



African Union Intermediate Council
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Topic 2: Escalating Violence of Boko
Haram in Nigeria

History of Issues

As we mentioned in our background guide in 2011, Nigeria has had a long history of internal conflict and civil unrest. Ever since its independence Nigeria has suffered from regional disunity, and natural distrust of political leaders. Many times this sense of regional loyalty has resulted in corrupt governments lacking in any sort of popular interest. Protest against these regimes has rarely been peaceful, often resulting in civil war or military coups. The Biafra War, also called the Nigerian Civil War, fought from July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970, marked one of the most important events of the country's history. Economics, politics, ethnic, religious and cultural tensions caused this horrible event. While there are hundred's of ethnic groups in Nigeria, the three main groups represent a large proportion of the population – the Igbo, who make up 65% of the southeast, along with the Hausa-Fulani, 65% majority in the northern part of territory, and the Yoruba, 75% of the population on the southwestern region. As the result of violence especially between the Hausa-Fulani and the Igbo, the Southeast declared it's independence from Nigeria, and then fought a brutal war as the Nigerian government and army forced them back into Nigeria. Another prominent violent event was the Maitatsine riots of 1980. The quasi-Muslim fringe cult led by self-proclaimed "prophet" Maitatsine. This cult appealed to the poor and working class in the Nigerian state of Kano. In December of 1980 his radical followers took to the streets and sparked several riots throughout the state of Kano. The Nigerian army intervened violently. The conflict resulted in over 5000 deaths including Maitatsine himself. The situation rapidly declined after his death, with rioting overflowing into the state of Yola, and several other cities in the north.

Since independence, Nigeria has been undergoing increasing civil and economic inequality. There have been longstanding tensions between the predominantly Muslim in the North and the

Christian in the South. In particular, the northern region of Nigeria, with its higher rates of poverty and unemployment, has exaggerated the problems that frequent the entire nation. There is an ongoing tradition of distrust between the Nigerian people and the government. This combined with a continuously widening economic gap has allowed for an increase in civil instability within post 1999 Nigeria; the politics of Nigeria returned to democracy after years of military dictatorship.

The Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by cleric Mohammed Yusuf. The radical group was founded in the northeastern state of Borno with the ultimate goal of an Islamic state of Nigeria. The



group aims to establish a full battery of sharia courts throughout the entire nation of Nigeria. The name Boko Haram means “western education is sin.” The Boko Haram publicly rejected the theory of evolution and other western teachings, but admitted to embrace western technology into their culture. The group’s leaders have stated a desire

for “mediation of western education through Islamic scholarship.” Up until 2009, the group did not seek to impose their ends through violence. The organization gained popular support by speaking out against government corruption and police brutality. The group’s main following consisted mostly of Islamic students and clerics as well as university students and professionals in northern Nigeria.

The organization became more violent in 2009 after the refusal of Boko Haram to adhere to a motorcycle helmet regulation prompted a heavy handed police response. The initial conflict led to an armed uprising in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Kano. The Nigerian army was sent to suppress the incident, and the ensuing firefights left more than 800 Nigerian dead. Nigeria has been in an upswing in

development and since 1999 has successfully transitioned from military to democratic rule. Unfortunately, the two elections following '99 were marred by fraud, violence, and corruption. In 2010, Goodluck Jonathon was elected as President in an election which was described as the freest and fairest in the country's history. Nevertheless, they were again marred by violence, especially in northern states where none of the northern states had given a majority vote to President Goodluck.

Current Issues

The aftermath of the 2009 uprising was the televised execution of Mohammed Yusuf and his family by the Nigerian government. This has left a radical, disorganized Islamic insurrection waging active war against the Nigerian government. The government believed that they could stop Boko Haram by killing its leader; instead, as many observers described, it has "metastasized" spreading farther and doing more damage than ever before. On August 26, 2009, an unidentified Boko Haram member drove a truck containing a homemade car bomb in the United Nations headquarters in Abuja Nigeria. The attack killed 23 people and left 76 wounded, making it one of the most devastating attacks on the United Nations since its creation in 1945. The Boko Haram claimed responsibility for both this bombing as well as a failed attack on the police headquarters in Maiduguri. The organization's spokesman described these attacks as "punishment for the humiliating treatment meted to our members by state agencies in various parts of the country." This was the first time they targeted the international community, rather than local actors – in fact, for many years, their targets were always those seen as corrupted government officials like police department and local government officials. The organization continued, issuing the demand that "they must release all our members detained in various prisons across the country unconditionally before we accept dialogue with the government." The president of

Nigeria set up a civil committee to investigate the causes of the unrest in states like Borno, but this has done little to quell the aggression of the Boko Haram.

The group has continued its campaign of violence throughout the past few months with devastating results. On November 4, 2011 the organization carried out several suicide car bombing on key government installations in the northern states of Yobe and Borno. The death toll since 2011 is 425 people including police officers, soldiers, community



Figure 1 Bombed Church

leaders, and Islamic and Christian religious leaders. The campaigns have destroyed infrastructure and have led to almost an 80 percent drop in foreign investments. This has further weakened the Nigerian economy. The Boko Haram has shown no intention of slowing the attacks.

Also, the unsettling of Nigeria has started to impact neighboring countries such as Cameroon. In 2012, four French tourists in Cameroon were captured by Boko Haram groups, and after several weeks of being hostage, they were finally released unharmed. Very recently, on November 13, 2013, a French Priest, Father Georges Vandenbeusch, was kidnapped by the Boko Haram group in northern Cameroon and believed to be transferred to Nigeria. Their hostage targets recently have been French nationals due to their desire for revenge for the French invasion in Mali, where many Boko Haram are believed to have been training.

The clashes between the government and police and the group caused many deaths including village civilians because of the ruthless bombing of both Boko Haram and the army in the village. Due to their desire to form an Islamic state and elimination of education, often the target for the group became government officials, militaries, and Christians. Several deaths both in the Nigerian army and

Boko Haram group occurred in 2012. On June 2012, the group raided one of the churches in Kaduna, and killed fifty civilians.

On March, 2013 the president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan stated that “his government cannot grant an amnesty to the militant Islamist group Boko Haram,” and on May 14th, the north-eastern states of Nigeria, Yobe, Borno, and Adamawa, declared a state of emergency, threatened by the organization. Soon after, on June, 2013,

Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Muhammad Shekau, finally released his identity to the public through the internet. As the conflict of Boko Haram and government rising to its pinnacle, the fear of civilians also increased



Figure 2 Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Muhammad Shekau

tremendously. This summer, the Nigerian government and the police decided to jail Boko Haram militants with life sentences, which the group responded with more severe resistance towards the religion and education. On September 29, 2013, the 50 deaths from the College of Agriculture in Yobe apparently showed the group’s absolute intolerance towards the education and western culture. The police stated that “two vanloads of bodies had been taken to a hospital.” This attack and the previous attack on secondary education school were believed to be the group’s responses to the government’s refusal of amnesty.



Figure 3 Student from the college bombing

This Boko Haram and government conflict has heavily impacted the life of civilians, especially the ones who live in the North. The army harassed and detained many civilians based on a scant evidence of Boko Haram and likely have had an excessive amount of arbitrary arrests in the north, as well as the practice of extrajudicial executions, which have allegedly caught up numerous young men who's affiliation to Boko Haram was uncertain. On October 2013, Nigerian army raided the northern city of Damaturu, suspecting the existence of the members of Boko Haram inside the city. The police's treatment towards the villagers was equally severe as the treatment towards the members of Boko Haram. A resident in Potiscum, Yobe, Kadai Musa, said, "We no longer care about anything else except to live and see the next day." In addition, many of those in the north-eastern states have died in the detention facilities due to the suffocation in overcrowded cells, and starvation. Many experts believe this problem will be catastrophic and lead to more fighting.

Boko Haram has also had a splintering, with the formation of a new, and even more violent group called Ansaru. They claimed that the group would not kill any innocent non-Muslim or security officials, "except in "self-defense"... [, and] the group will defend the interests of Islam and Muslims

throughout all of Africa, not only Nigeria or any particular state.” However, Ansaru group kidnapped several foreigners in Nigeria and is responsible for the prison break in Abuja in November 2012. Interestingly, as they contradicted their previous statement, they attacked Nigerian troops during their trip to Northern Nigeria for the conflict.



There are three main issues for African Union to consider taking action in this situation.

1. The recent designation of Boko Haram as terrorists:

Although many people celebrated this event, believing that the US force would actively involve and mitigate this conflict, many scholars and experts strongly disagreed with this designation. On May 21, 2012, 26 professors of many renowned universities and experts sent a letter to the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, urging that the US government refrain from making this terrorist designation. They stated that this will only prompt the group to gain more notoriety and will cut off any hope for making a negotiated peace. This will effectively end dialogue, and the ability of outsiders to learn more about the group, and will also surely lead to

their forging of closer ties with other terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda of the Maghreb (AQIM) The FTO, Foreign Terrorist Organization, designation resulted the failed communication between Boko Haram and international groups, which made the scholarly research on Boko Haram to be nearly impossible. Not only the communication, but also the increased military force to face Boko Haram's attack may lead to disastrous results. As former president Bill Clinton commented, "It is almost impossible to cure a problem based on violence with violence."

2. The high risk of growing regional instability.

There is a serious potential for this movement to spread across various borders. Already, northern Cameroon where it shares its border with Nigeria had several attacks by Boko Haram. As mentioned earlier, both two cases of kidnap happened in Cameroon. Not only the countries, but also other international group may be affected by Boko Haram; for example, al-Qaeda. Nobody can predict the outcome if Boko Haram and al-Qaeda forge closer ties. State's with less capacity than Cameroon, like Niger and Chad, also share long borders with Nigeria, where possible Boko Haram infiltration may already be taking place. What will be African Union's role to minimize the negative impacts on other countries and organizations?

3. The role of African Union and other organization for protection of civilians in northern Nigeria.

Due to ruthless attacks from both Boko Haram and the military forces, abundant amount of innocent civilians get killed every week. Many local populations are finding themselves trapped between the violence of Boko Haram and the abuses of the Nigerian army. Since the government launched the state of emergency this past summer, the

villagers have lived in fear every day. Ironically, President Goodluck comes from the Oil Delta region where a brutal uprising led to the kidnappings of hundreds of foreign oil workers, and major conflict in the region between armed rebels and the Nigerian military. For years, as the government increased repression and its reliance on heavy handed tactics, the rebellion only continued to thrive and grow. It was only in 2009, with a government sponsored Amnesty to all rebels did the violence begin to decrease. Unfortunately, since 2012, there has been a major rejection of the truce, and a return to rising violence in the region. What could the African Union do to help prevent Nigeria from falling back into a state of full blown civil war? Should the AU send observers to work with the Nigerian military operation in the north in order to help insure rule of law and protection of human rights? How can the current government address the issues of growing alienation of the northern parts of the country, as their often legitimate political and economic grievances only become more pronounced?

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For more on the Amnesty in the Oil Delta region, download the following article translated from French at:

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