, blackmails and cash-payments that JAS seemed to rely upon. As the adversary of JAS, the Nigerian state does not possess the strong capacity and authoritarian regime that secured victory for the Egyptian state,

Like the role of Islam in GI and JAS insurgencies, Christianity played a considerable role in the Irish Troubles. However, the differences in state capacity and regime type in Nigeria and Ireland seem to trump any further meaningful comparison between the Nigerian and the Irish insurgencies. Similarly, the strong international involvement that proved decisive in both prolonging the Irish insurgency, as

well as ending it through negotiated settlement is conspicuously absent in the Nigerian case, at least thus far.

Finally, the LRA insurgency in Uganda is more comparable with JAS in many respects, including the significant role of weak states, both controlled by regimes unwilling or incapable of investing enough resources to end the insurgencies in both Nigeria and Uganda. The implications are also similar in both cases: insurgents easily crossing porous borders without effective state control; government troops losing battles due to poorly organized military operations; local communities ravaged freely by insurgents; forceful recruitment through abductions and sexual violence, etc. Given the crucial importance of state capacity, or the lack thereof, JAS seems likely to follow the LRA's pattern of becoming a long and messy conflict, with no decisive end in sight.

Two obvious dissimilarities can be highlighted: 1) Nigeria's neighbors have stronger incentives to deny safe-haven than Sudan had in the LRA case, if only because JAS insurgents have begun to attack targets in the neighboring countries (particularly Cameroon); 2) the religious framing of the two insurgencies is of course different, with JAS being Islamic and LRA being Christian.

The similarities of the Nigerian and Ugandan cases make the possibility of JAS following the 'LRA-trajectory' a real risk: a protracted civil conflict that allows the JAS to continue destabilizing significant parts of northern Nigeria. This risk becomes more likely if the Nigerian state continues to follow its current strategies and tactics.

The four insurgencies reviewed thus far reveal that insurgencies are messy and protracted. Table 6 summarizes the key findings that are pertinent for analyzing the possible trajectories of ending the JAS insurgency, and identifying the appropriate policies needed for the most desirable outcome.

Table 6: Summary of case study findings

|                                    | Egypt                       | LRA                         | IRA                   | JAS     |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Outcome                            | Decisive Government victory | Ongoing/ Government victory | Negotiated settlement | Ongoing |
| Duration                           | > 30 years                  | >26 years                   | > 40 years            |         |
| Low bureaucratic state capacity    |                             | •                           |                       | •       |
| Low military state capacity        |                             | •                           |                       | •       |
| Anocracy                           | •                           | •                           |                       | •       |
| Democratising                      | •                           | •                           |                       | •       |
| Protracted conflict                |                             | •                           | •                     | •       |
| Mismatch strategies government     |                             | •                           | •                     | •       |
| Exclusively enemy-centric strategy | •                           | •                           |                       | •       |
| Indiscriminate state violence      |                             | •                           |                       | •       |
| Indiscriminate rebel violence      | •                           | •                           |                       | •       |

## Policy Recommendations

In light of the finding from the academic literature, there are four possible endings of the JAS insurgency, namely:

- 1) Nigerian government breaks the JAS insurgency by using massive deployment of troops and degrading its capacity to carry violent attacks.
- 2) JAS achieves victory by creating and defending a polity in the rural areas of the Northeast.
- 3) Negotiated settlement, which may involve the Nigerian government granting amnesty and compensation in return for JAS disarmament and complete renunciation of violence.
- 4) JAS slowly transforms into a less ideological and more criminal movement, with no other goals than survival and destabilizing Nigeria.

- The tendency of insurgencies to become long, messy, and difficult to terminate is a strong incentive for the Federal Government of Nigeria to develop the political will and work diligently towards the expeditious ending of JAS insurgency by simultaneously pursuing policies and programs on the two likely outcomes of stalemate in near future and negotiated settlement or victory in the long run.
- The Ugandan LRA demonstrates the unacceptable hazard of failure to end an insurgency and allowing it to mutate into a pestering unrest ravaging innocent populations through abductions, sexual violence and extortion. Hence it is imperative that JAS insurgency is brought to an end rather than allowing the stalemate that has emerged to continue.

- The Nigerian government should resist the temptation to consider the status quo as a regrettable but nevertheless tolerable outcome that does not threaten the regime or the nation. A mutually-hurting stalemate is exceedingly costly, morally unacceptable, and counter-productive for the resolution of the conflict.
- The impact of foreign intervention on the outcome of insurgencies requires careful consideration. Short of inviting foreign troops, the Nigerian government should coordinate with its neighbors, regional partners within ECOWAS, the United Nations, and all friendly countries. Important forms of foreign intervention include sharing intelligence, counter insurgency training and equipment, and controlling JAS's access to weapons.
- For Nigeria to achieve either victory or a negotiated settlement, it needs to:
  - Combine enemy-centric and population-centric strategies, including providing real security to northeastern Nigeria outside of JAS control
  - Think creatively about all types of negotiated settlements that are appropriate and effective in the Nigerian context, even if with different factions within JAS
  - Offer protection for those members of JAS who wish to defect from the organization
- Weakening JAS fighting capacity should be deliberately pursued by encouraging defection and factionalization within the insurgency, mounting effective media campaign that mobilizes mass public support, and blocking or limiting the reach of JAS messages to the public. At the same time, the Nigerian government should combine the enemy-centric (military) and population-

centric (hearts-and-minds) strategies in order to drain support for JAS and reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

- An important lesson from the Egyptian insurgency is the central role of religious doctrine and ideological commitment in radicalizing movements into active insurgency, and providing the justifications for ending the violence if not the radicalism of movements. Prominent Nigerian Islamic scholars have already spoken against JAS violence but more seem to be needed. Perhaps publicizing the publications by the Egyptian insurgents who have been clear and firm in their theological rejection of violence will be helpful, at least in dissuading others from joining the insurgency.
- Complaints against the excess of the security forces requires that the rule of law should prevail even in the face of extreme threats to national security. Upholding the rule of law also means that the relevant authorities should quickly and transparently resolve all the outstanding complaints against security personnel. The incidents of human rights violations by security forces if unchecked could serve as trigger for revenge by aggrieved parties.
- Nigeria should develop a comprehensive approach to tackling threats to national security, particularly the challenge of domestic terrorism. The complexity of the situation calls for a multi-stakeholder consideration of both the problem and the solution. An amalgam of measures would serve the country better than one skewed militarily as is the case now.
- The Nigerian Police Force should be reinvigorated in a comprehensive and sustainable manner to give the nation a more robust police force capable of dealing more effectively with security threats. The NPF must do more than pay lip service to the concept of community-policing, which places citizens at its core. Community-policing

empowers the individual, community and the police itself; it must also be intelligence-driven.

- There should be an exit strategy for ‘Civilian JTF’ after the insurgency ended. In the meantime, the group should be better regulated or disbanded altogether. But the implications of doing so without a well thought out exit strategy and well managed process could be disastrous. It becomes imperative for government to develop an effective and comprehensive policy for managing the CJTF post-insurgency. This would entail a more nuanced understanding of the composition of the group and a resolution of the allegations of abuse levelled against some of its members.

Because negotiated settlement is arguably the more feasible way to end JAS insurgency, Nigerian government should pursue it as a matter of urgency and high priority. It is also necessary to approach the negotiations with sufficient appreciations of the all the difficulties entailed. It is even more imperative to go into the negotiations with a genuine and firm commitment to fully honor all the negotiated terms of the settlement.

Without that, the negotiations are bound to be wasteful exercise instead of being the only feasible way to end the regrettable bloodshed, terminate the misery of millions of innocent people, and stop the senseless destruction of valuable property.