



# Nigerians, not Washington, Must End Terrorism in Nigeria

By Doug Bandow  
5/15/2014

The kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian school girls has captured international attention. Yet few outside of Nigeria paid attention as the terrorist group responsible, Boko Haram, killed thousands of people in previous attacks.

Americans understandably want to help, but Washington must avoid getting entangled in another interminable conflict, this one featuring relentless Islamic extremists battling brutal security forces. Only Nigerians can find a way to simultaneously defeat a terrorist organization which kills more indiscriminately than al-Qaeda and reform a political system which seems to guarantee failure.

The Islamic extremist group Boko Haram began more than a decade ago. The government's response often has been ineffective, even counterproductive. Unlawful killings, mass arrests, and other abuses help sustain support for the guerrillas.

From 2009 to 2012 the organization killed some 1500 people. Another 1500 have been murdered so far this year.

The kidnapping highlighted the failure of President Goodluck Jonathan's government. The military may have had advance warning of the attack yet did nothing; its response afterwards was scandalously slow.

After a month there is little hope of rescuing the girls, who probably have been dispersed throughout the remote region where Boko Haram operates. However, the burst of publicity caused the Obama administration to dispatch a multi-agency delegation.

The mission may meet an emotional need, but offers few benefits and many snares. After all, why is the U.S., rather than oil-rich Nigeria, offering a financial bounty for the capture of BH head Abubaka Shekau?

Most important, America can do little to save the girls or stop Boko Haram. State Department spokesman Jen Psaki explained that the U.S. group contained “law enforcement officials with expertise in investigations and hostage negotiations.”

But this is not a complicated “Who done it?” mystery. Moreover, dealing with Boko Haram is not like negotiating with a crew of bank robbers. BH cheerfully, even gleefully, kills en masse.

The U.S. might have some useful satellite intelligence and specialized equipment, which Abuja previously requested. But those could be transferred without a large and very public delegation.

No doubt the Nigerian army would benefit from professional training—which Washington already is providing. Alas, Nigeria’s military suffers fundamental flaws beyond America’s reach. Worse is the lawless behavior of the security agencies, including police and intelligence agents. Two years ago Human Rights Watch warned that they “engaged in excessive use of force, physical abuse, secret detentions, extortion, burning of houses, stealing money during raids, and extrajudicial killing of suspects.”

So far Boko Haram has restricted its murderous activities to Nigeria. Active U.S. involvement, however, risks turning the conflict into one of international jihad, when BH may broaden its attacks to Americans.

Finally, what is the end point for American involvement? What if the girls aren’t located?

With failure almost inevitable, there will be pressure on the U.S. to do more, even enter the conflict directly. Secretary of State John Kerry already has talked of doing “everything possible to counter the menace of Boko Haram.”

Much the same process has occurred with the administration’s expanding mission to eradicate the so-called Lord’s Resistance Army, formed in 1987 in Uganda. The U.S. long provided money, intelligence, and logistical assistance for Kampala’s military operations against the organization. Three years ago President Obama deployed about 100 special forces to aid the Ugandan government in defeating the LRA and capturing its leader, Joseph Kony.

The group was much reduced by then. The LRA in no way threatened America, but the administration promised that the mission would be “short term.” Kellen McClure of Freedom House predicted that there were few other bad guys in the world who could “be ‘dethroned’ as easily.”

However, Col. Kevin Leahy, commander of the American troops, admitted last year that “This isn’t searching for a needle in a haystack. It’s like searching for a needle in 20 haystacks.”

Although the LRA is said to have dwindled to just 250 guerrillas, in March the administration announced that it was nearly trebling the number of personnel and deploying at least four CV-22 Ospreys. Will U.S. forces stay on for the rest of Kony's life—and his successor's?

The U.S. has been increasingly active across the continent. The Pentagon set up the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and has been steadily augmenting America's military presence.

Washington's default policy should be to stay out. The fact that there is conflict somewhere on earth does not require Washington to join it.

One can hardly imagine the pain felt by the families of young girls kidnapped by Boko Haram. But the U.S. can do little to help and Washington's intervention risks creating blowback Americans can ill afford. Only the Nigerian people can bring peace to Nigeria.

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