



## Nigeria: Boko Haram's insurgency

Standard Note: SN06920

Last updated: 19 June 2014

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Section International Affairs and Defence Section

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Human rights groups have reported serious [abuses](#) by Boko Haram but also by the notorious Nigerian security unit known as the Joint Task Force. The government has been predominantly committed to a security-based solution to the problem.

In recent months, Boko Haram has further stepped up its violence. How to respond now dominates the domestic political scene in Nigeria. There were major bomb attacks in the capital, Abuja, in both April and May. Boko Haram has also captured international attention through its kidnapping on 14 April of about 270 schoolgirls in the small town of Chibok, Borno State (around 50 reportedly subsequently escaped). Well over 2000 people are estimated to have died in attacks by the group since the beginning of 2014.

The Nigerian authorities have been heavily criticised both at home and abroad for their ineffective response to the crisis. Outrage in Western countries led governments rapidly to make offers of assistance to the Nigerian authorities. The UK Government has had three teams of advisors in Nigeria, including experts in counter-terrorism, hostage negotiation and victim support, assisted by an RAF surveillance aircraft that is based in Ghana. The US and France have also deployed personnel and technology. A regional security conference on Nigeria took place in Paris in May. There was a follow-up in London on 12 June at which increased co-operation was agreed. The UK Government announced further training and intelligence assistance to the Nigerian military, as well as an increase in its aid to education.

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### 1 Boko Haram steps up its insurgency

In the northeast of Nigeria, an Islamist terrorist insurgency continues to rage. This insurgency is now regularly extending into other parts of the country. At the head of the insurgency is Boko Haram, which calls for the introduction of Sharia law and an Islamic state across the whole of Nigeria. There has been a state of emergency in the three northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa since mid-2013.

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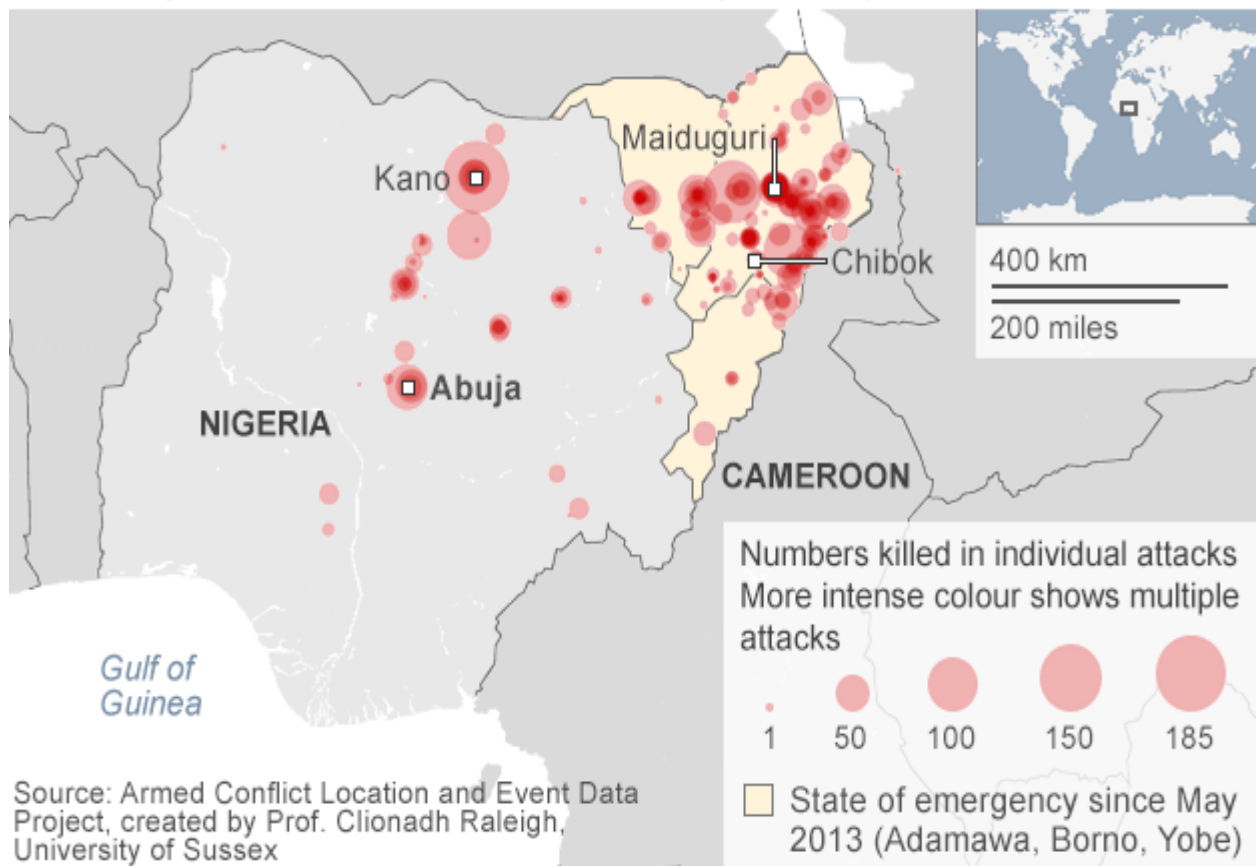
In recent months, Boko Haram has further stepped up its violence. How to respond now dominates the domestic political scene in Nigeria. There were major bomb attacks in the capital, Abuja, in both April and May. Boko Haram has also captured international attention through its kidnapping on 14 April of about 270 schoolgirls in the small town of Chibok, Borno State (around 50 reportedly subsequently escaped). Well over 2000 people are estimated to have died in attacks by the group since the beginning of 2014.

The Nigerian authorities have been heavily criticised both at home and abroad for their ineffective response to the crisis. There have been claims by Amnesty International and others that the authorities had advance-warning about the attack on Chibok but failed to act. Attacks on schools have become a staple of Boko Haram; for example, in July 2013 46 schoolboys were killed in an attack in the same part of Nigeria. The apparently poor state of the Nigerian army is a big topic of debate in Nigeria. Many believe that the military lacks counter-terrorism expertise and has lost significant capability over the past decade as civilian governments have reduced spending on defence. The military's strength is now only 144,000. In recent weeks, the authorities have threatened to restrict public protests by the 'Bring back our girls' campaign, prompting accusations that they are more preoccupied with avoiding embarrassment than taking effective steps to rescue the schoolgirls.

Below is a BBC [map](#) showing the range and intensity of attacks by Boko Haram between September 2010 and April 2014:

## Boko Haram fatal attacks

Civilians reported killed in Boko Haram attacks Sep 2010 - Apr 2014



Boko Haram is widely believed to have also been behind bomb attacks in Jos on 20 May, a city in the 'Middle Belt' of the country, in which over 100 people may have died. Villages near Chibok were again attacked around this time, with well over 20 deaths. Attacks have continued unabated during the first half of June. For example, around 5 June over 200 civilians were reported to have been killed in a series of attacks on villages in the northeast. Residents were reported to have contacted the army for protection before the attacks but to have received no response. On 17 June there was a suicide bombing in Damaturu, the capital of Yobe State, which killed at least 21 people watching a World Cup match. Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, has preached against football, describing it as a Western conspiracy to distract Muslims from their religious duties. The attack came after two previous attacks on venues screening World Cup matches. Some state authorities have closed down these venues in response. On 15 June the Nigerian authorities claimed to have captured 486 suspected Boko Haram insurgents travelling in a convoy of buses in Abia State in the south of country. Some accused the authorities of carrying out an indiscriminate sweep of northerners – not the first.

## 2 Regional and international responses

Outrage in Western countries led governments rapidly to make offers of assistance to the Nigerian authorities. These offers have been accepted, although not without some mixed feelings on the part of the hosts, who are protective of Nigerian sovereignty in such matters.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This may be so particularly in relation to the US; Nigeria has hitherto been resistant to US requests to cooperate with AFRICOM.

The UK Government has had three teams of advisors in Nigeria, including experts in counter-terrorism, hostage negotiation and victim support, assisted by an RAF surveillance aircraft that is based in Ghana. The US and France have also deployed personnel and technology. Both also have personnel in Chad devoted to the search. France has 6,000 troops in the Central African Republic and Mali. Its regional military footprint is by far the largest of the Western powers.

Western countries have been hampered from providing greater or more direct assistance, including the sale of defence equipment, by the very poor human rights record of the Nigerian military. Over recent years the army has regularly taken wives and children of suspected Boko Haram supporters into custody as part of indiscriminate retaliatory sweeps following attacks. Amnesty reported that some 600 people were killed by the military after a Boko Haram attack on Maiduguri's Giwa barracks in March. Last month, there were reports of a brief mutiny amongst Nigerian troops in the north. Human Rights Watch has described the Nigerian army as “almost as evil” as Boko Haram. However, there have also been media reports that Nigerian soldiers are currently receiving training in counter-terrorism in two other unnamed countries.

Since the kidnapping, many have argued that the best chance of rescuing the girls is a prisoner swap. Boko Haram has given indications at points that it would be open to such a swap. However, at a regional security conference on Nigeria held in mid-May in Paris to discuss the issue, the Mali, Chad, Benin, Cameroon and Niger governments joined with their Nigerian counterpart in declaring “total war” on Boko Haram, pledging to cooperate through joint border patrols and intelligence-sharing. British, French and US officials were also present. All agreed that Boko Haram should now be viewed as part of the wide ‘war on terror’ across the region, asserting it has growing links with Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (some analysts remain sceptical of this view, arguing that its goals are still primarily local in character; indeed, views on this very likely also vary within Western governments). There are claims that the stance taken at the regional conference scuppered a deal between Boko Haram and the Nigerian Government at the last moment. President Jonathan reiterated the declaration of “total war” in a speech on 29 May.

Amid growing concern that its territory is being used by Boko Haram as a rear-base, Cameroon has sent up to 3,000 additional troops to the border areas with Nigeria. There are some Chinese workers in the area, working on local mines. Relations between Nigeria and Cameroon have been complicated over the years by their territorial dispute over the Bakassi peninsula, although that is now apparently resolved.

### **3 The London conference on Nigeria**

A follow-up regional conference on Nigeria to was held in London on 12 June during the *Global Summit to combat sexual violence in conflict*, at which increased cooperation was agreed. Here is a [link](#) to the full text of the conclusions of that conference.

William Hague [announced](#) that the UK was further stepping up its assistance when commenting on the outcome of the conference:

We, the UK, have continued our support for that search as you know in providing surveillance aircraft and that continues. I am not going to give a running commentary on the technical progress of that search that's not in the interest of the girls but a great deal of work continues with multi-national support. To ensure that we deal more

effectively with Boko Haram and with incidents of this kind we have reached a series of important agreements.

First, Nigeria, Chad, Benin, Niger and Cameroon have today confirmed that they will operationalise a Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit to bringing together all available information and tighten the net around Boko Haram. The UK, along with the US and France, will provide the necessary technical expertise.

Second, Regional countries have also agreed that they will from now on be running Multi National Joint Task Force patrols. We know that terrorists in Nigeria use porous borders to their advantage; they use them to regroup and to regroup and to rearm. This Task Force will better enforce borders to shut down escape routes of the terrorists. These are important steps towards making Nigeria safer for ordinary people under threat from terrorism.

But we did not just discuss security so third, all of the countries present have committed themselves to considering what more they can do on development, governance, education and gender to combat the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity in the region.

And we were united in our agreement that any effective response must be fully in accordance with human rights.

I am also pleased to be able to announce a substantial package of new British advice and support which we have agreed with our US and French partners.

We will increase our work with the Nigerian Government to strengthen its capacity to deal with Boko Haram. This will mean significantly expanding the training and tactical assistance that the UK provides to the Nigerian Armed Forces. This will include helping to train units deployed on counter insurgency operations against Boko Haram in North East Nigeria. We will also provide further assistance to regional security and intelligence cooperation.

We also want to make sure that Boko Haram does not succeed in its twisted mission to deny education to girls, so together with the US, we will boost our education programmes to draw a million more boys and girls into education in Northern Nigeria. We will be increasing our support for girl's education to help better protect those who are most vulnerable.

And through our Department for International Development, we will do even more to help Nigeria and the region deliver development and prosperity, ensuring that basic services and infrastructure are provided to those communities most at risk.

This package is a substantial boost to our existing commitment to the fight against Boko Haram and we will meet again to discuss progress in Nigeria.

The abduction of the schoolgirls was a terrible reminder of the toll taken by Boko Haram on women across the world. It is therefore very good news that in the margins of this Summit Cameroon, Benin and Niger have joined Nigeria and Chad in endorsing the Declaration to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

#### **4 The wider domestic context**

The security situation in Nigeria has fomented speculation in recent weeks that the 2015 presidential and legislative elections may have to be delayed, either entirely or in the states most affected by Boko Haram's insurgency. The security situation is dangerously entangled with electoral politics.

There is a feeling amongst some in the north that President Goodluck Jonathan – an Ijaw from the Niger Delta in the south of the country who originally inherited office in 2010 after his predecessor, the northerner Umaru Yar'Adua, died – should not seek a second term and instead make way for a northerner to be the next president. This position reflects the informal arrangement that had prevailed since the country returned to democracy in 1999 known as 'zoning', whereby northerners and southerners alternate in holding the presidency. Jonathan originally promised not to stand for the PDP in the 2011 elections and allow a northerner to do so, but subsequently went back on his word.

There are strong indications that Jonathan wants a second term, although he has not said so explicitly. The mainly Ijaw coterie around him, whose fortunes depend on his, is putting plenty of pressure on him not to withdraw. Some of Jonathan's more militant youthful backers in the Niger Delta have threatened to take up arms if he is prevented from standing as the PDP candidate, alleging that those behind Boko Haram are in truth motivated mainly by achieving this goal. By contrast, former president Olusegun Obasanjo has urged him not to stand again in a [leaked letter](#), in which he also warned that the country was in danger of breaking up.

Jonathan is far from unassailable in his own political backyard. There are a growing number of critics of Jonathan within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), many of whom see him as a weak leader. In recent months, he has faced a revolt by some PDP state governors. While some have said they are establishing a 'new PDP', five of them [joined the opposition](#) All Progressive's Congress (APC) in November, providing at least a short-term boost for the party, which is the result of a 2013 merger between the north-based Congress for Progressive Change and the southwest-based Action Congress Nigeria. The APC could pose a real threat to the PDP in the next elections in 2015, although maintaining opposition unity will be the key to success and the past record is poor.

There is discontent in the north about the region's political and economic marginalisation, although, according to the 2012 Poverty Survey of the Nigerian National Statistical Bureau, levels of poverty have been [rising](#) across the whole country in recent years. The north has fared much worse in terms of federal budget allocations over the last 20 years. According to official figures, the leading oil-producing state, Rivers State, received Naira 1,053 billion between 1999 and 2008. By contrast, Yobe and Borno States in the north received Naira 174 billion and Naira 201 billion over the same period.

In March 2014, a nationwide conference of delegates from all over the country began meeting to discuss its future. Known as the 'National Conference', it represents President Jonathan's attempt to forge a consensus about the way forward for Nigeria. 20 committees have produced reports on a wide range of topics, which are now being considered in plenary. The conference is due to conclude by the end of June, having been extended to 16 weeks from its initial 12. Inevitably, however, some view Jonathan's support for the National Conference through the prism of his own political ambitions, suspecting that he is using it to pave the way for a second term in office. While some remain hopeful about its prospects, sceptics note that Nigeria has seen several such initiatives in the past which have come to little or nothing.

## 5 Further reading

J. Zenn, "[Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria](#)", Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, February 2014

Human Rights Watch, "[Nigeria: Escalating Communal Violence](#)", 14 April 2014

Human Rights Watch, "[How do you beat Boko Haram with an army that's almost as evil?](#)", 14 May 2014

R. Pantucci and R. Madoux-Hudson, "[Nigeria's Opaque Jihad: Insurgency in Africa's Richest Nation](#)", RUSI, 14 May 2014

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"[Boko Haram](#)", Council on Foreign Relations, May 2014

*Africa Confidential*, "[Jonathan faces the north](#)", 13 June 2014