

Date: 23 November 2015

Subject: U.S. involvement in the multinational fight against Boko Haram

Executive Summary:

It is in the best interest of the United States to remain committed to a support position in the multinational struggle against Boko Haram. President Obama's pledge of 300 U.S. troops and additional drones to conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations will greatly increase the effectiveness of the increasingly efficient Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) made of troops from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin. United States military involvement should not surpass this commitment unless it has been openly invited by the host nation, the additional participation is supported by the general population, and after a thorough examination of the government in power. Any additional military assistance above what has already been committed should be a last resort option. The main focus of United States involvement moving forward should come in the form of political pressure, humanitarian assistance, and diplomatic channels.

United States involvement in the West African regional struggle against Boko Haram has been kept at a minimum due to historical, political, and religious circumstances. These conditions have recently been altered to allow increased U.S. participation, but this participation is still looked at with apprehension by the Muslim general public in the region where Boko Haram openly operates. The objective of this memorandum is to describe the shifting elements in Nigeria that have allowed for U.S.

open involvement, explain the rationale for restricted U.S. intelligence as the safest and surest step forward, and then ending with foreign policy recommendations.

Main:

Since Boko Haram's resurgence in 2010 after a re-organization by Abubakar Shekau following the execution of founder Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram has become increasingly violent and destructive. They are estimated to be responsible for more than 17,000 deaths and the displacement of around 2.2 million people in Northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Benin. The U.S. National Security Strategy published February of 2015 does not identify Boko Haram as a concrete threat. However, it does outline a strategy to not only "combat the persistent threat of terrorism" but also to build the capacity and effective governance of Western Africa to prevent the growth of violent extremists and radicalization.

A month after the National Security Strategy was published Boko Haram posted a message to ISIS asking to join their ranks. In March 2015, a spokesman for ISIS exclaimed joyful news at "the expansion of the caliphate to West Africa because the caliph...has accepted the allegiance of our brothers of the Sunni group for preaching and the jihad." Another momentous event took place in March 2015; Muslim candidate Muhammadu Buhari was overwhelmingly elected president of Nigeria in arguably the first legitimate democratic elections to take place in the country. His platform gained momentum because of its focus on the termination of Boko Haram. The transition of power between President Goodluck Jonathan and Buhari was also one of the smoothest in Nigerian history. Since the establishment of democratic elections in 1999,

there has been an established alternation of power between the Christian and Muslim elites to facilitate peace and maintain control. This peace has come with corruption and political violence against the main population and has decreased the legitimacy of the ruling class. It has also brought a great distrust of military, police, and security services. This political setting formed Boko Haram in 2002 under Mohammad Yusuf. This early institution gained early support for their adherence to Sharia law and their confrontations with government forces. The early phases of Boko Haram ended with Yusuf's execution in 2009 and its resurgence under his second in command, Shekau. The corruption and gross violence of the government has equaled that of Boko Haram under Shekau. This has alienated the majority of people, and although they do not support Boko Haram, they would not step in to help when military establishments were attacked. The same reluctance was attributed to President Jonathan, a Christian accused of dragging his feet against Boko Haram when Muslims were being targeted. Accusations against Jonathan cooled relations between Nigeria and the U.S., greatly limiting support in their struggle.

The election of Buhari is beneficial to the U.S. because it marks an end to the long line of corrupt elite rule that culminated in the corruptive and often violent rule of Goodluck Jonathan. The U.S. can work with Buhari and not seem to be solely supporting Christian authority, but capable of working with a highly favorable Muslim leader. The U.S. will cease to be limited by the Leahy Law because of the human rights violations carried out by Jonathan's security forces and be able to offer specified training to the Nigerian and MNJTF forces. Buhari offers a chance to become involved

in a fight against an ally of ISIS while supporting an elected Muslim leader that is outspoken against corruption and human rights violations.

The Nigerian Presidency was not the only institution ruined by corrupt government and ineffective leadership. January 2015 saw the total discredit and near decimation of the MNJTF. After accusations of Boko Haram infiltration and rumors of cowardice, the MNJTF was re-organized under a Nigerian general with a new mandate. President Buhari assumed his office a month after the African Union approved a Multi-National Joint Task Force plan to end Boko Haram. The restructuring has since allowed for more rapid response times and improved coordination. The commitment of President Obama has come as a much needed addition to this force. Due to brutality of past regimes, Nigerian forces have exhausted their ability to appeal to citizens for intelligence; they are also limited in aerial capabilities and have struggled due to this deficiency. Increased intelligence will greatly assist military operational and tactical capabilities and possibly disrupt Boko Haram's sources of income. Boko Haram is financed in large part by ransom, black market slavery, and crude oil thefts. While President Buhari is cracking down on vessels and ports that have been implicated in illicit activities, U.S. intelligence assistance should prevent the original obtainment of these sources before they can be sold for profit.

Along with intelligence capabilities, Major General Linder of SOCAFRICA stated in 2014, that future exercises in Africa will include training on new communication technology for the quick and secure sharing of intelligence across borders and during operations. The formation of the MNJTF also keeps U.S. involvement to a support role where they can offer intelligence to troops familiar with the region, politics, and people.

Nigeria has a history of strict observance of sovereignty and has been engaged in multiple border disputes. ISR support limits the imposition of Western encroachment on the ground while filling in an area of need for the African troops.

With Nigeria and Chad leading the fight against Boko Haram, the U.S. can focus on long term goals to strengthen the resolve of Nigeria and curb the appeal of Boko Haram to young people. Boko Haram started as a regional response to poverty, oppression, and corrupt governance. In supporting human rights, holding the government accountable, and facilitating humanitarian assistance the United States can prevent the growth of extremists and add credibility as a global leader. Steps that can be taken to achieve these three goals start with the support of Nigerian citizens and politicians that work to further democracy and human rights. This can be further compounded by revoking the visas of perpetrators of violent and financial crimes. Incubating an environment that encourages responsible governance and facilitates communal growth will spill over into the police and military culture, ultimately changing it to one that is not openly hated and feared by the general public.

In reality, Boko Haram poses no threat to U.S. soil and is not actively targeting or recruiting Americans to further their goals of establishing a caliphate in West Africa. However, they are implementing a reign of terror against a U.S. ally, have become vocal supporters and affiliates of ISIS, and carry out gross violations to human rights. The U.S. can support a re-vamped Nigerian led coalition against Boko Haram while bringing attention to the underlying factors that facilitated its existence. It is in the National Security Strategy of the U.S. to combat terrorism and the best way that this can be accomplished is through limited but deliberate contact with an anti-western region.

Sources

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