



## Boko Haram – An Analysis of the Latest Developments

Yossef Bodansky

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### Executive Summary

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\* Since January 20, 2015, the Boko Haram delivered a major political-military challenge to Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. This is the most explicitly political challenge to the government - albeit delivered through military means. The impact on the presidential elections, now scheduled for mid-February, will be immense.

\* On January 24, the Boko Haram launched a surprise attack on Maiduguri, Borno State. This offensive is a milestone in the Caliphate's war against Nigeria, and perhaps a turning point in Nigeria's own political fortunes. The offensive was launched less than 24 hours after President Goodluck Jonathan campaigned in Maiduguri and promised the restoration of stability and the imminent defeat of the Boko Haram.

\* The events of 24-26 January bode very badly for the Nigerian military. Simply put, the fighting in Maiduguri and northern Borno State took place under most favorable conditions for the Nigerian military and security forces - and yet, their performance has been lackluster and wanting at best.

\* Meanwhile, the Boko Haram returned to emphasizing the significance of the Caliphate building in the context of both the global and regional Takfiri Jihadist trend. The Boko Haram introduced a media outlet named al-Urwah al-Wuthqa (The Indissoluble Link in Arabic) tailored after the Islamic Caliphate's Takfiri Jihadist media. The key theme is that the Boko Haram is building a regional "Islamic State in Africa".

\* Nigeria is heading toward the mid-February presidential elections militarily exhausted. A country of 175 million with the largest economy in Africa - Nigeria has so far failed to build a military force capable of containing, let alone defeating, the Boko Haram. The growing state-sponsorship from Sudan, Iran and Qatar will markedly increase the military might of Shekau's Caliphate with no reciprocal increase of the Nigerian military might.

\* On 30 January, the African Union announced the formation of a 7,500-strong regional force to help Nigeria. This announcement will amount to a very little change on the ground. Chad, Cameroon and Niger already have forces in the area. They fight Jihadist insurgencies - most affiliated with the Boko Haram - on their own territories, as well as in occasional cross-border operations. These forces will now constitute the bulk of the new AU force.

\* In asking for the AU's help, Abuja essentially acknowledged Nigeria cannot defeat the Boko Haram on its own. The West now dreads that the Nigeria conflict will soon evolve into Western intervention. Politically, the West considers this anticipated turn of events to mean Abuja's abdication of the quest to return as a regional power on behalf of the West. Thus, the West will not easily and soon forget or forgive the great disappointment from a Nigerian failure to live up to the West's great expectations.

\* Alas, all of this could and should have been avoided had Abuja implemented on time programs articulated back in Autumn 2014. However, progress stalled as official Abuja focused on, and became fixated with, the elections campaign to the detriment of the war effort. The West still prefers a Nigerian regional ascent over the alternatives. Therefore, even before the elections are over, official Abuja must return to pursuing these pro-



grams expeditiously rather than remain mired in the current no-win strategy. The cost to Nigeria's vital interests of not doing so will exceed by far and long anything the Boko Haram might be able to inflict.

## About ISPSW

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## About the Author of this Issue

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Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

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*Yossef Bodansky*



## ANALYSIS

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Since January 20, 2015, the Boko Haram delivered a major political-military challenge to Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. This is the most explicitly political challenge to the government - albeit delivered through military means. The impact on the presidential elections, now scheduled for mid-February, will be immense.

In the evening hours of January 24, the Boko Haram launched a surprise attack on Maiduguri, Borno State. In the early morning hours of January 25, the Boko Haram also launched attacks on several other towns all over northern Borno State. This offensive turns out to be at least a mile-stone in the Caliphate's war against Nigeria, and perhaps a turning point in Nigeria's own political fortunes. The political context of the Boko Haram offensive is unique because the offensive was launched less than 24 hours after President Goodluck Jonathan campaigned in Maiduguri and promised the restoration of stability and the imminent defeat of the Boko Haram. In order to ensure the safety of the President's visit, the military and security forces had amassed huge forces in and around Maiduguri. Still, they were surprised by the Boko Haram attack and could not repel it quickly and without inflicting heavy damage on the city.

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On January 20, 2015, Shekau delivered a speech defining the Boko Haram's policy concerning the overall situation in Nigeria and the Heart of Africa while standing in front of several combat vehicles he and another commander would later claim were captured from the Nigerian military in Baga. Shekau first acknowledged the Boko Haram's responsibility for the recent carnage in Baga and promised more bloodshed. "We thank God for making us enter Baga and Doro-Baga in victory. We have today declared Baga as part of our territory and one of our operational base," he announced. "This is just the beginning of the killings; what you've just witnessed is a tip of the iceberg; more deaths are coming. This will mark the end of politics and democracy in Nigeria. This is to confirm to you that we carried out the Baga massacre, and we are going to do more."

Shekau ridiculed the Nigerian military for their failures against the Boko Haram. "Is it not amazing that we, who started with sticks and machetes, are today the biggest headache to the almighty Nigerian soldiers? What a shame!!" He then declared the two presidential candidates in Nigeria to be infidels and enemies. He boasted that the Boko Haram would soon bring Nigeria to its knees. Shekau warned the leaders of Chad, Cameroon and Niger against the dire ramifications of helping Nigeria. "Kings of Africa, you are late. I challenge you to attack me even now. I am ready," he taunted. Shekau ended his speech by burning a Nigerian flag and hoisting the Boko Haram's flag and the Jihadists' black banner. "I pledge to Allah, my God. To be Faithful Loyal and Honest. To serve Allah with all my strength. To defend his Islam. Allahu Akbar! Nigeria is dead; her constitution is dead! Islam and Islam; war by war upon the Kafir who is the unbeliever," Shekau declared.

On January 23, Abuja announced that "[the] Nigerian military is reviewing strategy in the combat against terrorists to accommodate joint and combined operations with neighboring military organizations. Massive deployment of air and amphibious assets are expected to feature in the operation." Abuja stressed that the Nigerian military finalized plans to conduct a "once and for all comprehensive operations" towards the elimination of the Boko Haram terrorists and bring to a conclusive end their "laying claim to Nigeria's territories." Nigeria was assured of the cooperation and support of Cameroun, Niger and Chad in the elimination of Boko Haram safe-havens. "The deployment for the mission is expected to facilitate the elimination of safe havens and escape routes of terrorists in or out of Nigeria. The arrangement has enlisted the support of the military forces of neighboring countries towards ensuring that the plan to effectively block the terrorists for elimination while they are being pounded in the ongoing counter terrorism campaign is effectively attained," Abuja explained.



Major force build-up started immediately for both strategic reasons and in order to provide security for a campaign rally by President Jonathan. In the morning of 24 January, several thousand troops, new tanks and armored vehicles were deployed to the streets of Maiduguri. The soldiers were equipped with new gear and assault rifles. The troops closed the entire area from the airport to the major roads and streets in the city's center. In some areas, the soldiers were stationed five meters apart. The election rally was successful and was accomplished quietly. The president and his entourage flew out of Maiduguri - leaving behind the huge force in place. Alas, Nigerian intelligence had failed to discover and locate several task forces of the Boko Haram also amassing and lying in wait at the immediate vicinity of Maiduguri.

On 24 January, at 8 pm, the Boko Haram launched a diversionary attack on Jimtilo - a community and a military base some 20 km west of Maiduguri. The military rushed reinforcements from Maiduguri. Overnight, these forces were soon entangled in street fighting with small highly mobile Boko Haram forces. In the early morning of 25 January, the military deployed additional forces and artillery in order to flush out the marauding Boko Haram forces. Meanwhile, the Boko Haram forces attacked and bombed civilian targets - forcing massive escape of the population toward Maiduguri. By morning, the flow of refugees further clogged the roads also used by the military.

Then, also in the early morning hours of 25 January, the Boko Haram attacked Maiduguri itself with a large force of a few hundred fighters. The attack on Maiduguri came from different directions at short intervals. The largest Boko Haram force arrived through the Damaturu road around 5am. Smaller forces entered Maiduguri from the Dalwa and Limanti axes. The Boko Haram offensive caught the Nigerian military by surprise. Meaningful defensive engagements began only around 9am, followed by a few fighter strikes and several helicopter raids. The military's bombing and shelling caused heavy civilian casualties and heavy damage to the city. As huge numbers of civilians sought to escape town - the military imposed a complete curfew with no end in sight. Moreover, the military could not move forces quickly from Jimtilo over the roads clogged with recently displaced crowds. By mid-day, air and ground operations continued as the nimble Boko Haram forces kept roaming all over Maiduguri and extending their hold over large swaths of the city.

Concurrently, a major force of the Boko Haram attacked Monguno, 140 km northwest of Maiduguri and 65 km from Baga, and quickly seized the town. Shortly afterwards, around 8-9am, the Boko Haram forces also took over the local military barracks. The Boko Haram won in Monguno even though the local garrison had warnings that the Boko Haram would attack between January 22 and 25, and even though local commanders ordered their forces to remain on high alert. The advance force of the Boko Haram succeeded to get close to the barracks largely unnoticed and unharmed because they were hiding in the midst of an herd of more than 5,000 cows. The cows were collected from Fulani herdsmen in neighboring villages. The Boko Haram assault forces included both militias comprised of Monguno youth and an elite assault unit comprised mainly of hundreds of Chadian Arabs. By mid-day, the Boko Haram hoisted their black flags all over Monguno. The capture of Monguno will both prevent the military from moving quickly on Baga and the Lake Chad area, and open a new attack route on Maiduguri from the northeast.

Meanwhile, in the early morning hours of 25 January, smaller Boko Haram forces launched a series of localized offensives throughout Borno State in order to improve and consolidate earlier gains. Boko Haram forces rampaged through Konduga, 35km southeast from Maiduguri. The Boko Haram raiders caused extensive damage and inflicted heavy casualties before leaving. A Boko Haram mobile force also raided the Bama area down the road and about 60 km from Maiduguri. Over 55 people, including 22 police officers, were killed in the Bama



attack. Finally, the Boko Haram seized the village of Damboa, south of Maiduguri, hoisted their banners over the key buildings, and forced the villagers to flee their homes.

The Boko Haram renewed their thrust in Maiduguri during the night of 25-26 January. Additional small raiding forces drove into town and expanded the areas of rampaging and clashes. They repeatedly clashed with military units trying to hunt them down. Most of the Boko Haram forces left Maiduguri on their own before darkness on the evening of 26 January after almost two days of rampage. During this period, they roamed the city at will. A number of Boko Haram fighters went underground and are still hiding in Maiduguri - most likely shielded by local supporters. The Boko Haram never intended to occupy Maiduguri. Even Shekau knows that it is impossible to seize a city of 2.5-3.0 million inhabitants (including IDPs) with a force of a few hundred raiders. Indeed, the Boko Haram fighters did not try to hoist their flags over any building - their usual manifestation of occupation. During the fighting, the Boko Haram lost about 100 fighters and several vehicles including two armored cars originally captured from the military and a few Technicals. The military lost at least 60-70 troops and numerous combat vehicles. Hundreds of civilians were killed mostly by military shelling and bombing. A large number of houses were burned or heavily damaged in the fighting, bombing and shelling. Maiduguri is still under curfew - albeit in a relaxed regime.

The events of 24-26 January bode very badly for the Nigerian military. For days, huge military and security forces deployed to Maiduguri, and all intelligence resources focused on discovering potential threats to the President during his brief visit to Maiduguri. Nevertheless, Nigeria failed to discover the major force concentrations of the Boko Haram so close to Maiduguri during the President's stay and was taken by surprise by the ensuing offensive. The large military forces fell for diversions and failed to react in time to the main offensive. Throughout the fighting, the Boko Haram sustained the strategic, operational and tactical initiative with the Nigerian military reacting slowly and ineffectively. Simply put, the fighting in Maiduguri and northern Borno State took place under most favorable conditions for the Nigerian military and security forces - and yet, their performance has been lackluster and wanting at best.

Soon afterwards, the Boko Haram returned to emphasizing the significance of the Caliphate building in the context of both the global and regional Takfiri Jihadist trend, as well as the centrality of the Baga operation in furthering this endeavor. Significantly, this was the first major use of the Boko Haram's new Jihadist media outlet. Back around January 18, the Boko Haram introduced a media outlet named al-Urwah al-Wuthqa (The Indissoluble Link in Arabic) tailored after the KHI's Takfiri Jihadist media. For example, the broadcasts and posting start and end with the Caliphate's statement "nashid ummati qad lah al-fajr" ("my ummah's dawn has appeared" in Arabic). Like the KHI media, the al-Urwah al-Wuthqa started posting general reports (including the training of boy-soldiers) and not just statements by Shekau.

Subsequent al-Urwah al-Wuthqa postings introduced a new official spokesman of the Boko Haram called Abu Musab al-Barnawi or Abul-Barnawi (the former in the Arabic, and the latter in the Hausa and English postings). It is not clear if he has any relations with Khalid al-Barnawi except that both Barnawi's come from Borno State.

On January 27, 2015, al-Urwah al-Wuthqa posted a conversation between Abu Musab Abul-Barnawi and a hooded interviewer about the strategic and economic context of the Baga offensive, the consolidation of the Caliphate, the essence of the Boko Haram's relations with the Muslim population they control, as well as the new relations with the Takfiri Jihadist trend. This was the first comprehensive and pragmatic articulation of the Caliphate's vision of itself. Indeed, this post was also distributed widely through the KHI media channels.



Abul-Barnawi started by explaining the importance of Baga to the Boko Haram in the context of building a regional “Islamic State in Africa”:

“First, this city is located in the northeast of Nigeria, in the vicinity of Lake Chad. It is important from both the trade and military aspects for the Nigerian government. As for its military importance to the Nigerian government, it has an alliance with the countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. It is an alliance against our project to establish a State of Sharia, and it is an alliance to control Lake Chad, which is considered the most important economic resource in the region. As for us, its importance lies in removing this military gathering from the lands of the Islamic State, and thus, to establish the Sharia of Allah in this area, and provide security and safety for the Muslims in it. It is known that if these military gatherings enter an area they will corrupt it and oppression will prevail in it. By the grace of Allah alone, we were able to open this city and to include it with the cities of the Islamic State in Africa. The land is for Allah and He will bequeath it to whomever He wills from among his worshippers, and the good end is for the pious. Allah knows better.”

Abul-Barnawi explained that he was addressing the Jihadist media via al-Urwah al-Wuthqa because the general media had constantly distorted the mission and the name of his group Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah Lil Dawa wal Jihad - which he pronounced in correct Arabic. Back on November 9, 2014, Shekau also stressed that they were “Jama’tu Ahlus Sunna Lidda’awati wal Jihad” and not the Boko Haram. Now, Abul-Barnawi stressed, the international and media perception of the forces behind the Caliphate were intentionally deceptive and demeaning.

“Praise be to Allah, the media is changing much of the facts and spreading lies, especially the media outlets that are controlled by the tyrants when the matter is related to the mujahedin. It is the one that wages the distortion campaigns against the actions and words of the mujahedin, and if there was no response to them, the truth would be confused with falsehood. Therefore, we say that we did not name ourselves ‘Boko Haram’. Our call is not limited to prohibiting foreign schools and democracy. We are Jama’at Ahl al-Sunnah Lil Dawa wal Jihad. Therefore, this name [Boko Haram] is an attempt to bury the truth. We carry out the support for the Sunnah and establish governance of Allah in the land.”

Abul-Barnawi shifted to a damage control effort regarding the carnage inflicted by the Boko Haram against civilians, particularly Muslims, in the cities they overrun. He denied that the Boko Haram was intentionally harming Muslims. He started by refuting the accusations that the Boko Haram forces committed a massacre in Baga.

“As for those accusing us of shedding Muslim blood, this is unreal and Allah bears witness to that. How can we fight them while we fight for their sake? When we entered the city [Baga] there was the so-called carriers of the Catodqora stick, who cooperated with the soldiers of the tyrant and carried their weapons and stood by their side. So we fought who we fought. They know they fought us. When they saw our severity they escaped from the city and some of them rode into the sea and some of them went into the forest. However, we send this message to those who fought us or did not fight us: Whoever from among them comes to us in repentance, we accept their repentance and he shall have safety and security from us, because we are people.”

Abul-Barnawi stressed that the Boko Haram is actively seeking repentance and cooperation from the local population, rather than confrontation and carnage. He explained that informing the population in advance about this option is “achieved by many ways such as putting out leaflets and also posting them on the inter-





net.” There is a proactive effort to inform the population in advance and seek their repentance and cooperation. Abul-Barnawi noted that this campaign worked in other cities seized by the Boko Haram. There, the Boko Haram capitalized mainly on local emissaries.

“If some of them come in repentance, we send him back to his brothers to inform them and to come in repentance. The best proof for that is the cities we have entered such as Mubi, Damaturu, and Fika. In these cities we did not cause harm to anyone, because they did not fight us. We fought those who fought us. If they stop their assault on us we will stop our assault on them. If you are not with us, do not be against us. We want to take the worshipers out of worshiping worshipers to worshiping the Lord of the worshipers, and from the oppression of religions to the justice of Islam, and from the narrowness of this world to the vastness of this world and the hereafter.”

Abul-Barnawi reiterated that when raiding a community, the Boko Haram refrains from attacking innocent civilians and only kill those who actively resist. The percept is valid “for all the cities.” He stressed the point by contrasting the Boko Haram’s handling of the civilians in Baga on the one hand, and Mubi and Damaturu on the other. “For example, the people of Baga know they fought us and when we went to them they escaped and many from among the people of the cities did not fight us. Therefore, let them not escape from the city if we enter. For example, the people of Mubi and Damaturu welcomed our arrival and they invoked Allah in the streets. We see much of that. Therefore, we advised them to repent and to return safely to their homes and to stand with us to repel this crusader project which the crusader, deceitful Nigerian government imposed on the people, may Allah’s curse be upon it”.

Abul-Barnawi concluded by discussing the regional context of the ascent of the Boko Haram. He warned of a major regional escalation if Cameroon, Chad and Niger come to the aid of Nigeria. He appealed to the neighboring states as Muslim brethren who are committing grave errors oblivious of their consequences. “Stop your evil from us; otherwise, just as you raid our houses we will raid your houses. For example, Cameroon started to attack us so we attacked it. Therefore, we say to Niger and Chad that if they stop their assault on us and we will stop our assault on them; otherwise, just as you fight us we will fight you. We will inflame against you a war of which you have not before tasted its bitterness. Withdraw your soldiers before you regret what will come soon and you have no time to regret. As for whoever cooperates with them and stands with them, we say: come back to your senses and stand with your mujahedin brothers, who did not go out and leave their families and homes but to defend you and your religion,” Abul-Barnawi urged.

Meanwhile, the Boko Haram has not abandoned the strategic offensive in Borno State. In late January there were growing indications that the Boko Haram were preparing a renewed offensive on Maiduguri and other key areas of Borno State. Refugees from Boko Haram controlled areas report large groupings of fighters regrouping for a major offensive on Maiduguri before the presidential elections. There are reports of the arrival to forward camps of numerous Technicals, trucks, motorcycles and camels. As well, the removal of long-range artillery from the Monguno barracks for positions in the vicinity of Maiduguri is being reported. By 30 January, the Boko Haram nearly completed the encirclement of Maiduguri - leaving air traffic the only secure communications.

Most disturbing are recent eyewitness reports mainly the area between Monguno and Maiduguri, Borno State. According to these reports, helicopters dropped arms in wooden boxes and food items in large sacks into Boko Haram camps in the bushes. Some of these Boko Haram bush camps, particularly in and around Marte and Monguno, include “many foreign fighters and some external supporters.” Other camps, mainly near the



Chikungudu and Kwalam villages, have only Nigerian Boko Haram forces. The eyewitnesses described professional drops with Boko Haram fighters in wait rushing to the spots, picking up the dropped items, and loading them on trucks, camels and donkeys waiting nearby, and quickly disappearing into the bush.

On February 1, the Boko Haram launched their heaviest and most sophisticated assault on Maiduguri to-date. The attack began at 3am in the southern edge of the city. The Boko Haram launched a barrage of artillery and rocket fire from weapons recently seized from the Nigerian military. Several highly mobile and heavily armed fists surged into the city under the fire cover. The main assault started around 7am from three directions, with the largest column arriving from Konduga road, and two smaller columns entering from Damboa and Damaturu roads. A fourth attacking force joined in a couple of hours later from the north. By late morning, the key Boko Haram thrusts into the center of Maiduguri were from four different axes - through Njimtilo, Dalwa, Ngom and Mulai. Inside Maiduguri, the raiding forces divided into smaller units and spread all over town - rampaging and attacking security forces and civilian targets with heavy fire, rockets and bombs. Meanwhile, artillery and rocket fire exchanges continued during the day, causing heavy damage to the dense neighborhoods. Throughout, the military failed to react to the constant maneuvers of the nimble but powerful Boko Haram strike fists.

The battle for Maiduguri will keep escalating in the coming days. Tribal elders from Borno State learned that the Boko Haram intends “to overrun Maiduguri” before the mid-February presidential elections. Indeed, by mid-day February 1, the Nigerian military HQ in Maiduguri reported that “soldiers and Boko Haram terrorists engage in battle over the control of Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.” Both sides are thus cognizant of the immense importance of the battle for Maiduguri.

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The Boko Haram might be able to briefly occupy a city the size of Maiduguri - but they cannot hold onto it with the currently available forces. The Boko Haram can lay a stifling siege to Maiduguri, and then aggravate and exacerbate the situation with rampaging raids. However, the mere large-scale presence of the Boko Haram near Maiduguri is politically and strategically intolerable for Abuja. Therefore, disproportionate numbers of military and security forces will be diverted to confronting the Boko Haram in the Maiduguri area at the expense of other fronts.

Nigeria is heading toward the mid-February presidential elections militarily exhausted. A country of 175 million with the largest economy in Africa - Nigeria has so far failed to build a military force capable of containing, let alone defeating, the Boko Haram. The growing state-sponsorship from Sudan, Iran and Qatar will markedly increase the military might of Shekau’s Caliphate with no reciprocal increase of the Nigerian military might.

On 30 January 2015, the African Union (AU) finally recognized the all-African threat the Boko Haram constitutes and announced the formation of a 7,500-strong regional force to help Nigeria. However, in reality, this announcement will amount to a very little change on the ground. Chad, Cameroon and Niger already have sizeable forces in the area. They fight Jihadist insurgencies - most affiliated with the Boko Haram - on their own territories, as well as in occasional cross-border operations. These forces will now constitute the bulk of the new AU force.

Moreover, the locally-deployed forces of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger are ill-suited for meeting the Boko Haram challenge. They are slow and heavy compared to the nimble Boko Haram raiding fists. They lack offensive initiative and are reacting to the Boko Haram strikes mainly in efforts to evict the Boko Haram from seized





towns and villages at the remote periphery of the Caliphate. Since these forces lack any staying power, they leave quickly these towns and villages only to have the Boko Haram return with vengeance a few days later. Thus, when the Chad Air Force claimed to have liberated a town from the Boko Haram by bombing - in reality, the majority of the Boko Haram mobile forces left for the bush to wait out the bombing and most of them have already returned to the town.

For Nigeria, the current phase of the fight against the Boko Haram constitutes a quandary the significance of which exceeds by far the security challenges in northeastern Nigeria. With the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of the Heart of Africa rapidly growing, the West wants to see Nigeria returning as the regional power responsible for the region's security and stability the way Nigeria did in the 1990's and early 2000's. The Nigerian military build-up and defeat of the Boko Haram are perceived as painful but inevitable phases of Nigeria's recovery and ascent.

However, in asking for the AU's help, Abuja essentially acknowledged Nigeria cannot defeat the Boko Haram on its own. Historically, AU or other all-African forces have also failed to defeat major African challenges, and, at the end, Western forces had to intervene under UN or ad-hoc mandates in order to decide these African conflicts. This was the case in Sierra Leone, Somalia, Mali, the Central African Republic, etc. The West now dreads that the Nigeria conflict will soon evolve in a similar fashion. However, even in its current capabilities and prior to the anticipated state-sponsored build-up, the Boko Haram is a formidable force that will necessitate a major Western military intervention. The West is loath to commit to such an intervention.

Politically, the West considers this anticipated turn of events to mean Abuja's abdication of the quest to return as a regional power. Absent other viable options, the West will have to resign to accepting the US-French alternative that is based on French-led Francophone African order. Most African states dread this because of the political and economic high cost of French hegemony. Thus, the West will not easily and soon forget or forgive the great disappointment from a Nigerian failure to live up to the West's great expectations.

Alas, all of this could and should have been avoided. Back in Autumn 2014, Abuja started working on a series of innovative military and intelligence build-up programs that could have profoundly change the war against the Boko Haram. If implemented in accordance with the original timetables - the initial forces and assets could have been deployed operationally by the turn of 2015. However, progress stalled toward the end of 2014 as official Abuja focused on, and became fixated with, the elections campaign to the detriment of the war effort.

The West still prefers a Nigerian ascent over the US-French alternative. Therefore, even before the elections are over, official Abuja must return to pursuing these programs expeditiously rather than remain mired in the current no-win strategy. The cost to Nigeria's vital interests of not doing so will exceed by far and long anything the Boko Haram might be able to inflict.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.