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Council Special Report No. 70
November 2014

John Campbell

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Contents

Foreword vii

Acknowledgments ix

Council Special Report 1

Introduction 3

The Political Context of Boko Haram 6

An Anatomy of the Boko Haram Insurgency 9

The Jonathan Government's Response to Boko Haram 13

The United States and Nigeria 15

Recommendations for U.S. Policy 19

Conclusion 26

Endnotes 27

About the Authors 30

Advisory Committee 31

CPA Advisory Committee 32

CPA Mission Statement 33

Foreword

Boko Haram, an Islamist separatist movement based in northern Nigeria, has captured the attention of policymakers in Nigeria and around the world with its potent blend of religious fanaticism, social media savvy, and cold-blooded violence. Its most notorious act was the kidnapping of some two hundred girls from a school in Chibok in April 2014, but it has killed thousands through assaults on villages, car bombings, and mass killings of supposed political opponents.

Nigeria's president, Goodluck Jonathan, calls Boko Haram a new front in the global war on terror, one that demands a forceful response. Yet the Nigerian military's fight against Boko Haram has been undermined by accusations of incompetence, collusion, and cruelty nearly on par with that of the terrorist group it seeks to defeat, and has done little to curb the group's spread.

In this Council Special Report, John Campbell, CFR's Ralph Bunche senior fellow for Africa policy studies, situates Boko Haram in the context of Nigeria's larger political situation and draws out consequences for policymakers in Abuja and Washington. The terrorist group itself he finds to be opaque, with few clear answers about its leadership, connections to other jihadist groups, funding sources, or even political goals. Its power and reach have grown mainly through its willingness to brutalize and intimidate local populations. But it has also resonated with a suspicion among some northern Muslims that Western education and democratic institutions are secular, untrustworthy, and possibly forbidden by Islam.

Nigeria's government, meanwhile, has not helped its own case. A small political elite holds the keys to—and the financial benefits of—political power. Corruption is common and rarely punished. And the security services, often the most visible face of government, are reported to commit violent acts with impunity. As the political establishment

gears up for presidential elections in 2015, Boko Haram and the government response to it are likely to be major points of debate.

The United States, Campbell writes, has an interest in ensuring the stability and democratic future of Nigeria, as both ends in themselves and as a means to blunt the advance of Boko Haram. Unfortunately, Washington's ability to effect change is limited. Abundant oil income means Nigeria is not reliant on U.S. aid, which is in any event modest. In addition, its size and economic strength make it a dominant power in regional institutions, a status that further tends to reduce U.S. leverage.

Nonetheless, Campbell offers a number of recommendations for U.S. policy. In the short term, he calls for the consistent inclusion of human rights issues in all American dealings with Abuja, including calling for accountability for security service crimes; pressure for free and fair elections in 2015 and beyond; facilitating humanitarian assistance in northern Nigeria; and establishing a consulate in Kano. Over the longer term, he recommends providing practical and diplomatic support for government bodies, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals working to improve the practice of democracy and human rights in Nigeria; using U.S. law to penalize corrupt officials; and encouraging a wholesale change in the culture of the military and the police through, for example, inviting Nigerian participation in the U.S. government's International Military Education and Training program.

U.S. Policy to Counter Nigeria's Boko Haram offers a sober assessment of the security situation in northern Nigeria. It argues clearly that the best route to stability is through the establishment of accountable and effective democratic institutions. And it recommends steps U.S. policymakers can take to contribute to that end. It makes the case that while Boko Haram may be the most headline-grabbing threat, the long-term stability of Nigeria is a most serious U.S. and international interest.

Richard N. Haass

President

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John Campbell

Council Special Report

Introduction

The April 2014 kidnapping of more than 250 schoolgirls from Chibok in northern Nigeria by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram—and the lethargic response of Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan’s government—provoked outrage. But the kidnapping is only one of many challenges Nigeria faces. The splintering of political elites, Boko Haram’s revolt in the north, persistent ethnic and religious conflict in the country’s Middle Belt, the deterioration of the Nigerian army, a weak federal government, unprecedented corruption, and likely divisive national elections in February 2015 with a potential resumption of an insurrection in the oil patch together test Nigeria in ways unprecedented since the 1966–70 civil war.

The United States cannot be indifferent. Boko Haram poses no security threat to the U.S. homeland, but its attack on Nigeria, and the Abuja response characterized by extensive human rights violations, does challenge U.S. interests in Africa. Nigeria has been a strategic partner and at times a surrogate for the United States in Africa. With 177 million people equally divided between Christians and Muslims, the benefit of Africa’s largest oil revenues, and in the past a relatively modern military, Nigeria has had greater heft than any other African country. The national aspiration for democracy survived a generation of military rule and served as an example for other developing countries. But, if the country has been the “giant of Africa,” Nigeria’s current challenges politically destabilize West Africa, potentially providing a base for jihadist groups hostile to Western interests, fueling a humanitarian crisis, and by example discrediting democratic aspirations elsewhere in Africa.

Upcoming Nigerian elections will shape the country’s trajectory. The electoral process—the campaign period, polling, and ballot counting—is likely to be bitter, especially at the local and state levels. Splintered

elites are already violently competing for power and appealing to religious and ethnic identities.

If Nigeria's civilian government is to forestall an implosion involving Boko Haram and the 2015 elections, and to resume its positive regional role, it needs to end ubiquitous human rights abuses by official entities, orchestrate humanitarian relief to refugees and persons internally displaced by fighting in the north, and ensure credible elections that do not exacerbate internal conflict. If it achieves these goals, Nigeria could resume its evolution into a democratic state that abides by the rule of law and pursues a regional leadership role commensurate with its size and supportive of goals shared with the United States.

Unfortunately, the United States and other outsiders have little leverage over the Jonathan government. Nigeria's principal exports and economic drivers—oil and gas—command a ready international market. The country's size gives it an advantage over its neighbors, even in its weak state. Neither the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) nor the African Union (AU)—the relevant security organizations—is expected to pressure the Abuja government, because Nigeria is the largest contributor to their budgets and presides among African states as the continent's leader.¹ The country receives minimal assistance from international donors; U.S. assistance, about \$721 million in 2015, paled in comparison with government revenue.²

Washington faces hard choices. Enhanced U.S. security cooperation with Abuja against Boko Haram might limit the movement's military activities. Conversely, a visible U.S. military presence risks an anti-Western backlash in the north and across the Sahel, where the government of Jonathan, who is Christian, is suspected of being anti-Muslim. In the run-up to the February 2015 national elections, Washington supports Nigerians working for credible polling in an environment free of violence. But even with its strong financial and diplomatic support, U.S. ability to influence the conduct of Nigeria's elections is limited by the country's enormous size, diversity, and security challenges, not least from Boko Haram.

Nigeria's restoration of a democratic, regional leadership trajectory should be a top Africa policy goal for the Obama administration. As in the past, a restored partnership with Abuja could forestall the need for deeper U.S. involvement in the Sahel when Washington is preoccupied with pressing foreign policy challenges in other regions.

The Boko Haram insurgency is a direct result of chronic poor governance by Nigeria's federal and state governments, the political marginalization of northeastern Nigeria, and the region's accelerating impoverishment. The insurgency's context is a radical, Salafist Islamic revival that extends beyond the movement's supporters. Government security service human rights abuses drive popular acquiescence or support for Boko Haram. Washington should follow a short-term strategy that presses Abuja to end its gross human rights abuses, conduct credible national elections in 2015, and meet the immediate needs of refugees and persons internally displaced by fighting in the northeast. It should also pursue a longer-term strategy to encourage Abuja to address the roots of northern disillusionment, preserve national unity, and restore Nigeria's trajectory toward democracy and the rule of law.

The following steps should be taken in the short term:

- Washington should pursue a human rights agenda with Abuja, pressing the Jonathan administration to investigate credible claims of human rights abuses and to prosecute the perpetrators;
- the Obama administration should pursue a democratic agenda, including its support for credible elections in 2015;
- the United States should facilitate and support humanitarian assistance in the north; and
- the Obama administration should strengthen its diplomatic presence by establishing a consulate in Kano, the largest city in northern Nigeria.

The following steps should be taken over the long term:

- Washington administrations should identify and support individual Nigerians working for human rights and democracy;
- the United States should revoke the visas held by Nigerians who commit financial crimes or promote political, ethnic, or religious violence; and
- Washington should encourage Nigerian initiatives to revamp the culture of its military and police.

The Political Context of Boko Haram

Nigeria is divided into more than 250 ethnic groups and its population is split evenly between Christians and Muslims.³ Christians are predominant in the southern half of the country, Muslims are mostly in the north, and religious and ethnic minorities can be found everywhere. Nigerian politicians exploit ethnic and religious identities, especially around elections, and associated violence has accelerated since the end of military rule in 1999. Violence also tends to occur where ethnic, religious, and land-use boundaries coincide. Few perpetrators of ethnic and religious aggression have ever been held accountable in a court of law.

Although Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, up to 64 percent of its population is categorized as “very poor.” In rural areas, the rate rises to 73 percent.⁴ The federal government and its national oil revenue have long since been captured by a tiny number of cooperating and competing elites.

Politics have had little relevance to the Nigerian people outside elite circles. Non-elite Nigerians appear to fear the government. The military and the police, which, for most people, constitute the face of the federal government, are routinely brutal.⁵ The judicial system often fails to provide justice, and accountability under the law is frequently absent for elites. Corruption is pervasive and the common perception is that it is getting worse.

Since the restoration of civilian government in 1999, political power in Nigeria has normally been exercised by elites using the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) as their vehicle. Before the 2011 elections, much of the elite, following the principle of power alternation between north and south and between Muslim and Christian, reached a consensus on the presidential nominee, as per a 1999 arrangement initially orchestrated by Nigeria’s military rulers. Elites then ensured that the election was rigged in favor of their consensus candidate. If the

president was Christian, then the vice president would be Muslim, and vice versa.⁶ Power alternation was not a matter of law. Rather, it was an elite arrangement that promoted political stability in a country with numerous ethnic and religious divisions.⁷

Elites controlled the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is responsible for the conduct of elections. Until 2011, each national election since 1999 was worse than its predecessor, and ballot stuffing, police intimidation, and counting irregularities were common. Following the 2007 elections, the president appointed retired Chief Justice Muhammadu Uwais to head a special commission (now called the Uwais Commission) to make recommendations for improvement. The commission did so, but the recommendations were never completely implemented. President Jonathan also appointed notable reformer Attahiru Jega chairman of the INEC. But his authority remains limited because governors still appoint other commissioners.

Boko Haram's success has been facilitated by the 2011 ending of the arrangement of presidential alternation between north and south. When President Umaru Yar'Adua, a northern Muslim, died in 2010, Vice President Jonathan indicated that he would finish out the presidential term, but would not run in 2011, because it was still the north's turn for the presidency under the eight-year power alternation rhythm.⁸ But in the 2011 elections, he ran and won nearly all the states outside the predominately Muslim north, suspending power alternation. The elections lacked credibility for many northerners and widespread rioting followed the announcement of the results.

With the south—much more economically and socially advanced in Western terms—controlling the federal government, northern elites faced the prospect of the political wilderness. Paradoxically, if the 2011 elections alienated many of the northern elites from Abuja, they also widened the gap between many northern Nigerians “on the street” and their traditional Islamic leaders, some of whom accepted payoffs to support Jonathan rather than the northern Muslim candidate, Muhammadu Buhari. As these traditional leaders lost authority among the population, Boko Haram was well positioned to fill the resulting vacuum.

The end of power alternation, a series of political mistakes by the Jonathan government, pressure from Boko Haram, and the prospect of a renewed insurrection in the oil patch inform the causes and consequences of elite disunity. Many Nigerians believe that an opposition

candidate could defeat President Jonathan in 2015. This new aspiration puts a premium on electoral conduct and results that are credible. Many Nigerian civil organizations, however, are pessimistic about the state of electoral preparation for 2015.

An Anatomy of the Boko Haram Insurgency

President Jonathan argues that Boko Haram is a new front in the international war on terrorism. Accordingly, he says, Nigeria's war on Boko Haram requires international involvement.⁹ Jonathan has had some success in selling this perspective. The Obama administration, under pressure from Congress, designated Boko Haram a foreign terrorist organization, and has offered a multimillion-dollar reward for information regarding the whereabouts of Abubakar Shekau, the best-known Boko Haram warlord. The UN Security Council added Boko Haram to the list of "Entities Associated with al-Qaeda" at Nigeria's request.¹⁰

Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic *malam* (teacher) based in the capital of the northern state of Borno, Maiduguri, organized the Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad, now called Boko Haram, around 2002.¹¹ The group saw the government as evil and considered participating Muslims to be infidels. Although it did not eschew violence, killing was not its primary characteristic. Boko Haram probably had political connections within the Borno state government.¹² In what was perhaps a response to police brutality, the group launched a revolt in July 2009 that security forces suppressed, killing some eight hundred members of the community. The police extrajudicially executed Yusuf and several close relatives. The movement then went underground.

Mohammed Yusuf had two deputies: Abubakar Shekau and Mamman Nur; a third, close associate was Khalid al-Barnawi. Though initially they worked together to reestablish Boko Haram after 2009, Nur and al-Barnawi subsequently broke with Shekau because, they said, he was killing too many Muslims. They organized the Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands, commonly called Ansaru. Ansaru's operations were directed primarily against Christians and the security services rather than those Muslims who participated in the federal government. Ansaru probably had links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic

Maghreb, al-Shabab, and other radical groups. Ansaru may have introduced suicide bombing and kidnapping to the struggle against the Nigerian government.¹³

The relationship between Shekau and Ansaru is likely fluid. Ansaru has been silent for many months, and it is possible that its operatives have recently rejoined Shekau's followers, potentially following an obscure power struggle that resulted in a collective leadership. The kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls has the characteristics of an Ansaru operation, though Shekau claims Boko Haram is responsible for it.

There are remarkably few hard facts about Boko Haram. It has published no political program and the structure of its leadership is largely unknown. Abubakar Shekau is familiar through his videos, but it seems likely that he now shares power within the movement.¹⁴ In part because of its mysteriousness, Boko Haram has become a political football in the run-up to the 2015 elections. The degree of public support for Boko Haram and the number of its operatives is also unknown.¹⁵ Funding and weapons are probably largely locally sourced, but if there is some international support, its origins and scope are unclear.¹⁶

Boko Haram is brutal, fully exploiting the propaganda value of violence. Its murder methods are grisly, featuring throat-slitting and beheadings, which it sometimes captures on video for propaganda purposes. Initially, most of its victims were members of the security forces, persons associated with the government, and Muslims who actively opposed the group. Now, however, victims include women, children, and Muslims who merely do not actively support its agenda.

Boko Haram accelerated its attacks over the past year. In the cities of Gwoza and Damboa in Borno state, Boko Haram murdered or expelled Christians and all Muslims opposed to it, killing the respected emir of Gwoza in May 2014. As of September 2014, Boko Haram was able to operate freely in a territory about the size of Rhode Island and proclaimed Gwoza as part of a "caliphate." It has now carried out bombings in Abuja and one in Lagos, far from its northeastern heartland.¹⁷ The group regularly slaughters adolescent male students in schools that it attacks, and kidnaps women and girls for ransom or slavery with increasing frequency.

Is Boko Haram primarily an indigenous expression of a variety of Islamic fundamentalism that has evolved into an insurgency against the Nigerian political economy, or is it a part of the al-Qaeda terrorist

network that poses a direct threat to the West as President Jonathan maintains? With so little hard evidence, the most convincing hypothesis remains that Boko Haram is predominately a diffuse, Islamist, Nigeria-centered insurgency. Its rhetoric attests to its roots in the widespread cultural opposition to “secularism” and “Westernization” that the British introduced and that controlling elites have advanced ever since. Other than rhetorical salvos, it appears uninterested in the United States.

This perspective minimizes—without denying—the significance of contacts and links between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Shabab in Somalia, or the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa in Mali. But even if its character remains predominantly indigenous, Boko Haram’s rhetoric is acquiring something of an international focus, especially as the United Kingdom, France, Israel, and the United States continue to support the Abuja government. Shekau now regularly demonizes President Barack Obama in his videos.

Until now, Boko Haram has acted more like a violent, apocalyptic, millenarian movement than a political entity. The group appears fundamentally uninterested in economic development. Boko Haram shares its anti-Western, antiseccular, and antidemocratic stance with other Nigerian Islamist communities that preach similar positions but do not resort to violence.¹⁸ Many northern Nigerians who do not adhere to Boko Haram consider Western education fraudulent because it was imposed on a Muslim population by Europeans and their Nigerian successors, thereby undermining traditional Islamic values. From this perspective, Western education promotes secularism and corruption and makes materialism and hedonism the ultimate values. This agenda is perceived as promoting an alternative god to Allah and therefore is idolatry. Boko Haram draws on this grassroots sentiment.

Boko Haram’s rhetoric emphasizes justice for the poor through the rigid application of sharia, or Islamic law. From its statements and videos, Boko Haram claims to reflect the true Islam, and other Muslims, especially those within the Nigerian establishment who support the Abuja government, are considered apostates and infidels who deserve to die. This accusation serves as the group’s justification for the wholesale killing of Muslims external to their movement. Thus far, Boko Haram seems to be immune to the influence of outside, mainstream Islamic institutions, such as the Organization of Islamic Countries. Shekau stated the following in a recent video:

I am going to kill all the imams and other Islamic clerics in Nigeria because they are not Muslims since they follow democracy and constitution. It is Allah that instructed us, until we soak the ground of Nigeria with Christian blood, and so-called Muslims contradicting Islam. We will kill and wonder what to do with their smelling corpses. This is a war against Christians and democracy and their constitution.¹⁹

In another video, Shekau contends that “the concept of government of the people, by the people, for the people cannot continue to exist. It shall soon, very soon, be replaced by government of Allah, by Allah, for Allah.” He rejects the Nigerian flag and national anthem as manifestations of the worship of the secular state.²⁰ Boko Haram will likely try to sabotage the 2015 elections.

Boko Haram may be moving to create an alternative government based on the rigid implementation of Islamic law. In a video released in August, Shekau said that Boko Haram is establishing a caliphate based in Gwoza, but provided no details. He praised the emergence of a caliphate in territory controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but said nothing about its relation to a Borno caliphate.

The Jonathan Government's Response to Boko Haram

President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the three northern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa in May 2013, which he renewed in November 2013 and May 2014. He concentrated domestic military assets in the three states and recalled others from international peace-keeping missions. The military, the state security services, and the police are consolidated into a Joint Task Force (JTF). Subsequently, in 2013, these forces were reorganized into the Seventh Division, which reported directly to the chief of army staff, a close ally of President Jonathan's. In some places, irregular vigilantes known as the Civilian JTF assist the division.

The army dominates the security services, which suffer low morale and poor leadership and are sapped by corruption. Despite a projected defense budget of nearly \$6 billion, Boko Haram regularly outguns security forces.²¹ Jonathan has also said that Boko Haram has penetrated his government and many Nigerians believe it has also infiltrated the army.²² In some cases, unlocked gates or absent patrols have facilitated Boko Haram's operations against military establishments, and the high number of government armory weapons that Boko Haram employs hint at collusion. Increasingly, army units melt away at Boko Haram's presence.²³ Amnesty International published a report in May 2014 stating that the army had four hours' notice that Boko Haram was going to attack Chibok, the town where the kidnapped girls were gathered to take their final examinations. Yet no steps were taken to augment security.²⁴

There has long been anecdotal evidence that the Nigerian security agencies may have killed as many Nigerians as Boko Haram in certain time periods.²⁵ Amnesty International released a report on October 15, 2013, based on its own investigations, revealing that more than 950 people died in military custody in the first six months of 2013 alone. The *Wall Street Journal* also reported on its survey of the morgue records at

the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital. The findings affirmed that soldiers routinely brought in large numbers of corpses from Giwa Barracks, where detainees are held without charge.²⁶

Following a Boko Haram attack in March 2014 on Giwa Barracks, there have been credible, though unconfirmed, allegations that government security personnel killed up to one thousand detainees. The senator representing Maiduguri said that 95 percent of those detained and subsequently killed were “innocent” and not connected to Boko Haram.²⁷

On September 9, 2014, PBS screened a documentary as part of its *Frontline* series that included video clips from Boko Haram and from the security services that showed equivalent butchery by both sides. The Boko Haram videos clearly had propaganda intent; *Frontline* characterized the security service videos as “trophies” taken by perpetrators with cell phone cameras.²⁸

President Obama raised the issue of human rights abuses with President Jonathan when the two met in September 2013. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had done the same with President Jonathan in May 2013. These exchanges appear to have had no effect on the Nigerian government or on the behavior of the security services.²⁹ However, President Jonathan asserts that human rights organizations’ allegations are untrue.

In April 2014, President Jonathan’s national security advisor, Sambo Dasuki, published a strategy aimed at winning over the population of the north. Its implementation would command significant Nigerian government resources. The Jonathan government has yet to provide the necessary support to this promising initiative. However, even were it to do so, the Dasuki strategy addresses fundamental, long-term challenges such as inadequate education; it is not a short-term fix for Boko Haram depredations in the 2015 election period.³⁰

It is difficult to see how Boko Haram will be defeated. In the past, other millenarian religious movements in northern Nigeria have burned themselves out only to reappear in different forms because the rebellions’ social and economic drivers have never been addressed. The group’s killing of Muslims may turn the population against it or revitalized security forces could drive it deep into the bush. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that Boko Haram will vanish by the 2015 elections; the group will likely do all in its power to sabotage the voting.

The United States and Nigeria

The George W. Bush administration paid minimal attention to Nigerian domestic political developments beyond expressing support for “free and fair” elections. Washington failed to recognize the Nigerian government’s growing administrative dysfunction and U.S. officials did little to address a cresting wave of corruption, staying mostly silent when President Olusegun Obasanjo unsuccessfully sought an unconstitutional third term.³¹ Washington remained quiet about the blatant rigging of the 2007 elections that placed Obasanjo’s hand-picked successor, the ailing Umaru Yar’Adua, in the presidency and the inexperienced Goodluck Jonathan in the vice presidency.

During President Umaru Yar’Adua’s terminal illness in 2010, many observers feared that a military coup would fill the vacuum in government authority. Washington, relieved that Goodluck Jonathan’s interim presidency and subsequent election seemed to forestall a coup, accorded the new president the benefit of the doubt.

The Obama administration’s policy toward Nigeria has been undemanding, with officials only mildly denouncing publicly the human rights abuses perpetrated by Nigerian security services in their struggle with Boko Haram. Washington has not exacted a high political price from Jonathan as these transgressions persist.³² Pressed by U.S. public opinion, the administration offered Jonathan assistance in the search for the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls, but has not investigated the government’s detention of alleged Boko Haram wives and children without charge or the large numbers of young men extrajudicially incarcerated on the basis of mere suspicion.

However, President Obama did not visit Nigeria on either of his two African trips, a sign of a new concern in his administration about rigged elections, human rights abuses, and corruption. Nevertheless, in its rhetoric and its actions, the Obama administration remains supportive of the Abuja government. Accordingly, Jonathan continues to



A campaign poster for Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan emphasizes his relationship with U.S. President Barack Obama, in Abuja, Nigeria, January 12, 2011. (Sunday Alamba/AP Photo)

identify himself with President Obama to appeal to his pro-American, Christian base; his presidential campaign materials have featured photographs of him and Obama together.³³

As of March 2014, there is a legal precedent for the U.S. Department of the Treasury, working with the U.S. Department of Justice, to identify illicit financial flows through the U.S. financial system to another country.³⁴ Those funds could then be frozen. That was done with respect to \$458 million looted by the notoriously corrupt dictator Sani Abacha, Nigeria's de facto chief of state from 1993 to 1998, which he then deposited in banks in France and the Channel Islands.³⁵ This action may signal a greater willingness by the U.S. government to deprive foreign political figures of the fruits of their corruption.

Frustration over the failure to liberate the Chibok schoolgirls, the Nigerian military's manifest inadequacies for the task, and the Jonathan government's visibly weak political will has prompted some in Congress and the media to call for U.S. military intervention to liberate the girls.

Any such course is fraught with peril. In earlier kidnapping episodes, efforts to free the victims by the use of force have led to their captors murdering them—a possible fate for the schoolgirls in the event of a military operation.

Overt U.S. military intervention also risks further alienating the Muslim population in Nigeria and across the Sahel. Already, northern Nigerian field preachers have issued warnings in sermons against European and American military boots on Nigerian ground.³⁶ Retired general and former President Olusegun Obasanjo, probably echoing widespread views among Nigerian officers, has publicly criticized President Jonathan's request for outside assistance against Boko Haram, particularly from Europe or the United States.³⁷

So far, the U.S. military has trained only small numbers of Nigerians to participate in international peacekeeping forces. The U.S. Department of State's budget request for International Military Education and Training (IMET) for Nigeria in fiscal year 2015 is only \$700,000.³⁸ (IMET is a vehicle for the provision of such U.S. training to a foreign country.) Nigerian reluctance to accept further U.S. training with its requirements for fiscal accountability and transparency has inhibited the program's expansion in the past. In addition, the Leahy amendment prohibits U.S. military training of foreign units that violate human rights with impunity.³⁹ U.S. embassies and relevant bureaus in the Department of State vet units for eligibility. If they are found ineligible, American training is suspended until the host government brings to justice those responsible for human rights violations.

The number of Nigerian units that can pass Leahy vetting is small and shrinking. Military units are rotated through the north, making them vulnerable to credible charges of human rights violations. There is no public indication that a significant number of military perpetrators of human rights violations have been brought to justice.

In May 2014, the U.S. Department of Defense deployed twelve active-duty U.S. soldiers to Nigeria to train a 650-man Nigerian ranger battalion for combat operations that would presumably be free of the taint of human rights violations. This was the first time in years that the United States trained Nigerian military units for operations other than peacekeeping missions. However, isolated trainings are unlikely to have a lasting effect on Nigerian military culture. Abuja's stance toward security cooperation with the United States continues to be unenthusiastic, despite President Jonathan's request for assistance in the aftermath of the Chibok kidnappings. Trainings, even if small, link the American and Nigerian militaries and thereby risk tarring the United States with the Nigerian security sector's ongoing human rights violations.

Nevertheless, improving the professionalism of the Nigerian military and other security services is in the interests of the Nigerian people,

Nigeria's neighbors, and the United States. Were Abuja to investigate allegations of human rights abuses by the security forces, and were the security services receptive, the door would open to greater U.S. assistance that over time could improve their professionalism and thereby their performance.

At the request of the Nigerian government, the United States is deploying drones and surveillance aircraft concentrated on finding the Chibok schoolgirls. That program may be expanded. The territory to be searched is roughly the size of New England. How valuable the intelligence acquired by such surveillance will be in finding and liberating the Chibok girls remains to be seen.

The expanded surveillance option would require the United States to deploy additional assets, which would likely require more support personnel, especially in a region that lacks basic infrastructure. Increased deployment will make the U.S. presence more obvious to a Muslim population that is already suspicious of the West.

The U.S. political response to Boko Haram continues to be hobbled by a lack of understanding about the latter's methods and goals. Given Boko Haram's threat to the Nigerian state and its potential for stronger links to international terrorism, the United States needs to deepen its understanding of the organization's leadership, structure, funding, and sources of support. U.S. efforts should be coordinated with other governments that have significant on-the-ground knowledge of the Sahel, perhaps by means of a contact group.

Given Nigeria's current travails, the watchword for Washington policy initiatives should be "first, do no harm." An increasingly brutal civil war between Islamist radicals and government security forces capable of the most egregious human rights abuses poses potential pitfalls. American missteps such as an overly militarized response in northern Nigeria could compromise U.S. interests throughout Muslim West Africa. Protecting those interests in Nigeria and in the Sahel will require trade-offs. For example, a stronger Washington stance on Nigerian human rights abuses could make Abuja less cooperative in such venues as the UN Security Council, at least in the short term. But, it is the policy with the best prospect for mitigating Boko Haram's radicalization of West Africa's largest Muslim population.

Recommendations for U.S. Policy

In the coming six months, Nigeria's civilian government faces a possible implosion involving Boko Haram and the 2015 elections. It is in the interests of the United States that Nigeria preserve its national unity and resume its democratic trajectory so that Abuja once again can partner with Washington on Africa's strategic challenges. Yet Washington has little leverage over the Jonathan government and the country's fractured political class. If Washington cannot be indifferent to Nigeria's future, it can shape the outcome only at the margins.

Boko Haram is a security threat to Nigeria, and, as such, it retards U.S. goals in Africa. But, Boko Haram at present poses no threat to the security of the homeland of the United States. Boko Haram has undertaken no operations against U.S. public or privately owned facilities, in Nigeria or elsewhere. It has kidnapped no Americans. Unlike al-Shabab, it enjoys no support from expatriates living in the United States. Unlike the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, it has recruited as fighters no U.S. citizens or nationals of other Western countries who could establish terrorist cells on returning home. The central al-Qaeda leadership does not control Boko Haram and has openly criticized its brutality. Boko Haram's attention has been on Nigeria, not the furtherance of an international jihad beyond the Sahel, despite President Jonathan's claims to the contrary.

With a defense budget approaching \$6 billion, the Jonathan administration is not short of resources. Rather than securing an enhanced military capability, Abuja's challenges are to address poor governance, rebuild a national political consensus, and reduce the northern Muslim sense of marginalization. Its immediate goal should be to neutralize Boko Haram in the run-up to the 2015 national elections, even if it cannot be defeated. Absent a political initiative, a robust U.S. security package would be unlikely to tilt the scales against Boko Haram even if Abuja were to accept it. Hence, Washington should urge and assist

Abuja to undertake policy changes that will isolate Boko Haram and reduce its regional appeal. Given Abuja's human rights abuses, there is little that Washington can do at present in the security realm against Boko Haram in partnership with the Nigerian army and security services. Were Abuja to take steps against those abuses, however, it would likely help mitigate northern alienation and as well open the door to an expansion of the U.S. IMET program.

Washington needs to recognize unpalatable realities as it devises its Nigeria policy for both the short term in the run-up to elections and for the long term afterward. As for political initiatives, it is too late for Washington to urge Abuja to complete implementation of serious reforms of the electoral process before 2015, as recommended by the Uwais Commission. Likewise, U.S. policy toward Nigeria after the elections will depend on unpredictable factors such as the credibility of polling and counting, the level of violence, the cohesion of the state, and whether there is military intervention. Whatever unfolds in February 2015, addressing the drivers of the Boko Haram insurgency and supporting a democratic trajectory in Nigeria will present long-term challenges for Abuja and its potential partners.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

PRESS ABUJA ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Obama administration should hold the Abuja government accountable for security service human rights abuses. It should call on the Nigerian government to investigate credible claims by human rights organizations and the media of security service human rights violations, publish the results, and prosecute the alleged perpetrators.

The White House and State Department should also deplore credible reports of human rights violations by the security services, just as they do Boko Haram killings. In addition, senior U.S. elected and administration officials should include human rights violations on their agendas for all meetings with Nigerian counterparts.

Washington should offer to expand IMET and any other appropriate U.S. programs for the professionalization of the security services should Abuja take concrete steps to address human rights abuses. The regular meetings of the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission—a

vehicle for diplomatic consultation between Washington and Abuja—offer a venue for this dialogue.

The Abuja government might respond by declining to cooperate on those remaining issues of mutual concern, especially within the UN Security Council. But, a weak U.S. human rights agenda in Nigeria reinforces the Muslim view that Washington is prepared to look the other way when a Christian government is committing human rights abuses.

In the short term, the pursuit of a diplomatic human rights agenda with Nigeria should not result in any additional financial costs to the U.S. government. However, if an expanded IMET or other security service training initiatives were to become possible, there would be additional costs, the amount of which would depend on the size of the program.

PRESS FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

The Obama administration should publicly reiterate its support for free, fair, and credible elections, and maintain modest funding for electoral support, encouraging efforts by the International Republic Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and other nongovernmental organizations to monitor the election campaigns, polling, vote counting, and election's aftermath. The Obama administration should also avoid early comment on the quality of the elections. The U.S. Embassy in Abuja and the consulate general in Lagos should monitor political appeals to ethnic and religious identities in electoral campaigns as possible harbingers for electoral violence. Moreover, the State Department should revoke the American visas of those who advocate or perpetrate violence.

Visa revocation is a cumbersome process, and there could be bureaucratic push back from U.S. government agencies that are under-resourced. However, many in the Nigerian elite place high value on travel to the United States. Potential loss of a visa to do so could influence their behavior.

FACILITATE AND SUPPORT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE NORTH

The Obama administration should encourage and assist the Jonathan government to develop and lead a multilateral program of humanitarian

assistance for the displaced populations in the north and the Nigerian refugees who have crossed into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

The Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has a formal structure in place to address internally displaced persons. The Obama administration should direct the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other relevant U.S. agencies to explore what technical assistance the United States could provide those agencies to meet immediate emergencies.

Private organizations, ranging from the Red Cross/Red Crescent to Christian and Islamic relief agencies, are present in the north, though often with only a weak capacity. USAID should encourage and facilitate coordination of their efforts by providing occasions and venues for their leaderships to meet. Refugees are the responsibility of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) based at the European offices of the United Nations in Geneva. The U.S. Mission in Geneva should open a dialogue with UNHCR on Sahelian refugee flows and look for opportunities diplomatically to support its work, especially in Niger and Cameroon.

Humanitarian assistance would require careful planning, given the security challenges. As with any emergency relief program, there would be costs, but in the past, the American public has supported food and medicine deliveries. Humanitarian assistance to an Islamic population could have a positive impact on the region's view of the United States and balance the widespread view that Washington uncritically accepts Abuja's record of poor governance.

PROCEED WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A U.S. CONSULATE IN KANO

The United States needs a diplomatic presence in the north in order to understand and shape developments in that volatile region, particularly as the 2015 elections approach. A consulate also becomes an important instrument of American outreach to Nigeria's Muslim population.

The opening of a consulate in Kano was approved by former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during President Obama's first administration, but was shelved because the security risks and costs were judged to be too high. Given the partisan rancor in Washington following the terrorist attack on the U.S. facility in Benghazi, moving forward with a Kano consulate requires political courage.

The absolute security of a diplomatic establishment can never be guaranteed. Nevertheless, the United States has successfully met terrorist security challenges in Kandahar and Karachi, and could do so in Kano. The financial costs will be high. But, the public diplomacy and political benefits of a U.S. diplomatic presence in this volatile region make the investment worthwhile.

Implementation of these recommendations is necessary for the credibility of U.S. advocacy for human rights and democracy, not just among Muslims in Nigeria but also in West Africa. Implementation will also encourage and support Nigerians working for credible elections and may discourage overt appeals to ethnic and religious hatred. But the United States can assist only at the margins in containing the violent pressures associated with the Boko Haram insurgency, the Nigerian government's response to it, and national elections.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

If Nigeria successfully meets the challenges of the next six months, then the government buys time to address the deeper causes of northern alienation and impoverishment that drives Boko Haram. Although the impetus for fundamental reform and transformation will need to come from Nigeria's political elites, the United States can usefully contribute to this longer-term effort.

SUPPORT NIGERIANS WORKING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

The Obama administration should encourage the Jonathan government to launch a counterinsurgency strategy against Boko Haram by offering technical support. That could include an expanded IMET program to increase the professionalism of the security services if Abuja meets the requirements of the Leahy amendment. The Obama administration should also urge the Jonathan government to publicize and implement the Uwais Commission's recommendations for the improvement of elections.

The U.S. Embassy in Abuja, the consulate general in Lagos, and a consulate in Kano, when it is established, should increase their contacts with Christian and Muslim religious leaders and traditional rulers

working toward peace and reconciliation. They should also seek to establish links with “field preachers” and increasingly influential individuals outside the traditional establishments.

American officials should identify effective governors who provide a model of good governance and publicize their efforts. USAID should continue its strategy of working exclusively with state governments with a good track record.

The Obama administration should encourage new trade and investment in the north. It should also draw attention to new, private Nigerian investment in the region, perhaps in conjunction with organizations such as the Corporate Council for Africa and the Business Council for International Understanding.

Additionally, the United States should expand its Fulbright scholar program and other exchange programs with Nigeria to highlight its commitment to democracy and to building Nigeria's civil society leadership capacity.

To facilitate travel between Nigeria and the United States, the U.S. Department of State should devote sufficient resources to visa processing to eliminate periodic backlogs. Understaffing of visa officers at the embassy, the consulate general, and of those who perform additional reviews in the State Department in coordination with other federal agencies can cause a waiting time of months. The National Security Council should coordinate an executive branch review of procedures that subject Nigerians and others with Islamic names to secondary security checks, which delay their travel to the United States. The costs of this recommendation would be modest.

REVOKE VISAS IN RESPONSE TO FINANCIAL CRIMES

To ensure that the perpetrators and profits of corruption find no safe haven in the United States, the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, the consulate general in Lagos, and the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs and Consular Affairs should expand the revocation of visas of those found to be corrupt as well as of those who perpetuate and advocate political, ethnic, and religious violence. With respect to money laundering and other financial crimes, the National Security Council should publicly announce that it is directing the Treasury and Justice Departments to identify and freeze the profits of corruption that have passed through the U.S. financial system. Because these processes will

be time-consuming, the Obama administration may announce publicly its intention well in advance of implementation.

***ENCOURAGE ABUJA TO REVAMP
MILITARY AND POLICE CULTURE***

A stable, democratic Nigeria requires changes in military and police culture. In the United States, it has been a long-standing goal to encourage military and police accountability to civil authority. In addition to the current small-scale U.S. programs with that goal, or even an expanded IMET, relevant U.S. agencies should provide extensive technical assistance to Nigerian institutions working toward security service accountability. The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies in Kuru and the Center for Peace Studies at Usman Danfodio University in Sokoto, no doubt among others, have notable programs that merit U.S. support.

Conclusion

Boko Haram is primarily an indigenous northern Nigerian response to poverty and bad governance within the context of a breakdown of regional power alternation and a radical Islamist worldview. Hence, it would be a mistake for Washington to place Boko Haram in the context of the international war on terrorism. There is little scope for a military response by the United States.

Rather than a greater U.S. security role in Nigeria, Washington should redouble its diplomatic efforts to persuade and encourage the Abuja government to address the drivers of Boko Haram.

Implementing the recommendations outlined above would likely result in a cooler bilateral relationship between Washington and Abuja, at least in the short term. However, they could strengthen American ties to the Nigerian people, especially civic organizations working for democracy and good governance.

The United States can assist those in Nigeria working for a democratic trajectory only at the margins. But it is worth the effort. A democratic Nigeria characterized by the rule of law would promote economic development, alleviate poverty, and address the people's alienation from their government. Boko Haram would be deprived of its oxygen. The diplomatic and security partnership between Washington and Abuja could then be reestablished, relieving the United States of the need for a greater security presence in West Africa.

Endnotes

1. South Africa would claim that it, too, has the capacity for continental leadership.
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3. Estimates of the number of ethnic groups range up to three hundred and fifty. The lack of precision reflects different definitions of "ethnic group" and how to separate them from other categories, such as "clans."
4. "Nigeria Economic Report," World Bank, May 2013, p. 9.
5. "Nigeria: War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity as Violence Escalates in North-east," Amnesty International, March 21, 2014.
6. Umaru Yar'Adua, elected president in 2007, was a Muslim. His vice president, Goodluck Jonathan, is a Christian. Although power alternation has been suspended following the elections of 2011, President Jonathan has a Muslim vice president.
7. Power alternation, which Nigerians call zoning, is described in detail and analyzed in John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), chap. 3 and 7.
8. President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian from southwest Nigeria, held office from 1999 to 2007. Under the principle of alternation, a northern Muslim would hold the presidency from 2007 to 2015.
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10. At present, neither designation has much practical effect, though they may inhibit the ability of third parties to negotiate with Boko Haram in the future.
11. Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad, or, in Arabic, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*.
12. "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group, Africa Report no. 216, April 3, 2014.
13. For an extensive discussion of the murky relations among the leaders of Boko Haram and Ansaru, see Jacob Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel*, February 24, 2014.
14. Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram Leader Abubakar Shekau: Dead, Deposed or Duplicated?" *Militant Leadership Monitor* 5, no. 5, May 2014, pp. 8–10.
15. See Freedom C. Onuoha, "Why Do Youths Join Boko Haram," United States Institute for Peace Special Report 348, June 2014. Onuoha, drawing on research by the CLEEN Foundation (Lagos) that includes a mapping study and hundreds of interviews, analyzes why young men are radicalized, but he does not suggest how many there are. The CLEEN Foundation was formerly known as the Center of Law Enforcement

- Education in Nigeria.
16. Boko Haram robs banks and now benefits from ransoms, and many Boko Haram weapons come from Nigerian army armories.
 17. For a map indicating the intensity of Boko Haram, government, and sectarian violence by state, see the Nigeria Security Tracker, <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>. It is updated monthly.
 18. Many of these communities are local in focus and oriented around a charismatic leader.
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 29. See "Readout of President Obama's Meeting with Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan," The White House, September 23, 2013; "State of Emergency and Fighting in Northern Nigeria," U.S. Department of State, May 17, 2013.
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