Editorial note

To cite this article: (2016) Editorial note, African Security Review, 25:2, 107-109, DOI: 10.1080/10246029.2016.1156881

To link to this article:  https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2016.1156881

Published online: 22 Apr 2016.
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Security perspectives on Nigeria

Nigeria is currently besieged by multiple threats to its national security, some of which impact on West Africa as a whole. Prominent among these is the militant Islamic group Boko Haram, which has been responsible for thousands of deaths, mass human displacement, widespread terror and the destruction of property and infrastructure. Militants are re-emerging in the highly volatile region of the Niger Delta. The state security forces – the military and the police – have been widely accused of committing violence against civilians, including extrajudicial murders. Ethnic and religious tensions continue to bubble on the surface, contributing to rates of communal violence that are double the average continental rate in Africa. State governance is weak, with a political system that has neither transparency nor accountability, and this is compounded by the problems of unequal economic growth and the failure to meet some of the basic human rights of its civilians.

Despite this internal insecurity, which also impacts on Nigeria’s immediate neighbours, Nigeria is considered a major player both in Africa and internationally. It currently has Africa’s largest GDP, surpassing South Africa in 2014. Nigeria is also an important player at the United Nations (UN); it contributes the tenth highest number of peacekeepers to UN peacekeeping missions in the world (the fifth highest in Africa), and it has just served a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC). If UNSC reform was to go ahead, South Africa and Nigeria would vie to become the permanent member for Africa on the council. Some have argued:

Geostrategically the US … deems Nigeria the most important country in Africa, particularly in West Africa and the strategically significant Gulf of Guinea. Although the US has cut back dramatically on imports of Nigerian crude oil, it remains an important potential US energy supplier.

The seeming contradiction between being one of Africa’s undisputed powerhouses while beset by intractable inner turmoil and violence makes Nigeria a fascinating case study and worthy of the focus of an entire issue of the African Security Review.

Olusola Ogunnubi and Ufo Okeke-Uzodike open this special issue on Nigeria by asking if it can, indeed, be Africa’s hegemon. The paper interrogates the arguments made by academics and analysts that Nigeria’s influence in Africa is typical of a regional hegemon. In the context of the country’s foreign policy relations in Africa, the paper contends that due to various external and internal factors, Nigeria’s influence in Africa is dwindling – despite its current status as Africa’s largest economy.

Ibikunle Adeakin expands on one of the issues raised by Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike by examining the alleged human rights violations perpetrated by the Nigerian military since 1999. The state military has consistently been sent in to deal with internal security challenges in Nigeria and, just as consistently, has been accused of violating human rights in its operations. Using data gleaned from interviews with serving and retired military officers, this article
investigates the allegations of human rights abuses levelled against the Nigerian military and explores the prospect of an effective internal enforcement mechanism.

The next article looks specifically at Nigeria’s military failure against the Boko Haram insurgency. Habibu Yaya Bappah argues that until the involvement of troops from Chad and Niger in January 2015, Boko Haram was succeeding in consolidating an extreme version of the so-called ‘Islamic state’ in parts of north-eastern Nigeria. Bappah attributes the failure of military action against Boko Haram to three factors: the erosion of military professionalism under successive civilian administrations since 1999, poor handling of the campaign by top military officers, and a lack of decisiveness on the part of President Jonathan and his military leaders to take the action needed to end the insurgency.

Vesselin Popovski and Benjamin Maiangwa see the failure of the Nigerian military to contain or eradicate Boko Haram as necessitating a ‘fourth pillar’ of the state’s responsibility to protect (R2P). The article examines the dynamics of the response of ordinary citizens to the Boko Haram crisis, and investigates whether this response could be conceptually defined as a ‘fourth pillar’ of R2P, when a state, even in collaboration with the international community, is unable to live up to its R2P obligations. The authors argue that such a ‘fourth pillar’ is symbolic and should not be used in any way by governments to relegate their obligations under R2P.

One of the consequences of the ongoing violence and terror in north-eastern Nigeria is the hundreds of thousands of people who have been displaced from their homes. Stephen Adewale sheds light on the predicament of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been forced to abandon their homes in the affected areas of Nigeria and have moved to Abuja in search of safety and refuge. However, Abuja has turned out to be less than hospitable, and accessing adequate food, shelter and safe drinking water is becoming increasingly difficult for the majority of the dispersed population. Adewale reveals that there is agreement among a range of stakeholders on the need for the Nigerian government to change its policy orientation in dealing with IDPs.

Another consequence of the political, ethnic and religious tension in Nigeria is the trend of militia groups and insurgents using kidnapping to achieve certain ends. Samuel Oyewole examines the fate of hostages captured in Nigeria’s conflict theatres, such as the Niger Delta and in the north-east. The study seeks to understand the variations in the fates of hostages – murder, sexual abuse, religious persecution, forced labour and conscription, as well as escape, exchange for ransom and rescue – the survival strategies that the hostages use, and the efficacy of Nigeria’s crisis-management approaches in the aforementioned conflict theatres.

Freedom C. Onuoha and Temilola A. George provide a commentary on the 2015 Abuja bombings carried out by Boko Haram. The authors conclude by outlining measures that the current government could take to curtail the insurgency.

Finally, David L. Smith details how the Kanuri-language radio station Dandal Kura is providing an alternative to the Boko Haram narrative for many Karum-speaking people in the Lake Chad Basin, and concludes this issue of the *African Security Review* with a book review of Virginia Comolli’s *Boko Haram: Nigeria’s Islamist Insurgency*.

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**Notes on Contributor**

Romi Sigsworth is the editor of *African Security Review* (rsigsworth@issafrica.org)