

THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY: FROM SHORT TERM GAINS TO LONG TERM SOLUTIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the beginning of Boko Haram's insurgency in 2010, thousands of Nigerian civilians have lost their lives, with millions more being both internally and externally displaced. The organization has also spread into the Lake Chad region, carrying out attacks in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Over the last year, under President Buhari, an overhaul of Nigeria's counter-insurgency strategy and improved regional coordination through the Multinational Joint Task Force has severely diminished Boko Haram's ability to hold territory and carry out cross-border attacks. However, while security forces may have put Boko Haram on the back foot, the social and political root causes of the insurgency remain largely unchanged.

As seen in other contexts, short term military gains against violent extremism tends often to simply disguise its root causes and discourage long term solutions based on structural and economic reforms. Furthermore, the humanitarian crisis in the north of Nigeria, where an estimated 2 million people have been internally and externally displaced, may well serve to exacerbate these root causes and create new pathways to extremism. The recent rise in intercommunal violence, for example, indicates a breakdown of traditional structures, diminished social cohesion, and the inability of local conflict resolution mechanisms to mitigate violence. Public trust in the security sector remains low, and significant efforts still need to be put into security sector reform. The justice system is also weak, and largely unable to prosecute cases of terrorism, which leaves those accused of terrorism to languish in prisons.

However, while these issues persist, there are a number of positive developments which need to be supported and built on. Nigeria has a fairly vibrant media landscape, where people are willing to speak more openly about violent extremism relative to other African contexts. There is a growing political awareness that the insurgency has to be solved by the nation as a whole, and an increasing number of civil society organizations engaging in meaningful initiatives to prevent and counter violent extremism. In 2016, the government announced the creation of a Human Rights Desk within the National Army and a renewed commitment to upholding human rights in its fight against Boko Haram. Furthermore, through the CVE desk within the Office of the National Security Advisor, the government has developed and is implementing a comprehensive plan to prevent the further emergence and spread of extremism. Furthermore, under President Buhari, there has been improved regional relations with Nigeria's neighboring state, and important step in dealing with a conflict which now effects much of the Lake Chad region. This report serves to outline some of the key challenges and opportunities to preventing and countering violent extremism in Nigeria.

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SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW

THE "DEFEAT" OF BOKO HARAM

On 24 December 2015, President Buhari publically announced that “technically” Nigeria had “won the war against Boko Haram.” (BBC, 2015) Indeed, the defeat of Boko Haram was central to the President’s election campaign, which took place at a high point in the insurgency. In 2014, the Global Terrorism Index ranked Boko Haram above the Islamic State (IS) as the most violence terrorist organization in the world, and the organization was estimated to control an area of roughly 11,000 square miles across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015). In the month of January 2015, just two months before the March general elections, an estimated 2907 people died as a result of Boko Harm violence (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).

Two years into President Buhari’s term and indeed significant military gains have been made against the organization. Boko Haram controls little territory, even in Borno state – the birthplace of the insurgency, and the number of deaths per month attributed to them has dropped dramatically. President Buhari, a former general, took a powerful military approach against the Boko Haram. After his election, he directed the relocation of military command to Maiduguri, changed many of the service chiefs, called for daily monitoring reports, and overhauled the entire counter-insurgency strategy. On the basis that the previous administration had failed to properly equip and support costs for military operations in the northeast, the new government pushed through a bill for supplementary military spending of USD 187 million (Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning, 2016).

Regional security efforts have also been stepped up through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising of troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. These included the creation of a new Concept of Operations under the supervision of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and an agreement that a Nigerian officer will be the Force Commander for the duration of the mission against Boko Haram.

SHORT-TERM GAINS VS. LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Despite military successes against Boko Haram, the organization remains a dangerous asymmetrical threat in both Nigeria and neighbouring states in the Lake Chad region. While their last significant stronghold in Sambisa forest in Borno state has been recaptured by the Nigerian military, the organization is spread diffusely across the northeast, particularly along the borders with Cameroon and Niger.

As seen in other contexts, insurgent groups are a relatively easy target when controlling large swathes of territory, and tend to quickly generate resentment among populations under their control – many of whom may have at one time been either active supporters or sympathetic to their cause. The sheer brutality of Boko Haram’s insurgency has been self defeating, as formally neutral local communities began to rise up in opposition, forming community policing organizations and vigilante groups which have been provided support by the government.

However, Boko Haram has managed to adapt to increased military pressure by making greater use of women and children as suicide bombers to attack soft targets, and has increasingly relied on the plunder of villages to sustain themselves. As ICG (2016) notes:

“The nature of its [Boko Haram’s] tactics and geographical reach will make the group’s comprehensive defeat difficult. Current attacks seem to be less about military strategy than extracting resources and sending a violent message that it is surviving...Much like other jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), it may become less a guerrilla force attached to a specific territory and more a terror group with a longer reach.”

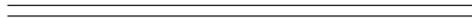
Rather than defeated, Boko Haram has evolved into a new type of threat and is still managing to carry out attacks and kidnappings on an almost daily basis. In March, the group released a 27-minute video featuring the group’s leader Abubakar Shekau, vowing to continue his insurgency until he establishes an Islamic caliphate across west and central Africa (The Associated Press, 2017).

In March 2017, for example, the following attacks were reported:

- March 03 – Three Boko Haram suicide bombers blew themselves up outside Maiduguri, no casualties reported.
- March 11 – Nigerian troops shot dead two female teenagers wearing explosive vests in Maiduguri.
- March 14 – Boko Haram release video showing execution of three men accused of spying for military.
- March 15 – Four female teenagers detonate explosive devices strapped to them near Mina Garage in Maiduguri, killing themselves and two other people.
- March 15 – Nigerian troops raided Magumeri, 50km NW of Maiduguri, five soldiers reportedly killed and three missing.
- March 18 – A woman with her two children detonated explosives strapped to all three in Umarari village near Maiduguri.
- March 22 – Five male suicide struck displaced persons' camp outside Maiduguri, killing four people.
- March 30 – Boko Haram abducted 22 women and girls in two raids in north east.
- March 31 – Boko Haram attacked communities in Konduga LGA, reportedly kidnapping ten.

(International Crises Group/Crisis Watch/Nigeria, March 2017)

While it is clear that military successes have been made against Boko Haram, and that the organization is on the back foot, many of the root causes of the conflict remain, and have perhaps even been complicated and compounded by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the North.



1. NORTHERN DISCONTENT AND THE HISTORY OF BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is not the first radical Islamist organization to have emerged in northern Nigeria denouncing 'Western education' and calling for a return to religious rule to purify society of its social ills. There have been several - both violent and non-violent - social movements, usually formed around a specific preacher, who have either rose up against the government and religious establishment, or tried to establish small communities governed by strict Sharia law. These have included, for example, the *Talakawas* in the 1940's and 1950's, the *Yan Tatsine* in the 1960's and 1970's, and *Darul Islam*, and followers of the Ndimi mosque in the early 2000's, to name a few.

This is an important point to highlight to better understand the historical, economic, and political drivers which led to the emergence of Boko Haram, and will, if not addressed, likely give rise to similar organizations in the future. Northern Nigeria has been profoundly influenced by religion and politics, the former often being used as a dialect of social organization in relation to the latter.

By 1903, the Borno Sultanate and powerful Sokoto Caliphate, which ruled over an area which would now include southern Cameroon, Niger, and northern Nigeria, came under British control. However, as Ochonju (2017) writes, typical of British colonial strategy, the British "came to northern Nigeria desirous of identifying and collaborating with a group of rulers representing a cultural and political entity that they deemed "civilized" and sophisticated enough to be partners in the colonial project. The Hausa-Caliphate worldview and those who best represented it — the Hausa-Fulani emirs and the Caliphate aristocracy — were recruited into this role." These circumstance created early opposition to Western influence by indigenous populations who began to distrust the Hausa-Fulani elite due to their apparent cooption by the British colonial administration. Furthermore, Christian missionaries who used Western education as a mechanism for evangelism were viewed with additional suspicion by local northern populations. As Owolade (2014) writes, "The Western influence of British colonialists caused a division among the people of Northern Nigeria, who were once united by Islam. This division saw, on one side, the so-called "civilized" — by Western standards — elite who were used by the British as agents of colonization; and on the other side, the commoners, who vehemently resisted Western influence in the region."

In the 1940's, a popular social movement know as the *Talakawas* (commoners) formed in northern Nigeria. The movement's leader, Aminu Kano, led an Islamic uprising against British colonialists and the ruling elite. As Lapidus (2014), writes "Kano's criticism was directed not only at Britain but also against the native establishment... The party rallied teachers, clerks, servants, petty traders, craftsmen, workers, and lesser '*ulama*' to oppose colonial rule."

In the 1970's and 1980's, several more fundamentalist organizations began to emerge in opposition to the state, such as the *Yan Tatsine*, led by the radical preacher Mohammed Marwa. Marwa reviled Western education and went as far to denounce the use of radios, bicycles, and watches. He received the nickname '*Maitatsine*', which translates from Hausa as 'the one who curses', due to his fondness of making curse laden speeches against the Nigerian state, whom he saw as irredeemably corrupt and beholden to Western powers. He slowly grew a following of religious scholars, youths, unemployed migrants, and others who felt mainstream Muslim leaders were not doing enough for their communities. As his following grew so did the frequency of confrontations with the police. By 1980, *Yan Tatsine* reprisal attacks against religious figures and the police forced the Nigerian army to become involved who killed Marwa. Subsequent clashes between his adherents and the authorities led to the death of around 5000 people (Kwaja, 2011).

While the name Boko Haram, which loosely translates from the Hausa as "Western Education is Evil/Forbidden", may sound slightly absurd to an outsider, it is appropriate if one considers the established narrative the organization is drawing on — that the Nigerian state is morally corrupt, fueled by greed, and beholden to the Christian West. In the colonial period, British or 'Western' education systems were at the core of the inequality, repression, domination and exploitation that characterized colonialism — as only a favored ethnic elite had access to English and Christian schools that enabled commercial and professional career advancement and access to power.

The group that would come to be known as Boko Haram was founded by Yusuf Mohammed in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of the northeastern state of Borno. Like Mohammed Marwa and the *Yan Tashine*, Yusuf Mohammed sought to gather impressionable youth who felt abandoned by the government and disenfranchised by an economic system which favoured only a politically connected elite. He offered a sense of hope through religious commitment and sketched out a simple picture of an enemy at which their anger and discontent could be focused. Yusuf spent several years during the 1990's in Saudi Arabia, meeting with like-minded Salafi preachers, before returning to Nigeria and travelling around the northeast, preaching against the Nigerian state and citing spiritual corruption as the cause of Borno's ills. As Walker (2013) writes "Yusuf was one of thousands of Almajiri children – religious students who beg on the streets for a living. But by the early 2000s he had found a place as a leader of the youth wing of a Salafist group at Maiduguri's popular Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi mosque." He was deeply opposed to any Western form of democracy and cited the education system, put in place by the Christian British during colonial rule, as the wellspring of corruption and social ills. Kwaja (2011), asserts that with regard to Boko Haram, the "religious dimensions of the conflict have been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence when, in fact, disenfranchisement and inequality are the root causes."

Between 2005 and 2009, Yusuf established a sect at a compound in Maiduguri's Railway District, consisting of hundreds of followers, most of whom were unemployed and impoverished Islamic students, clerics, university students, and others. This sect was, by most accounts, non-violent and more interested in practicing and preaching an austere form of Salafism than violence. However, like the *Yan Tashine* before them, as the *Yusuffiya* grew in numbers and influence so did the sect's run in with local police. On 20 February 2009, a disagreement between a convoy of *Yusuffiya* and local police turned violent, leading to the deaths of several members. Things quickly escalated in the following months. Yusuf's farm and the sect's headquarters in the Ibn Taymiyyah mosque compound were raided by police. In response, the sect took to the streets, killing any police and soldiers they found, as well as scores of civilians. Mohammed Yusuf was captured by the military and handed over to the police who summarily executed him in front of the police station and a group of journalists who captured the event on camera.

The group scattered and went into hiding but emerged in 2011 under the new leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's second-in-command. Boko Haram had evolved from the remnants of a radical sect, to a fully fledged terrorist group, and immediately began to wage the bloody insurgency which, up until today, has claimed the lives of some 26 000 civilians and displaced millions.

2. KEY CHALLENGES

2.1) THE HUMANITARIAN COST OF THE INSURGENCY

The humanitarian cost of the Boko Haram insurgency has been immense. Despite the Nigerian Armed Forces and Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNTJF) achieving considerable gains against the insurgency, Boko Haram continued to carry out attacks over the course of 2016, including suicide bombings, widespread sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), kidnappings and forced recruitment, in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. The area has been victim to harsh climatic conditions in recent years. In addition to disrupted economic activity and food production, this has resulted in extreme levels of poverty and deprivation (UNHCR, 2017). Villages have been razed, infrastructure destroyed, including hundreds of school, and millions of Nigerian citizens have been both internally and externally displaced. An estimated 2 million people have been internally displaced in northern Nigeria since the beginning of the insurgency. Of these 2 million, 80 percent live in host communities, while the remainder live in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (Amnesty International, 2017). Furthermore, around 170 000 Nigerian refugees are currently being hosted in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Since 2014, when Boko Haram began expanding its operational footprint into the Lake Chad states, the conflict has internally displaced an estimated 192,912 persons in Cameroon's Far Northern region, 82,260 in Chad's Lake region, and 184,230 persons in Niger's Diffa region (UNHCR, 2017). While the security situation in the region is still highly volatile, it remains to be seen whether conditions in northeastern Nigeria will be conducive for the voluntary repatriation of refugees, and whether respective tripartite agreements between Nigeria, host countries, and the UNHCR will be signed. The United Nations Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Lake Chad region, for 2017, is set at USD 241.2 million. More than half (USD154.29 million) is required for Niger, with the response in Cameroon requiring USD 67.25 million and USD 19.61 million for operations in Chad. However, only a fraction has been committed by donor countries to date (UNHCR, 2017).

2.2) PUBLIC TRUST IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

Public trust in the security forces has a profound effect on the success of security-led initiatives to combat violent extremism. It determines whether local communities, who are an important source of information and often best situated to understand the distinct dynamics of conflict in their region, are willing to work with or against security forces (Hultman, 2007). Nigerian citizens have some of the lowest levels of trust in police and security forces across any country in Africa. Across 36 African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2014/2015, public trust in both the police and army was lowest in Nigeria. Only 21 percent and 40 percent of citizens indicated they trust the police or the army "a lot" or "somewhat" respectively (Buchanan-Clarke & Lekalake, 2016). In 2015, Amnesty International reported that since the insurgency began, "military forces have extrajudicially executed more than 1,200 people; they have arbitrarily arrested at least 20,000 people, mostly young men and boys; and have committed countless acts of torture" (Amnesty International, 2015).

However, under President Buhari, promises have been made to ensure the security sector renew their commitment to uphold human rights. Nigeria has also shown a commitment to justice by maintaining support for the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, since May 2015, President Buhari has cracked down on corruption and probed weapons procurement deals, while appointing new service chiefs. In March 2016, the President ordered an investigation into allegations by Human Rights Watch of rapes by soldiers and police of women and girls fleeing Boko Haram in Borno state (Reuters, 2016). However, much more still needs to be done. As ICG states, in their June 2016 report entitled *Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform*, the government needs to "implement comprehensive defence sector reform, including clear identification of security challenges; a new defence and security policy and structure to address them; and drastic improvement in leadership, oversight, administration and accountability across the sector."

Another key challenge to security sector reform in Nigeria, is that the formal security establishment exists alongside an informal security sector that serves the security needs in communities far from the purview of the state. For example, many self-defense groups have emerged around the Lake Chad region to defend their communities against Boko Haram and banditry. The government has helped supply these groups with weapons (International Crises Group, 2016). However, it is difficult to determine what level of oversight is maintained over these groups to ensure they are upholding human rights or that they do not devolve into banditry.

2.3) A WEAK JUSTICE SECTOR

Without functioning justice systems, whether formal or informal, security sector institutions are more inclined to handle suspected terrorists extrajudicially. A number of major challenges face Nigeria's formal justice sector institutions, including scarce resources, low capacity, delays and backlogs, and on-going security threats. Recent data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, shows that that 72.5 percent of Nigeria's total prison population are inmates serving time while awaiting trial and without being sentenced (National Bureau for Statistic, 2017). There are only 13 public prosecutors in Nigeria tasked with handling all terrorism cases, of which, there are currently 300 awaiting trial. Prosecuting terrorism cases is also difficult and requires strong evidence based police investigations, which are rarely undertaken. This leads to many cases being dismissed by the courts, further encouraging police to take matters into their own hands. In addition, both witnesses and public prosecutors involved in terrorist cases face major security challenges. The 2011 Terrorism Prevention Act was amended in 2013 to include provision for witness protection. However, scare resources means witnesses are rarely afforded the required level of security.

In 2016, President Buhari created a new committee to oversee legal reforms and appointed Itse Sagay, a former dean of the law faculty at the University of Benin at its head. However, in order for the justice sector to be able to effectively prosecute terrorism cases, there needs to be significant coordinated reform between the legislature, law enforcement, the judiciary, and the prison system.

2.4) COMMUNAL VIOLENCE AND THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL COHESION

The chaos and trauma created by the Boko Haram insurgency has seen an increase in inter-communal violence, banditry, and a general breakdown in social cohesion, in northeastern Nigeria. It is estimated that the 2 million IDPs in the region impact on 10 million people, as 80 percent of them live among host communities. This rapid internal migration puts acute strain on traditional economic, social, and justice systems. Moreover, communal violence between local farming communities and nomadic herdsman, which has plagued the 'Middle-Belt' region for many years, has worsened since the emergence of Boko Haram due to increasing competition over scarce resources (UNHCR, 2016).

2.5) RE-ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (P/CVE) PROGRAMME

In March 2014, under President Goodluck Jonathan, the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) rolled-out Nigeria's Soft Approach to Countering Terrorism (NACTEST). The strategy was developed with the input from a range of academics, civil society actors, and international partners and was perhaps one of the most progressive soft-approaches to countering violent extremism globally. Col. Sambu Dasuki, in his announcement of the strategy, stated that "What we have learnt is that there is not one particular path that leads to terrorism; rather, there are many often complicated paths that led to terrorism...The NACTEST seeks to prevent attacks before they happen by preventing our people from becoming terrorists in the first place." (Premium Times, 2014) NACTEST's, Countering Violent Extremism programme involved three-tiers of government (federal, state, and local) and included civil society, academics, traditional and religious leaders. The programme was divided into four streams. The first, included initiatives to de-radicalize convicted terrorists and suspects awaiting trial. The second, was focused around improving relationships and knowledge sharing between government and civil society on issues of violent extremism. The third, sought to build capacity of the military and law enforcement agencies to engage in strategic communications. The fourth, sought to bring together governors of six northeastern states to design targeted economic revitalization programmes in areas most prone to recruitment (Premium Times, 2014). One of the strengths of the Nigerian approach has been the strong ties between civil society organisations and

ONSA. This is exemplified by the creation of the PAVE (Partners Against Violent Extremism) network under the leadership of Dasuki and his ONSA team. In PAVE, civil society and ONSA worked hand in hand to address violent extremism based on a shared analyses and a collective approach.

However, under President Buhari, CVE programming within ONSA has been undermined and discouraged in favor of traditional military approaches. President Buhari, ordered the arrest of Dasuki, accusing him of stealing 2 billion USD through phantoms arms contracts (Reuters, 2015) It is vital that initial progress made in terms of developing a soft-approach to countering violent extremism, which brought civil society and the government together on issues pertaining to violent extremism, be rebuilt and maintained.



3. FACTORS OF RESILIENCE

While military gains have certainly been made against Boko Haram over the last two years, it is important to note the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed. Furthermore, the widespread displacement of people across northern Nigeria, now living dislocated from their traditional social networks and in often desperate circumstances, has the potential to revive the conflict by providing Boko Haram with new pools of potential recruits. The problem with military gains is that they tend to create the appearance of peace while the social and political issues that give rise to the emergence of conflict remain unaddressed. Despite considerable challenges to attaining peace in Nigeria, there are a number of factors of resilience that could, if taken advantage of, be used to help address to roots of conflict.

3.1) RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

As discussed above, trust in Nigeria's public institutions remains low, especially in northern Nigeria. The perception that the predominantly Christian South does not care about the Muslim North, and appoint leaders who exploit the region's resources, are widespread. Furthermore, for Shekau to negotiate with the government would discredit everything Boko Haram proposes to stand for. The organization's ideology has strength in its simplicity: the total destruction of the state and establishment of a new one governed by sharia law. Negotiations with government about a total surrender of the group would compromise his credibility and thus is a highly unlikely scenario, even though negotiations on smaller issues, like the release of the Chibok girls, seem to have taken place. On the basis of those talks and under President Buhari, Muslim leaders in the North, such as the Emir of Kano or Sultan of Sokoto, may serve as credible interlocutors who could further a conversation between Boko Haram and the state, with the end goal of a political solution.

Traditional and religious leaders are able to ground their discourse in philosophical and theological frameworks that are locally relevant and context specific. They often maintain extensive networks and channels of communication and are thus able to reach people who the state cannot (Voices for Change, 2014) Furthermore, traditional and religious leaders often maintain higher levels of trust and legitimacy than the state and can play an important role in shaping public opinion and government policy, mobilizing volunteers, financial and advocacy support, and disseminating messages.

3.2) PRESS FREEDOM AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HONEST DEBATE

In many countries that have seen acts of terrorism, the relationship between the state, civil society and the media has become highly securitized. This creates a landscape where people are not willing to openly discuss the challenges posed by violent extremism and what can and should be done to prevent and counter it. Stifling debate often leads to the emergence and spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories. In Kenya, for example, the government has increasingly sought to curtail press freedoms, including the passing of an expansive security law in December 2014, that amended existing laws so that anyone engaging in "the unauthorized dissemination of information that undermines counterterrorism investigations or operations, or of photographs showing the victims of terrorist attacks... or that is likely to cause fear or alarm to the public can be jailed for up to three years in prison." (Freedom House, 2017) Civil society have also been targeted by the government, with some organizations having been shut down. This creates an atmosphere where important discussions that could help in solving issues pertaining to violent extremism are muted.

Nigeria has one of the most vibrant and varied media landscapes in Africa, and the print sector in particular is generally outspoken in its criticism of unpopular government policies. While government has engaged in efforts to harass individual journalists and media publications, generally, there is a constitutional protection for freedom of expression, and federal courts in recent years have attempted to expand legal protection for journalists and provide fair rulings on cases involving the media. (Freedom House, 2017) There is also relatively more openness to

discuss issues relevant to the prevention of violent extremism in Nigeria than in other contexts in Africa. Among both government and civil society members interviewed, there was a good understanding of the drivers of violent extremism and on the fact that overly aggressive security policies may serve to exacerbate conflicts rather than solving their root causes.

3.3) A COMMITMENT TO SECURITY SECTOR REFORM AND UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS

While allegations of human rights violations have been made against the Nigerian National Army (NA), there have recently been some indicators that the government are trying to address the issue. In March 2016, the government announced the creation of a Human Rights Desk for the NA. The desk is composed of six legal officers from the Nigerian Bar Association and the legal section of the army. The new body will investigate allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by NA personnel. It will also work to strengthen the army's capacity to protect human rights and report annually on their progress (UNHRC, 2016) This desk could provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between civil society and the NA. In addition, to the creation of a Human Rights desk, President Buhari has also ordered an investigation into allegations by Human Rights Watch of rapes by soldiers and police of women and girls fleeing Boko Haram in Borno state (Reuters, 2016). The President's crackdown on corruption within the army and police will also hopefully serve to discourage extortion and raise levels of awareness regarding the need to improve levels of trust between communities and security agencies. There have also been instances where the NA have, after skirmishes with Boko Haram, given their lunch meals to local residents in a show of solidarity.

3.4) A CVE DESK WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR (ONSA)

Despite the removal of Col Dasuki as Head of ONSA and the challenges Nigeria's Soft Approach to Counter-Terrorism (NACTEST) has faced in terms of political buy-in, there is at least a strong precedent for meaningful CVE work in the country. The Partners Against Violent Extremism (PAVE) Network, for example, has already been able to create initial links between civil society and ONSA, and started the process of knowledge sharing between government and civil society, so as a more collective approach can be relaunched to preventing and countering violent extremism. This important platform simply needs to be revived and supported. Increasingly convincing arguments directed at the Nigerian government to continue uphold human rights in the fight against Boko Haram may serve to encourage them to improve levels of support for the CVE Desk within ONSA. Civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations could provide meaningful support by helping to raise awareness and provide capacity building for P/CVE in Nigeria through ONSA.

3.5) TURNING TOWARDS THE STATE

While some communities in the north may have, at a time, been sympathetic to Boko Haram's cause, the organization has lost much of its credibility in recent years. Kidnappings, forced recruitment, attacks on communities, the abuse of woman and children, amongst other gross human rights violations, has exposed the cruelty and hypocrisy of the movement. This creates an important window of opportunity, as people directly affected by the insurgency turn towards the state and humanitarian agencies for refuge and security.

3.6) A WILLINGNESS FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

The general population in northern Nigeria is aware of the humanitarian crisis taking place and is prepared to come to assistance in terms of material and other forms support. For a long period of time, the Boko Haram 'issue' was regarded as a local problem, to be dealt with by the locals and the locals alone. 'Nigeria' as a nation was not concerned. With a growing awareness that the country has a problem to be solved by the nation as a whole, more people seem ready to act and are willing to meaningfully engage with international and regional partners for assistance.

3.7) IMPROVED REGIONAL RELATIONS UNDER PRESIDENT BUHARI

Relationships between Nigeria and governments in the Lake Chad region have improved markedly under President Buhari. Shortly after his election, President Buhari embarked on diplomatic trips to Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin Republic and has seemed to have garnered higher levels of trust with these countries' respective governments. To date, regional cooperation is limited mostly to the MNJTF, which has successfully degraded Boko Haram across the region. The President's prioritization of fighting corruption, improving security, and economic reform (the pillars of his domestic policy) have also been well-received by the international community.

Violent extremism is increasingly regional in nature and cannot be effectively managed if states do not work together. This is especially true in areas like Lake Chad where porous borders, refugee flows, and historical ties between communities tends to regionalize conflict systems.

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