

TO SAVE THE AFRICAN STATE, NEGOTIATE WITH TERRORISTS



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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**



To Save the African State, Negotiate with Terrorists

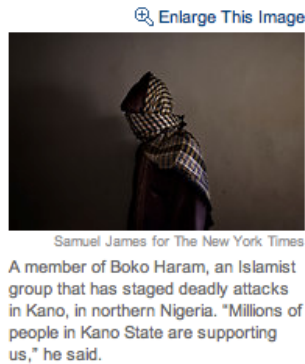
By [ALEX LAVERTY](#)
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An Islamic jihadst terrorist group that uses violence in an attempt to expel Western influences is growing in notoriety and expanding its tactical audacity.

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It opposes the teaching of Western education, and targets state institutions such as the police and government buildings through assassinations and car bombings. The state, an ally of the United States, has attempted to use its oil wealth to quiet dissent, but economic and political disparity located on ethnic, lingual, and regional lines has caused unrest to build among those who feel their share is insufficient. In response to the violence perpetrated by the terrorist organization, the state has violently cracked down on the movement and recently killed the leader of the group while he was being held in police custody.

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The New York Times | International Herald Tribune

This description is not of a country in the Middle East, but a recap of recent events in Nigeria.

Boko Haram, the colloquial Hausa name for the People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad, is based in northern Nigeria and has undertaken such operations as a car bombing on the United Nations headquarters in the capital Abuja, brutal attacks on police stations in the north, and a Christmas Day bombing of a Christian church also in the capital. They claim to be a reaction to the Western influence they see being forced upon

“Boko Haram... exposes the frailties of the modern African state that have persisted since the end of colonialism”

the people of the Muslim north by a corrupt Christian-led government.

These actions have signaled Boko Haram’s increasing reach within Nigeria, as well as highlighting the inability of the Nigerian state to prevent the group from conducting their operations outside of their region of support. This sets Boko Haram apart from other militant groups within Nigeria, and exposes the frailties of the modern African state that have persisted since the end of colonialism.

When colonialism ended, the founding fathers of African independence made a critical decision in state formation. They accepted the borders drawn up in Europe as the sovereign domains of the newly liberated African states. However, these lines were often arbitrary, and neglected ethnic and geographic considerations. The colonial state imposed these borders through the agreement drawn up at the Berlin Conference in 1884, and enforced control through repression and manipulation.

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The post-colonial state lacked the resources, the skills, and often the legitimacy to simply subsume the capacity of the colonial administration. Thus, groups were able to exist outside of the purview of the central government or in prominent opposition to the state.

Over the past 20 years, as commodities have become a larger part of African countries' GDP, the benefits of controlling the state have risen considerably. Thus the economic differences between those in favor by the central administration or those marginalized have increased substantially.

Without the same economic incentives, violent pressures, and geographic partitioning that characterized state and nation formation in other parts of the world, African states remain colonial amalgamations. To overcome those origins, there needs to be stimuli introduced to inspire greater cohesion among the populace, in a way that will encourage and incentivize the citizens of these states to pool their combined resources, rather than seeking to divide themselves along older ethnic or tribal boundaries.

To create this incentive, the Nigerian government should work towards immediately engaging in constructive talks with Boko Haram in order to grant them some level of self-governance and to negotiate a level of autonomy. This would be a radical break from previous government interaction with non-state armed groups and seemingly counter-intuitive in terms of nation-building. However, despite military campaigns to crush radical opposition groups around the world, the underlying causes of the anti-government sentiments have not been solved. Poverty, political corruption, economic marginalization, and the lack of investment are well known to be root causes of

Nigerian Oil Supply locations



Source: Le Monde

insurgencies, radical movements, and jihadist groups. Military defeat will not create greater national harmony, in fact it will create the opposite.

Boko Haram claims to have substantial support in the north, and whatever their numbers, they grow each time retaliation is carried out by the government. Thus, the Nigerian state needs to immediately cease their attacks on areas where Boko Haram is located, and seek to negotiate their terms. This should involve deciding on which Nigerian states will be given more self-rule powers, how quickly state taxation and social services should be discontinued (including any receipts from oil proceeds), and how to deal with those wishing to move to the newly formed autonomous region, and those who wish to leave.

The end goal is to show non-state armed groups around the world that self-governance and the expulsion of the modern state will not lead to the economic empowerment that underlie much of their motives.

Very soon after the transition of power, those residents that chose to move to or remain in the Boko Haram-administered areas will see the effects of the lack of financial support from Abuja. Creating a state within a state will be a task greater than that faced by the founders of post-colonial states. In the case of this new Boko Haram-region, a small population, few natural resources, and a group that has no administrative training or background means changes will cause drastic negative effects and will be felt rapidly.

In this scenario, Nigerian public diplomacy can begin to engage the people of this autonomous region to reinforce how unity under the state, while far from perfect and in need of much reform, is a better option to the fractious alternative that they chose. Already, the northern region of 60 million people rely on government funds to prop up their economy as their previous enterprises have fared badly in the face of Chinese competition or dwindled through agricultural decay. The Nigerian government will need to back up this outreach through quality and lasting reforms. Education should be the forefront of any engagement with the north as the benefits from increased schooling and skills can directly dispute the content of Boko Haram's message that western education is a negative influence.

This scenario will send a message to other non-state armed groups and African governments that interaction within existing state structures is the fastest way to

“Military defeat will not create greater national harmony, in fact it will create the opposite”

implement reform and to increase services for the country's citizens when compared to partition. Forming breakaway movements that challenge the sovereignty of the state will not be the panacea to Africa's ills. The case of South Sudan should be monitored closely, but early evidence suggests that even ample supply of natural resources does not guarantee political and economic success post-independence.

Boko Haram cannot be bought off like other groups in Nigeria because their sources of bitter disagreement stem from less material issues, and are expressed through religiously infused rhetoric.

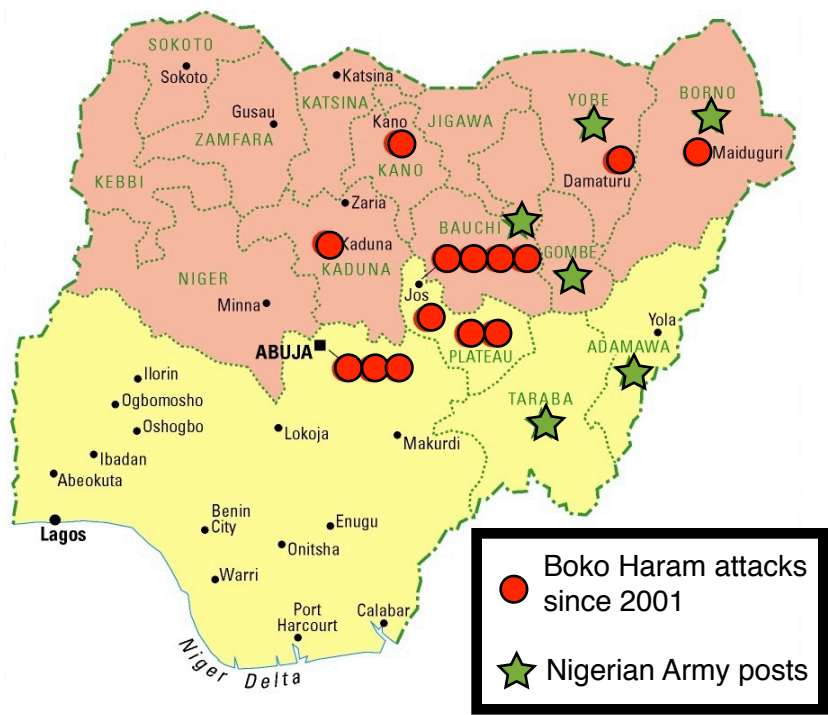
It is important for the international community to not aggregate Boko Haram as a sect of the global jihadist movement. The origins of Boko Haram lie more so in the colonial state formation of the continent of Africa and its failures in the 50 years since. This is an armed revolt against a serially corrupt government that responds to

“The origins of Boko Haram lie more so in the colonial state formation of the continent of Africa and its failures in the 50 years since.”

protests with abusive security forces. The increasing economic disparity that exists between these two regions, the oil-drenched Christian South, and the drier Muslim North, is a significant source of Boko Haram's rise and growth.

Boko Haram's ability to inflict great damage on a powerful African state that has responded with the typical counter-terrorism playbook without success, shows that new ideas and new strategies are needed to deal with the movement itself as well as the underlying causes. Structural change will take time in Nigeria, thus one option that should be considered is the opportunity to give Boko Haram exactly what it wants, in order to show that their radical goals cannot achieve what they promise their followers.


A DECADE OF VIOLENCE: THE SPREADING INSURGENCY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA



Source: Africa Confidential

The stability of Nigeria depends on the actions taken by its leaders in the coming months. The future of the state in Africa could be solidified if Nigerian leaders can make an example of Boko Haram. Solutions should come from compromise as part of a greater whole, not through division and segregation. As the the transnational ties between the globe grow and strengthen, African governments need to quickly address the issue of insufficient service delivery, corruption in politics, and attracting investment if the non-state armed groups are to be dealt with. How governments responds to these issues will decide whether the African state will thrive in the 21st Century

Deborah McGrath contributed reporting.



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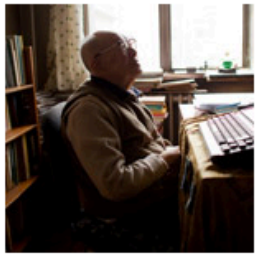
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