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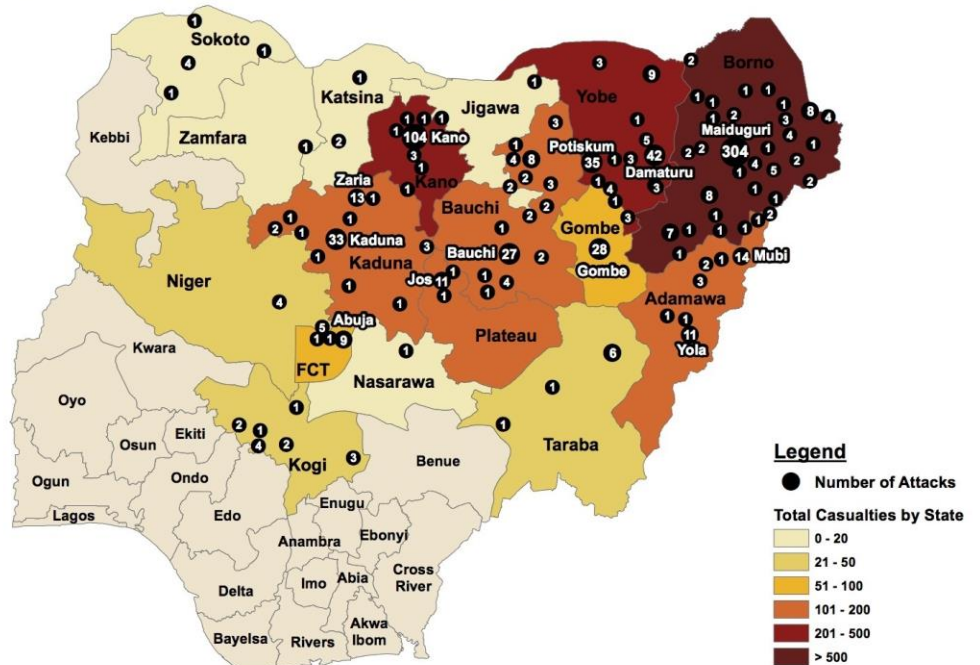
DaMina Advisors Paper: Boko Haram terror threat intensifies as Nigerian Army conventional tactics and weaponry fail to crush resilient guerrilla terror group. Will the terrorist attacks spread South?

– By Colonel (Rtd) James Hall, MBE MDA FCMI, (former UK Defense Attaché in Nigeria); with contribution by Captain (Rtd) Ogwuegbu-Stephens, BA, MPP, (former US Counter Insurgency Intel Analyst, Afghanistan, Iraq)

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Of all the threats that face Nigeria and the beleaguered government of President Goodluck Jonathan, the most immediate is that of Islamic extremism posed by the horrifyingly violent guerrilla terrorist group, Boko Haram. With its roots firmly planted in the far north eastern states of Nigeria, and operating under a self-proclaimed Islamic banner, it condemns Western influence, particularly the corrupting influences of western education on women, and demands strict Sharia Law. With remarkable lack of discrimination it has murdered thousands and has effectively rendered over 20% of the land area of northern Nigeria ungovernable.

Boko Haram-attributed Attacks in Nigeria Since July 2009



Source: Navanti

Western Governments, fearing the arrival of Al Qaida from the Sahel, are keen to grant assistance to foreign security services if they can prove the linkage to local movements. In actuality, much less support has been provided than is commonly assumed. Meanwhile the threat metastasizes and continues to move south towards Abuja and Lagos threatening the stability of Africa's most populous country, largest oil exporter and a strong western ally.

The reported use of military tanks, planes and other heavy conventional weapons has so far failed to have any enduring impact against the asymmetric guerrilla tactics of Boko Haram.

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The West's military aid to Nigeria has been negligible; despite regular statements of support very little if any equipment and certainly no advanced weapon systems have been handed over, not least because of reputational fears based on regular accusations of human rights abuse by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The asymmetry in tactics and weaponry has given Boko Haram at least an equal hand in the conflict and this is unlikely to change until the Nigerian Military re-equips and adopts a more decisive counter insurgency strategy. Success will almost certainly depend on recognizing that the "battle of ideas" is ultimately more critical than the sophisticated equipment that fights it. Whilst waiting for this realization, many more lives will be lost to terrorism and the insurgency may move south towards Abuja and even ultimately towards Lagos. Will the Nigerian Security Forces make the changes necessary to regain control? It certainly does not seem likely before the 2015 Presidential elections are over, and perhaps even less likely once a new leadership is in place and facing a myriad of political challenges – unless the wealthy elites in Abuja and Lagos are more directly threatened.

Boko Haram lives and operates amongst its poor Islamic kinsmen and blends into its surroundings extremely well. With the Nigerian Army fascinated (perhaps fixated) on obtaining advanced but largely irrelevant weaponry and conventional warfighting tactics, its enemy continues to gain momentum with their guerrilla insurgency. At first glance the group certainly shares some common ideological background with the Al Qaeda franchise. When compared to the guerrilla insurgencies of Iraq in the middle of the last decade, it also employs a very similar tactic of mass terror. Despite this, there is as yet no open source proof that the two have developed close relations.

Boko Haram is not alone in Nigeria in espousing a violent interpretation of Islam. Working along a much more internationalist route is *Jamā'atu Anṣārīl Muslimīna fī Bilādīs Sūdān*. Ansaru, as it is more often known, seems to have wider and stronger links to AQ and is likely to be the organisation more closely allied with other radicals in Mali and in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). How closely related it is to Boko Haram is hard to ascertain; clearly there have been links but, whilst Boko Haram remains firmly local in outlook, Ansaru is the organization much more likely to attack foreign and commercial installations and move south. Appearing to disapprove of a strategy that kills so many innocent Muslims unlike Boko Haram, Ansaru has been responsible for the fatal kidnappings of several Western workers since 2011 in Nigeria. Ideological disagreement between the two groups is in some way reminiscent of the Iraqi experience where excessive violence by al Qaida drove many Muslims to uncomfortable support of the Allied occupation and eventually forced a more focused set of Western targets that replaced the near indiscriminate murder of the civilian population.

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Neither Boko Haram nor Ansaru has yet had much effect on foreign investor commercial interests in Nigeria. Even attacks in Abuja did little to change the country's business profile, although they were the trigger for Total to withdraw non-essential staff and families out of Abuja. In truth most businesses can manage to work around even quite high levels of terrorist threats. Provided the risks are predictable and costs can be factored in, it is almost always possible to find a way to keep going. The oil and gas industry managed for years in the much more dangerous environment of the pre-Amnesty Niger Delta. What overseas commercial interests like much less is political instability and the consequent inability to foresee legislative, economic and fiscal constraints on their profitability.

Seen from this perspective the Boko Haram/Ansaru threat comes less from the physical risks it imposes and more from the damage it does to the Nigerian State and its ability to govern effectively. President Jonathan's People's Democratic Party (PDP), riven by political infighting and already focused for most of the last year on the 2015 Presidential elections, has yet one more problem to manage; or not. Not so long ago, commentators regarded a Jonathan reelection as a near certainty. No more; the cascading pressures of party politics, personal ambition, corruption and a myriad of failed projects, broken promises and security risks leaves his future very much in balance.

The consequence of political uncertainty is weak government. The Petroleum Industries Bill (PIB), on the legislative program for years, has no chance of being passed before 2016. Without it, industrial investment remains high risk and the oil and gas majors will continue their slow quiet rebalancing towards other markets. Recent capital markets gyrations following the suspension of Central Bank Governor Lamido Sanusi have shown the economic damage that lack of certainty can cause.

What can the Nigerian State do about Islamic extremist violence? The answer should not be very difficult in light of recent international counter-insurgency experience from Iraq and Afghanistan. One solution lies, not in conventional military force, but in the reconstruction of the dilapidated northern economy and civil society and in good governance that encourages investment, development and jobs. To provide this will require the intelligent and careful use of the security forces in order to exert sufficient control to allow officials to operate safely in areas that are currently effectively ungoverned. It is the road builders, educationalists, water, power, health and agricultural experts who will make the necessary changes – not security forces alone.

Another part of the solution acknowledges that reconstruction of the economy and civil society may not guarantee the final cessation of Islamic terror campaigns. Government may have to accept that hard core extremists have no intentions of a peaceful resolution. Boko Haram's announced objective of destabilizing Nigeria and the creation of an Islamic state in the north, mean that attempts at reconstruction of the economy and civil society will not satisfy everyone.

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Better economic opportunity may reduce the flow of recruits but will not in itself defeat the driving ideology. In consequence whilst the guerrilla campaign may be degraded by security force operations, the likelihood is that success will drive the hard core to a still more asymmetric approach – and that could well mean Western and commercial targets.

Neither Nigerian government, military nor police seem fully to grasp the realities of this. The public debate shows a continuing fascination with high technology: fast jets, tanks and artillery are almost universally seen as the answer to an insurgent threat. Not true of course. Heavy equipment, even if it works and its operators are well trained, is of limited value in a guerrilla war where the enemy lives amongst the people. The real fight should be about intelligence, foot patrols and human effects. Such human intelligence requires buy-in and cooperation from any and all northern Islamic clerics and elites who disapprove of Boko Haram's current terror campaign. Surgical strikes and high explosives are at best rare actions and based only the highest quality intelligence. The crisis within the PDP makes elite buy in impossible to secure. All this requires robust but fairly basic military equipment: vehicles, radios, small arms matched with sophisticated thinking and clever human tactics.

The Nigerian Armed Forces and the Police can manage few of these demands. Despite the propaganda, the idea that heavy armor is fluttering through to the North supported by fast jets is simply wrong. Nigerian soldiers sent to fight Boko Haram possess very limited advanced equipment and even more limited counter-insurgency training. Combat radios and communications in particular are almost non-existent. No wonder no-one comes when a village is attacked; static military outposts can normally only use mobile phones to summon help; and the military have turned off most of the mobile networks in the area.

It is worth saying that there are reasons for optimism. The Nigerian security services, not least the Military, are staffed by well educated, intelligent and determined people. Soldiers in particular are well disciplined and deeply loyal to the Nigerian State. Given the right doctrine and support from the government there is no doubt the problem could be solved. To do this requires some fundamental changes of assumption, not least in embracing in deed as well as in words, the Western doctrine of 'stabilization.' Perhaps the most difficult of these is the acknowledgement that such conflicts can never be solved quickly. With causes lost in history solutions can only be found over generations.

The truth therefore is that, despite all the protestations, a solution to the problem of Islamic violence is a long way off. Should that worry businesses? Yes, to the extent that it will mean continuing destabilization of the state and consequently further delay and prevarication over the many much needed strategic reforms – to take only three, the PIB, privatization of power and the anti-corruption campaign. Moreover, business interests will need to keep a clear eye on the threat posed by Boko Haram and Ansaru. Threats, ideology and strategy can change. Like most insurgencies, one should not expect the geography of the attacks to stay limited to its current region - the North. As Boko Haram grows bolder, one should expect a southward push of their terror campaign. More frustratingly, Government success in the North might well encourage a change of strategy to target the South more directly. Given the current political distractions, it is likely that Northern attacks will continue unabated but that new strikes in the central and Southern belts may also become more common.

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The danger of an attack on international commercial or diplomatic interests in Abuja and in Lagos is getting higher by the week.

For More in-depth analysis on Boko Haram or other Africa security related issues please contact us to arrange a private briefing by Col. (Rtd) James Hall and Capt. (Rtd) Ogwuegbu-Stephens

**** Col (Rtd) James Hall** was until recently the British Defence Adviser at the UK High Commission in Abuja, Nigeria. Now retired from the UK Armed Forces he provides strategic analysis and security advice, specializing in Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through his advisory company Sandwick Advisers Ltd, security consultants to DaMina Advisors clients. Born in Tanzania, James was educated at Pembroke College Oxford, where he read Modern History and studied Tropical African History. After a 2 year spell in industry he joined the Army in 1984. During a career of 29 years James served widely around the world before settling as a specialist in African affairs. In 2005 he commanded his Battalion before moving on to run the planning team in the British Army's Commitments cell, controlling the relationship between current demand for military capability with the need for long term structural change. In 2010 he was sent to America to teach Strategic planning and International Relations at Master's Degree level at the American Army Staff College, Fort Leavenworth.

Capt (Rtd) Ogwuegbu-Stephens is a Captain in the United States Army Reserve. He recently left active duty service after spending almost a decade as an intelligence analyst in the US Special Forces and the 82nd All American Airborne Unit. He is currently working towards his law degree and provides strategic security analysis and advice specializing in Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States. Born in the southwest city of Ibadan, Oyo State, Ogwuegbu-Stephens is a Captain in the United States Army Reserve. He recently left active duty service after spending almost a decade as an intelligence analyst in the US Special Forces and the 82nd All American Airborne Unit. Ogwuegbu-Stephens, a security consultant to DaMina Advisors clients is currently working towards his law degree and provides strategic security analysis and advice specializing in Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States.

Born in the southwest city of Ibadan, Oyo State, Ogwuegbu-Stephens spent the first decade of his life in Nigeria before emigrating to Washington DC in the United States where he then went on to be educated at Middlebury College (Bachelor of Arts), American University School of Public Administration (Masters of Public Policy), and currently University of North Carolina School of Law (Juris Doctorate). Ogwuegbu-Stephens call to service was prompted by 9/11 attacks in New York City and his desire to serve his adopted country. Ogwuegbu-Stephens gained extensive knowledge and intelligence training in dealing with insurgency and counter-insurgency during his service in the United States Army. He served as an intelligence analyst with 3rd Special Forces Group, whose area of expertise was Africa and was deployed his unit in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan). During his deployments, he worked with multinational forces, other government agencies and local forces providing relevant intelligence used to kill and capture insurgents. He subsequently gained a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant and joined the 82nd All American Airborne unit, a unit with which he returned back to Iraq for his 3rd deployment. In 2012, after almost a decade in the Army, he was honorably discharged due to training injuries sustained over his army career.

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