

**BOKO HARAM—EMERGING THREAT TO THE  
UNITED STATES**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COUNTERTERRORISM  
AND INTELLIGENCE**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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## **BOKO HARAM—EMERGING THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES**

**Wednesday, November 30, 2011**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:06 a.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Patrick Meehan [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Meehan, Quayle, Speier, Hochul, and Thompson (ex officio).

Mr. MEEHAN. The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence will come to order. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear the testimony regarding an emerging threat to the homeland from Boko Haram, a Nigerian Islamist group. I would like to welcome everyone to today's hearing. The hearing coincides with the release of the bipartisan subcommittee report\* outlining the emerging threat to the U.S. homeland from Boko Haram. I would like to thank the Ranking Member for her willingness to work together in a bipartisan fashion to call attention to this issue.

I believe we worked to create a document that will continue to contribute to the public conversation about Boko Haram, and will add a valuable perspective to the debate.

In late August, a suicide bomber drove a VBIED, vehicle-borne IED into the United Nations headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria, killing 23, and injuring over 80. A sect based in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram, claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack on the U.N. headquarters represented a marked shift by Boko Haram, highlighted by targeting its first non-Nigerian entity, and using a suicide bomber, which are hallmarks of al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

It would appear to be, in hindsight, to be a bit of foreshadowing, one week before the U.N. attack, U.S. Army General Carter Ham, who is the commander of the African Command United States, stated publicly that Boko Haram had an intent to coordinate and synchronize their efforts with AQIM and Al-Shabaab. Based on the U.N. attacks, General Ham's assessment seems to have been accurate. The U.S. intelligence community must not underestimate Boko Haram's intent and capability to strike at U.S. interests, and most importantly, potentially the U.S. homeland. Its fast evolution

\*The document is available at [www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-112HPRT71725/pdf/CPRT-112HPRT71725.pdf](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-112HPRT71725/pdf/CPRT-112HPRT71725.pdf).

in targeting and tactics mirrors other al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, and it is worrisome.

While I recognize, and this is important to say, while I recognize there is little evidence at this moment to suggest that Boko Haram is planning attacks against the homeland, lack of evidence does not mean it cannot happen.

As our report makes clear, the U.S. intelligence community has very recently been wrong about al-Qaeda affiliates' intent and their capability to strike the homeland with nearly deadly consequences. The most notable examples include AQAP and TTP, whose threats to attack the homeland were both assessed to be aspirational until they deployed suicide bombers to Detroit on Christmas day 2009, and Times Square in May 2010, and caught us entirely off guard. Due to the fast evolution of Boko Haram in the last year, the U.S. intelligence community must increase intelligence collection on Boko Haram and enhance cooperation with our Nigerian partners to build their counterterrorism and intelligence capacity. This subcommittee has held many hearings this year on multiple terrorist threats, including from AQAP in Yemen, the different groups operating in Pakistan, including TTP, and Hezbollah in Latin America.

One thing that I know I have taken away from these hearings and from the many classified briefings we regularly receive is that we underestimate emerging terrorist groups at our peril. I keep harking back to the language in the 9/11 report about the failure of imagination. I think one of the responsibilities of this committee is to be the imagination of Congress with respect to the challenges we face on the terrorism front.

The case of the Iranian terrorist plot in the District of Columbia is a perfect example. Everyone had assessed they would never strike in the homeland unless the United States or Israel were attacked or had attacked their nuclear facilities. This has proven to be wrong. It is one example that points to the larger issue, which is we must remain vigilant. In the case of today's hearing, we must remain vigilant in countering Boko Haram. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses.

The Chairman now recognizes the Ranking Minority Member of the committee, the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Speier, for any statement she may have.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding today's hearing on the Nigerian terrorist organization, Boko Haram, and the threat the group may pose to the United States. I would also like to welcome our witnesses today, and look forward to gaining insights from each of you, and to learn more about how we can partner with the Nigerians to help combat terrorism. Boko Haram, a terrorist organization based in northern Nigeria, has been drawing increased attention by conducting a campaign of violence against the Nigerian Government, and in an apparent and possibly game-changing escalation, a recent attack against the U.N. headquarters in the Nigerian capital.

The group has apparently continued to expand their target set. On November 5, the U.S. Embassy in Abuja issued an emergency message to all U.S. citizens in Nigeria that Boko Haram was planning to attack western hotels in Abuja. Boko Haram has expanded their capabilities and operations rapidly. But, in part, due to their

rapid rise, very little is known about the group, and little international attention has been focused on it. That is why I am pleased to join Chairman Meehan today in releasing a report on Boko Haram. This report pulls together the disparate pieces of open source media available on the group in order to present the fullest picture yet of the threat posed by Boko Haram, including whether or not it has the intent and capability to attack the United States, and options for U.S. engagement and assistance to the Nigerian Government to counter this threat. Hopefully, this report and our discussion today can raise awareness of an evolving terrorist organization whose list of targets has now expanded to include the international community and could include the United States homeland.

What makes Boko Haram particularly concerning is how quickly it has grown over the past few years from a local militia to a more complex terror organization which earlier this month carried out a series of coordinated suicide bombings in several cities across the country, killing dozens of people. Boko Haram has been able to expand its reach from a traditional northeast power base southward to the capital Abuja, and reportedly even further south. The most notable example of Boko Haram's evolving capabilities and ambitions is the suicide car bomb attack which the Chairman alluded to earlier. The attack signaled a willingness on the part of Boko Haram to attack international targets, and may signify a shift towards a more global militant ideology. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the threat posed by Boko Haram is the reports of increasing ties between the group and other terrorist groups, including AQIM in North Africa and Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

The reported commingling of weapons, tactics, and personnel among these groups may be one reason that Boko Haram has reportedly been able to quickly develop its bomb-making expertise and tactics. There is still too much we don't know about Boko Haram, including its membership strength, its leadership cadre, and the true nature of its ties to other terrorist organizations. We must learn more about Boko Haram so that we do not underestimate the threat they may pose, as has happened in the past with other terrorist groups such as AQAP and Al-Shabaab. The subcommittee calls for the U.S. Government to increase information sharing with the Nigerian government and outreach with the Nigerian people, particularly the Muslims in the north, to better understand the underlying factors contributing to such extremism and the appeal of a group like Boko Haram.

This is a prudent tactic. But until we can learn more about this group, their intentions to strike the United States, and the extent and the exact nature of their cooperation with other terror groups on the continent, we must be cautious with proceeding towards any major new commitments in Nigeria. I do not believe this hearing should telegraph a desire for the United States' engagement in another international theater. Rather, our report and hearing today should serve as a solid starting point to raise awareness of a potential new threat and spur further discussion and examination to build an effective strategy for dealing with Boko Haram. Once again, I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today, and I look forward to your testimony. I yield back.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Speier. We are pleased to have the Ranking Minority Member from the entire committee, the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Thompson. At this point in time, I would like to recognize him for any opening statement that he may like to make.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member, both, for holding this hearing. I also would like to thank our witnesses for their testimony also. Today, we are here to examine whether the Nigerian group known as Boko Haram poses a threat to the United States. This is a difficult question because we have a very limited amount of information about Boko Haram. We know that the group has ties to al-Qaeda. We also know that Boko Haram capabilities have increased. But we do not know the size, organizational structure, agenda, or resources at this point. While we do not know much about this group, we do know a great deal about Nigeria.

With 158 million people, Nigeria is the eighth most populous country in the world. About one-half of Nigerians practice Islam, and about 40 percent of Nigerians are under 14 years of age. Currently, Nigeria is experiencing its longest period of civilian rule since its independence. In many ways, Nigeria is a young democracy. In 2008, the civilian authorities in this oil-rich country began pursuing economic reforms. But as we know, the path of change is not easy. Every Nation has found that the road forward is often riddled with the remnants of the past, the stumbling blocks of the present, and the distracting dreams of the future. We also know that those who benefit from the status quo will resist change. These universal truths are alive and well in Nigeria also. It is clear that Boko Haram, with its unknown number of followers and unclear agenda, has become a source of strife. The military, which formerly ruled this country, has been clear about their concerns. But the Nigerian people have expressed a desire to move forward. As part of its effort to reach out in January 2010, Nigeria assumed a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2010–2011 session.

In August 2011, Boko Haram set off a suicide bomb at the United Nations headquarters in Nigeria. Some see this U.N. attack as an attack on western interests. However, given Nigeria's prior position on the Security Council, the meaning of this attack is far from clear. For many years, some of my friends on the other side of the aisle have supported defunding the United Nations because they claimed that the United Nations did not support the United States' interests. Now we are claiming that an attack on a United Nations building in Nigeria is an attack on United States' interests. I guess things change. However, what does not change is our need for clear and certain information before we commit to a position.

At this point, we cannot answer the question: Is Boko Haram capable of striking the United States or any other of its interests? To find the answer to this question, we need to work with the Nigerian government to increase the intelligence capabilities in their country. We also need to reach out to the vast Nigerian community in this country and seek their help and guidance. We must not paint Nigeria as a nation of terrorists. Our message goes well be-



yond these walls, and our message today should be that we need to learn more. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Thompson. Now, the other committee Members are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. We are pleased to have as well a very distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic. I will go through and introduce each of you, and then we will ask each of you individually to present your testimony.

So let me first give the biography of Dr. Peter Pham. He is the director of the Michael Ansari Africa Center. Dr. Pham was previously senior Vice President of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, and editor of the bimonthly journal *American Foreign Policy Interests*. He was also a tenured associate professor of justice studies, political science, and Africana studies at James Madison University in Harrisburg, Virginia, where he was director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs. He has served on the senior advisory group of the U.S. Africa Command since its creation. Dr. Pham served as a member of the USAID-funded International Republican Institute delegation monitoring the national elections in Liberia in 2005. He has also served on the IRI pre-election assessment and election observation delegations to Nigeria and Somaliland.

We are joined by Ms. Lauren Ploch, a specialist in African affairs with Congressional Research Service—did I get that right, Ploch—where she provides nonpartisan analysis on African political, military, diplomatic affairs, and U.S. policy in the region to Members of the United States Congress, to the Congressional committees, and to the Congressional staff. She has written extensively on security issues and U.S. military engagement on the continent, and has testified before Congress on these topics. Her work has focused extensively on Nigerian political and security developments. Ms. Ploch speaks regularly at academic institutions and international policy fora in the United States and abroad. Prior to joining CRS, Ms. Ploch managed democracy support initiatives in east and southern Africa, where she coordinated governance programs funded by USAID, the State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy. Previously, she served as a legislative assistant in the United States Senate.

Dr. Ricardo Laremont joins us today. He is a professor of political science and sociology at the State University of New York Binghamton, and a Carnegie Corporation Scholar on Islam. He has a J.D. from New York University Law School and a Ph.D. from Yale University. His principal books include *Islamic Law and Politics in Northern Nigeria*, *Islam and Politics of Resistance in Algeria*, *the Causes of War and Consequences of Peacekeeping in Africa*; *Borders, Nationalism, and the African State*, and the forthcoming *Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa and the Middle East*. His research focuses upon political Islam, Islamic law, conflict resolution, democratization, and civil-military relations, usually in the region of North Africa and the Sahel.

Last, Ms. Jennifer Cooke, director of the CSIS Africa Program, which she joined in 2000. She works on a range of U.S.-Africa policy issues, including security, health, conflict, and democratization. She has written numerous reports, articles, and commentary for a

range of U.S. and international publications. Previously, she worked on the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Africa, as well as the National Academy of Sciences, with its offices of news and public information, and its committee on human rights.

Thanks, each and every one of you, not only for your presence here today, but I know for the extensive work you put into the preparation of your testimony. I know many of you had extensive written testimony, which I enjoyed the ability to review. We are a little limited in our time, so I know that you will focus on the essence of what you think is at the heart of your testimony. So I open it and ask you, Dr. Pham, to begin, and ask you to do your best to keep within the confines of our unfortunate 5-minute limitations. But thank you, Dr. Pham.

**STATEMENT OF J. PETER PHAM, DIRECTOR, MICHAEL S. ANSARI AFRICA CENTER, ATLANTIC COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES**

Mr. PHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Speier, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the extremist sect, Boko Haram, examining not only the threat that it currently represents to Nigeria, but its potential impact on the West African subregion and the international community at large, especially the United States. Since other witnesses testifying today are better positioned to address questions relating to administration policy and actions to date on this issue, I will concentrate on just highlighting five key points which I believe the United States and other responsible international actors should bear in mind in assessing Boko Haram and the threat posed by it, as well as in determining adequate immediate responses to this challenge and planning for longer-term engagement with the Sahel region in order to counter the scourge of violence and extremism.

The emergence of Boko Haram cannot be understood without reference to the social, religious, economic, and political milieu of Northern Nigeria. The name Boko Haram is itself derived from the combination of the Hausa word for book, as in book learning, boko, and the Arabic term "haram," which designates those things which are religiously forbidden as ungodly or sinful. Thus Boko Haram is not only a name, but a slogan to the effect that western education and such products that arise from it are sacrilege.

Such a profound alienation is, alas, not unprecedented. The parallels, for example, with the Maitatsine uprisings of the early 1980s, which left thousands of dead, and cut a path of destruction across five northern Nigerian states are, to say the least, quite uncanny. Certainly there are comparisons to be drawn between Boko Haram and the earlier movement in terms of ideology, objectives, and modus operandi. Both can be described as fanatical sects whose beliefs are distinguishable from the religious orthodoxy of the majority of Nigerian Muslims. Both, in their rejection of western civilization, eventually also came to reject the legitimacy of the Nigerian state itself, viewing it as evil and unworthy of allegiance, and ending up waging war against it. While there is nearly a three-decade gap between the earlier movements and Boko Haram, that

passage of time has only seen the worsening of socioeconomic conditions in northern Nigeria with respect to economic stagnation, lack of educational opportunity, corruption, and political marginalization, all of which serves to swell the ranks of the ignorant, destitute, and disillusioned, who are easy recruits for movements promising a radical transformation of Nigerian society.

Second, far from being destroyed following the repression of its 2009 uprising, Boko Haram has undergone a dramatic transformation. In retrospect, the first sign of this was the al-Jazeera interview given by Abdelmalek Droukdel, the emir of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in June 2010. The head of al-Qaeda's North African franchise stated that his group would provide Boko Haram with weapons, training, and other support in order to expand its own reach into sub-Saharan Africa.

At the time, that claim was widely dismissed both because Droukdel was known for his outsized ambitions and because he was having internal difficulties at the time within his own group. Shortly afterward, Abubakar Shekau, the new head of Boko Haram, appeared in a video released by AQIM's media arm, the first time AQIM has been known to have allowed this outlet to be used by an outsider. In that video, he threatened attacks not only against Nigeria, but also against "outposts of western culture" in that country.

The following month, he published a manifesto in which he linked the jihad being fought by Boko Haram with jihadist efforts globally. Then as you yourself, Mr. Chairman, have already highlighted, in June 2011, Boko Haram launched its first suicide attack using a VBIED. The attack, which targeted the inspector general of the Nigerian police force, is believed to be the first suicide attack to take place in Nigeria. This incident, and the August 26 attack on the offices of the United Nations in Nigeria, underscored that far from being a spent force, Boko Haram has not only adopted, but indeed mastered one of the deadliest instruments in the jihadist arsenal. These attacks in the Nigerian capital also demonstrate that the militant group is now capable of carrying out operations far from its usual area of operation.

Third, while one should be cautious about asserting connections between different terrorist organizations and militant groups, one should also be wary of biases introduced into threat analysis by arbitrary distinctions and classifications which do little justice to fluid realities. A good case in point is the Sahel, the belt connecting North Africa and West Africa and straddling ancient trade and migration routes from Mauritania on the Atlantic Ocean to Somalia on the Indian Ocean. This region is strategically important for several reasons, including its role as a bridge between the Arab and Berber Maghreb and black sub-Saharan Africa as well as its important natural resources. Moreover, the Sahel belt touches upon several countries with serious security challenges of their own, which could or can or have easily spilled over their borders. The Sahel also shelters a variety of armed groups, ranging from al-Qaeda's regional franchise to the Polisario separatists, to Somali pirate syndicates, all very different ground groups, but very capable of opportunistic cooperation for their nefarious ends. Today, the Sahara and the Sahel form a single space of movement, which for purposes

of the geography of terrorism should be considered as a continuum, something that the territorial approach to states and geopolitics often prevents us from understanding.

Fourth, an alliance with Boko Haram is a very attractive option for any number of outside groups. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, for example, has never hidden its ambition to bring in the Islamists of Nigeria and exploiting the sectarian strife and conflict in that West African nation. Nor, given the operational pragmatism as shown in recent years would AQIM necessarily be put off by the more questionably orthodox aspects of its potential Nigerian partners. One should also keep in mind that the successful establishment or acquisition of an active affiliate in sub-Saharan Africa has been a goal of al-Qaeda for some time.

More than 5 years ago, for example, Sada al-Jihad, the magazine of what later evolved into al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, published a lengthy article on al-Qaeda's moving to Africa, in which the author was quite up-front about the agenda for Africa. Finally, it would be useful to recall why Nigeria is so important, both in its own right and for U.S. interests, a strategic significance that goes beyond the country's acknowledged importance as our fourth-largest source of petroleum imports. The fact that Boko Haram, Mr. Chairman, has been able in recent months to expand its operations beyond its base in northern Nigeria and to make a significant qualitative leap in its tactical capabilities ought to be a wake-up call to both the Nigerian government and the international community.

Certainly, the suicide bombings targeting symbols of Nigerian state authority and the international community represent a major advance in Boko Haram's capabilities and a significant shift in its messaging. The effect was not only to discredit the efforts of some Nigerian officials to trivialize the group as an insignificant local problem, but also to call into question the assumptions of security analysts outside Nigeria who have long minimized the risks faced by Nigeria and by the international community, including the United States.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the subcommittee, I thank you for your attention, and look forward to your questions.

[The statement of Mr. Pham follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF J. PETER PHAM

NOVEMBER 30, 2011

I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today on the extremist militant sect Boko Haram, examining not only the threat that it currently poses to Nigeria, but also its potential impact on the West African subregion and the international community at large, especially the United States.

THE EMERGENCE OF BOKO HARAM

While Boko Haram first received widespread attention for the armed attacks it launched against police stations and other public buildings in the towns of Geidam and Kanamma in Nigeria's northeastern Yobe State on Christmas Eve 2003, the emergence of the militant sect cannot be understood without reference to the social, religious, economic, and political milieu of northern Nigeria.

Nigerian sources differ in their accounts of the precise origins of the group, but most agree on the parallels with—if not direct connection in terms of individuals

linked to—the Maitatsine<sup>1</sup> uprisings of the early 1980s which left thousands dead and a cut a path of destruction across five northern Nigerian states. Certainly there are comparisons to be drawn between Boko Haram and the earlier movement in terms of ideology, objectives, and modus operandi. Both the Yan Tatsine and Boko Haram can be described fanatical sects whose beliefs are distinguishable from the religious orthodoxy of the majority of Nigerian Muslims. Both, in their rejection of Western civilization, eventually also came to reject the legitimacy of the secular Nigerian state, invariably described as *dagut* (“evil”) and unworthy of allegiance, and ended up waging war against it in an effort to bring it down, to be replaced by a “purified” Islamic regime. In both cases, police were unable to quell the outbreak of violence and military forces had to be deployed. And while there is nearly a three-decade gap between the Yan Tatsine and Boko Haram, that passage of time has only seen the worsening of socioeconomic conditions of northern Nigeria with respect to economic stagnation, lack of educational, corruption, and political marginalization—all of which serves to swell the ranks of the ignorant, destitute, and disillusioned who are easy recruits for movements promising a radical transformation of Nigerian society.

The name Boko Haram is itself derived from the combination of the Hausa word for “book” (as in “book learning”), *boko*, and the Arabic term *haram*, which designates those things which are religiously forbidden as ungodly or sinful. Thus “Boko Haram” is not only a proper name, but also a slogan to the effect that “Western education (and such product that arises from it) is sacrilege.” More recently, the group’s spokesmen have adopted the Arabic name *Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad* (“group committed to the teachings [of the Prophet], preaching, and jihad”).

After its late 2003 attacks were repelled, Boko Haram followers regrouped at a base on the border with Niger which they dubbed “Afghanistan” where, in 2004, they were joined by students from various local universities who withdrew from school and joined the sect for Quranic instructions. Later that year, Boko Haram members attacked police stations in Borno State, killing several policemen and stealing arms and ammunition. The police counterattacked the group and killed two dozen members. This set pattern for the next few years with Boko Haram members carrying out occasional assaults on police, who responded with raids and arrests.

One of these isolated skirmishes, a security raid on a Boko Haram hideout in Bauchi State in late July 2009, however, led to reprisal attacks on police and subsequently 5 days of rioting which spread across Bauchi, Kano, Yobe, and Borno. The violence was finally petered out after Boko Haram’s leader, *Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf* was captured and killed—supposedly while attempting to escape—but not before more than 700 people were killed and numerous public buildings, including government offices, police stations, schools, and churches were destroyed.

With its leaders as well as several prominent financial backers, including *Alhaji Buji Foyi*, a former commissioner for religious affairs in the state government of Borno, dead, the group receded from public attention and a number of analysts argued that it was either finished or hopelessly fractured.

#### BOKO HARAM SINCE 2010

Far from being dead, however, the group had undergone a dramatic transformation. In retrospect, the first sign of this was a June 14, 2010, *al-Jazeera* interview given by *Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud*, a.k.a. *Abdelmalek Droukdel*, the emir of *al-Qaeda* in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The head of *al-Qaeda*’s North African franchise stated that his group would provide Boko Haram with weapons, training, and other support in order to expand its own reach into Sub-Saharan Africa. At the time, this claim was widely dismissed, both because *Droukdel* was known for out-

<sup>1</sup>The Maitatsine movement took its name from a religious preacher, *Muhammadu Marwa*, who moved from his native Cameroon to northern Nigeria around 1945. His polemical sermons, ostensibly based on the Quran and aimed at both religious and political authorities, earned *Marwa* the sobriquet by which he was generally known, “Maitatsine” (in the Hausa lingua franca of northern Nigeria, “he who curses”), as well as the ire of the British colonial authorities who had him deported. Maitatsine eventually returned to Nigeria sometime after its independence and, by the early 1970s, had gathered a large and increasingly militant following, the “Yan Tatsine” (“followers of Maitatsine”), drawing heavily from youth, unemployed migrants, and others who felt that the official Islamic hierarchy was unresponsive to their needs. Maitatsine proclaimed himself a prophet and became increasingly anti-government in his pronouncements. He was killed by security forces during a December 1980 insurrection in Kano, but his followers rose up again in 1982, 1984, and 1985. See *J. Peter Pham*, “In Nigeria False Prophets are Real Problems,” *World Defense Review*, October 19, 2006, <http://worlddefensereview.com/pham101906.shtml>.

sized ambitions and because he was having internal difficulties at that time with the more dynamic southern commanders within his own group.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly afterward, Mohammed Yusuf's former deputy, Abubakar bin Muhammad Shekau, who was thought to have been killed in the suppression of the previous year's uprising, surfaced in a video that might best be described as "classic al-Qaeda." Wearing a headdress and framed by an AK-47 and a stack of religious books, Shekau proclaimed himself the new head of Boko Haram and promised vengeance for the casualties suffered the year before. Significantly, he threatened attacks not only against the Nigerian state, but also against "outposts of Western culture" in the country. The following month, Shekau published a manifesto in which he linked the jihad being fought by Boko Haram in Nigeria with the jihadist efforts globally, especially that of "the soldiers of Allah in the Islamic State of Iraq."

Two months later, on September 7, 2010, Boko Haram fighters dramatically broke into a Federal prison in Bauchi and freed more than 100 of their fellow members who had been detained there awaiting trial since the previous year's uprising. In the process of the assault, involving bombs and automatic weapons, the militants also let out more than 750 other prisoners and scattered leaflets warning of further violence.

The latter was not long delayed. On Christmas Eve 2010, the group set off a string of 7 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Jos, Plateau State. The bombings, which targeted the town's Christian communities, left 32 people dead and scores of others wounded. While the group subsequently carried out a number of other attacks—mainly small IEDs thrown from moving vehicles or planted near the target, although there was also the occasional prison break—it was only at the middle of this year when it achieved what should be considered a very significant and ominous tactical and operational upgrade in its capabilities.

On June 16, 2011, Boko Haram launched its first suicide attack using a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). The attack, believed to also be the first suicide attack to take place in Nigeria, targeted the Inspector General of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), whose convoy the terrorist followed into the Louise Edet House headquarters compound of the NPF in the Federal capital of Abuja. While the target escaped harm because security detained the suspect vehicle, the explosion was large enough to nonetheless destroy several dozen police vehicles parked nearby. In fact, the incident showed that far from being a spent force, Boko Haram had adopted and, indeed, mastered one of the deadliest instruments in the jihadist arsenal. Moreover, it also demonstrated that the militant group was now capable of carrying out operations far from its usual areas of operation.

Two months later, on August 26—after having spent the interim carrying out a half-dozen smaller attacks on government officials, establishments that served alcohol, and churches—Boko Haram carried out another major attack, sending another suicide bomber with an explosive-laden car to the offices of the United Nations in Abuja. Twenty-one people were killed and at least 70 were wounded in what UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon characterized as an "assault on those who devote themselves to helping others." This attack, the first by the group against a transnational target, put it in the ranks with jihadist terrorists who have targeted U.N. agencies in places Afghanistan, Iraq, and Algeria.

Earlier this month, on November 5, the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria issued a warning, indicating that it had received intelligence that Boko Haram was planning bomb attacks against several targets in the Nigerian capital in conjunction with the Muslim feast of sacrifice, Eid al-Adha. The warning specifically singled out as possible targets were the Hilton, Nicon Luxury, and Sheraton hotels. While the holiday passed without any terrorist incidents in Abuja, Boko Haram did strike at multiple targets in three northern cities, including a security tribunal in Damaturu and a military base in Maiduguri, killing more than 100 people in the process. Two of the attacks reportedly involved VBIEDs.

Just this past weekend, Boko Haram militants armed with automatic weapons and explosives attacked several targets in Yobe State, including a police station and a bank in Geidam, the same town where the group first burst upon the scene with its Christmas Eve assaults 8 years ago.

#### EXTERNAL LINKS

While one should be cautious about asserting connections between different terrorist organizations and other militant groups in the absence of credible evidence, one should also be wary of biases introduced into the threat analysis by arbitrary

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, "Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 240–254.

distinctions and classifications which do little justice to more fluid realities. A good case in point is the Sahel, the belt connecting North Africa and West Africa and straddling ancient trade and migration routes from Mauritania on the Atlantic Ocean to Somalia on the Indian Ocean. The region is strategically important for several reasons, including its role as a bridge between the Arab (and Berber) Maghreb and black Sub-Saharan Africa as well as its important natural resources, both renewable and nonrenewable. Moreover, the Sahel belt touches several countries—including Algeria, Nigeria, and Sudan—with serious security challenges of their own that could easily spill over their borders. In fact, a number of scholars have argued that the Sahara and the Sahel form “a single space of movement” which, for purposes of the geography of terrorism, “should be considered as a continuum, something that the territorial approach of states and geopolitics prevents us from understanding.”<sup>3</sup>

That being said, there are some tantalizing linkages between Boko Haram and other militant movements. The former has clearly absorbed what many regard as a signature tactic of some of the latter, the use of VBIEDs in repeated attacks against high-profile public targets, resulting if not in a significant increase in the number of operations, certainly a potentially spectacular increase in the casualties resulting from each, especially in cases where the bombs are deployed in near-simultaneous or otherwise coordinated attacks. At the very least, the existence at all of suicide attacks indicates a level of foreign ideological influence since they practically unknown in Africa, even during the height of the Algerian civil war which left hundreds of thousands dead or wounded, until more recent years when they were legitimized by ideologues close to al-Qaeda and became increasingly commonplace in AQIM’s repertoire.

AQIM itself has had a discrete number of Nigerian recruits since Algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC, “Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat”) was rebranded as al-Qaeda’s franchise in the region, a fact acknowledged as Abdelmalek Droukdel acknowledged as far back as 2008 when he gave an extensive interview to the *New York Times*. And the group has never hidden its ambition to bring in the Islamists of Nigeria in particular, exploiting the sectarian strife and conflict between Muslims and Christians in the West African nation. Nor, given the operational pragmatism it has evinced in recent years, would AQIM necessarily be put off by the more questionably orthodox aspects of the lives or beliefs of its potential Nigerian partners.<sup>4</sup>

It is noteworthy, in fact, that both AQIM and Boko Haram leaders have issued statements complimenting each other and pledging mutual support. Tellingly, AQIM has permitted the Nigerian group’s Abubakar Shekau to employ its media operation, al-Andalus, to spread messages.

Furthermore, there is the question of the role currently being played within the movement by the Chadian-born Mamman Nur, formerly third-highest-ranking figure in Boko Haram’s leadership after Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau. After Boko Haram members dispersed in the aftermath of the government crackdown in 2009, Nur is believed to have gone to Somalia, where he and his followers trained in camps within territory controlled by the insurgents of the Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (“Movement of Warrior Youth,” al-Shabaab) and forged links with transnational jihadist networks. He returned to Nigeria earlier this year and is alleged by Nigerian authorities, who placed a 25 million naira (\$175,000) bounty on his head, to have masterminded the attack on the U.N. building in Abuja in August. One should also keep in mind that the successful establishment or acquisition of an active affiliate in Sub-Saharan Africa has been a goal of al-Qaeda for some time.<sup>5</sup> In June 2006, for example, Sada al-Jihad (“Echo of Jihad”), the magazine of what was then al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia—which later evolved into al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—published a lengthy article by one Abu Azzam al-Ansari entitled “Al-Qaeda is moving to Africa.” The author of the article was quite up-front about the jihadist agenda for Africa: “There is no doubt that al-Qaeda and the holy warriors appreciate the significance of the African regions for the military campaigns against the Crusaders. Many people sense that this continent has not yet found its proper and expected role and the next stages of the conflict will see Africa as the battlefield.”

<sup>3</sup> Olivier Walther and Denis Retaille, “Sahara or Sahel? The Fuzzy Geography of Terrorism in West Africa” (working paper, CEPS/INSTEAD, Luxembourg, November 2010), 11.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “The Dangerous ‘Pragmatism’ of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 2, no. 1 (January–June 2011): 15–29.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, “Next Front? Evolving U.S.-African Strategic Relations in the ‘War on Terrorism’ and Beyond,” *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 1 (2007): 39–54.

With analytical precision, Abu Azzam then proceeded to enumerate and evaluate what he perceives to be significant advantages to shifting terrorist operations to Africa, including: The fact that jihadist doctrines have already been spread in many African countries; the political and military weakness of African governments; the easy availability of a wide range of weapons; the geographical position of Africa vis-à-vis international trade routes; the proximity to old conflicts against “Jews and Crusaders” in the Middle East as well as emergent ones like Darfur, which is explicitly mentioned; the poverty of Africa “will enable the holy warriors to provide some finance and welfare, thus, posting there some of their influential operatives”; the technical and scientific skills that potential African recruits would bring; the presence of large Muslim communities, including ones in conflict with Christians or other Muslims; the links to Europe through North Africa “which facilitates the move from there to carry out attacks”; and the fact that Africa has a wealth of natural resources, including hydrocarbons and other raw materials, which are “very useful for the holy warriors in the intermediate and long term.” What Abu Azzam wrote about Africa in general could very well be interpreted to point to Nigeria in particular.

In short, while conclusive evidence is not available—at least in an open-source basis—of connections between Boko Haram and other extremist networks, there is sufficient plausible basis to warrant the commitment of greater resources to examining the possibilities as well as enhancing our understanding of the overall geopolitical and socio-cultural dynamics of the Sahel.

#### POSSIBLE IMPACT

It might be useful to recall why Nigeria is so important, both in its own right and for U.S. strategic interests. With proven petroleum reserves conservatively estimated to amount to some 36 billion barrels—the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa and the tenth-largest in the world—Nigeria is America’s fourth-largest supplier of oil imports. Last year, the United States imported an average of 1,025,000 barrels of oil per day from the West African country, according to the Department of Energy’s Energy Information Administration (by comparison, an average of 2,532,000, 1,280,000, and 1,094,000 barrels per day were imported from Canada, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia, respectively). Nigerian output and, consequently, exports to the United States, would have been considerably greater if insurgents and criminal gangs in the oil-rich Niger Delta did not routinely disrupt operations and cause oil companies to declare force majeure and suspend production. Moreover, Nigeria’s export blends tend to be the light or “sweet” crudes preferred by U.S. refiners as a gasoline feedstock because they are largely free of sulfur, unlike the heavy, high-sulfur oils hailing from Caribbean or Persian Gulf sources.

Nigeria’s significance to American interests goes beyond its acknowledged importance as an energy supplier. Nigeria’s population of just shy of 150 million people makes it the eighth-most populous country in the world and by far the most populous in Africa. Historically, the country has played a major role in resolving the conflicts besetting the continent and has long been the largest African contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Currently, 5,622 Nigerian military and police personnel are deployed in seven United Nations operations in Africa—the U.N. Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union/U.N. Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the U.N. Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), the U.N. Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and the U.N. Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI)—in addition to those working with blue-helmeted forces in places as far away as Haiti, Lebanon, and Timor L’Este. Given that America’s willingness to undertake such assignments is rather limited even if U.S. forces were not themselves stretched, the value of such a reliable regional partner should not be underestimated. As President Obama emphasized in his meeting last year with Nigeria’s President Goodluck Jonathan, “a strong, democratic, prosperous Nigeria is in the U.S. National interest.”

Thus there should be considerable concern that a country of such geopolitical importance should find itself threatened by a terrorist group like Boko Haram, which has for its mission the bringing down of the Nigerian state itself. And the concern should be magnified in the face of the somewhat lackadaisical attitude of Nigerian senior Nigerian officials to the challenge they are confronted with. The late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua left for a state visit to Brazil right in the middle of the 2009 uprising and, only upon his return, set up a commission of inquiry headed by the then-National Security Adviser, retired Major General Abdullahi Sarki Mukhtar. That panel never formally published its findings into the death of Boko Haram’s leader and its work was eventually superseded by another commission ap-



pointed by President Goodluck Jonathan. Moreover, worse than the less-than-fully-committed reactive capacity are the instances of actual complicity with the militants. As with the post-electoral violence across northern Nigeria earlier this year following what was arguably the best-run elections in the country's history, there have been no shortage of politicians willing to exploit religious and other divides in the furtherance of their own ambitions. Just last Tuesday, a sitting federal senator from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), Mohammed Ali Ndume of Borno State, was arrested for his ties to Boko Haram.

While, at least for the moment, the threat which Boko Haram might pose to oil and natural gas producing areas in the southeastern Niger Delta and off the Nigerian coast in the Gulf of Guinea is minimal—distance aside, ethnic differences between the Hausa-Fulani of the north and the Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, and other peoples of southern Nigeria represent not insignificant hurdles for Boko Haram militants aspiring to operate there—it should be recalled that less than a year ago quite a number of Nigerian and international analysts assured themselves that the group could not project power as far as the Federal Capital Territory. Furthermore, it should not be so quickly forgotten that it was just a few years ago, between 2006 and 2009, that local militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which were poorly armed and trained in comparison with Boko Haram, succeeded in slashing Nigeria's oil production from 2.6 million barrels a day to as low as around 1 million barrels a day.

There is also reason to be concerned about U.S. and other expatriate persons and business interests in Nigeria and the threat to them posed by Boko Haram. On May 12, 2011, for example, two engineers—a Briton and an Italian—employed by B. Stabilini, an Italian construction firm that was building a branch office of the Central Bank of Nigeria in Birnin Kebbi, the capital of Kebbi state in northwestern Nigeria on the border with Niger and Benin, and were seized by armed attackers from their company apartment. A ransom video delivered to a news agency subsequently claimed that the two men were being held by AQIM. The suspicion is that Boko Haram or groups linked to it, either in imitation of or in collaboration with AQIM, were actually responsible for the operation and the claim of responsibility for AQIM was an attempt to exploit the latter group's fearsome "brand name" in the Sahelian kidnapping-for-ransom racket.

The Nigerian response to all of this has fluctuated between attempts to minimize threat perception to ham-fisted security operations like the "Operation Flush" security sweeps in the northwestern part of the country which have further inflamed public opinion against the government. While Nigeria is an important partner on the global stage—one that aspires to an even more prominent role within the international community—its friends, including the United States, would do well to help it see the importance of getting its house in order first. This entails not only improving its political, legal, and security responses to terrorist threats, but also attending to multiple fault lines—religious, ethnic, regional, economic, and political—which criss-cross Nigerian society.

#### CONCLUSION

All indications are that Boko Haram's support networks, both within Nigeria and outside the country, are still somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the fact that the group has been able in recent months to expand its operations beyond its base in northern Nigeria ought to be a wake-up call to both the Nigerian government and the international community. Certainly the suicide bombings targeting symbols of Nigerian state authority and the international community represented a major advance in Boko Haram's capabilities and a significant shift in its message. The effect was not only to discredit the hitherto efforts of Nigerian officials to trivialize the group as an insignificant localized problem—rather than the direct challenge to the state that it constitutes—but also to call into question the assumptions of security analysts abroad who have long minimized the risks faced by a Nigeria whose vast natural and political resources, rather than powering growth and development to the benefit of all Nigerians, have sadly for most of the last half century been consumed in a downward spiral of corruption, internal conflict, and violence.

Moreover, the recent attacks, when coupled with developments elsewhere in the Sahel, are a vivid reminder that extremism and violence cannot easily be contained by arbitrary divisions, whether on maps or in analytical frameworks. Consequently, the emergence of Boko Haram and its burgeoning capacity for violence ought to be seized upon by the United States and its partners as opportunity to more closely examine, better understand, and be more proactively engaged in confronting com-

mon challenges and advancing geopolitical, economic, and other strategic interests in this very dynamic and fluid region.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you for your testimony, Dr. Pham.  
Ms. Ploch.

**STATEMENT OF LAUREN PLOCH, AFRICA ANALYST,  
CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE**

Ms. PLOCH. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the House Subcommittee—

Mr. MEEHAN. You may not have hit your microphone.

Ms. PLOCH. I did not. Thank you. I will start again. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the House Subcommittee, thank you for inviting CRS to testify today regarding the threat posed by Boko Haram. My written statement provides details about Boko Haram's origins and recent operations, so I will save you the time and summarize my statement.

In the interests of time, I am going to summarize the information and identify key issues facing the U.S. Government and the United States Congress. Boko Haram emerged as a small radical Sunni Islamist sect that advocated a strict interpretation of Islamic law for Nigeria. While the group's name refers to—while the group refers to itself by a longer name in Arabic, local communities gave the group the nickname Boko Haram to describe its view that western education and culture have been corrupting influences in Nigeria.

Until this year, the Nigerian government appears to have primarily considered Boko Haram to be merely a nuisance, particularly in comparison to the militant groups operating in the Niger Delta region, where Nigeria's oil is produced. Boko Haram responded in 2009 to a security crackdown by fading away and surging back in force late last year. In the course of that violence, the group's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was killed in police custody. As this graph indicates, which has been compiled by CRS from open sources, the group's attacks have increased significantly in the last year both in frequency, reach, and lethality, now occurring almost daily in northeast Nigeria. These attacks now periodically also reach as far as Abuja, the capital city, which is located in the center of Nigeria.

The group is primarily focused on State and Federal targets, but has also targeted civilians in churches, mosques, and in beer halls. The apparent aim of these attacks is to discredit and delegitimize the Nigerian state by exposing the weakness of its security apparatus and by creating generalized insecurity. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 425 people have been victims of attacks attributed to Boko Haram. While Boko Haram has remained primarily focused on a domestic agenda, there are some indications that some of its members may be expanding ties with more developed violent Islamist groups in Africa, particularly the regional al-Qaeda affiliate AQIM. Attacks attributed to the group since 2010 have increasingly featured improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, car bombs, and more recently, suicide attacks.

<sup>6</sup>See *ibid.*, "U.S. Interests in Promoting Security across the Sahara," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 32, no. 4 (July–August 2010): 242–252.

The targeting of the U.N. building by a suicide bomber on August 24 marks a major departure from the group's previous focus on domestic targets. Spokesmen for the group claim the attack was retribution for the state's heavy-handed security response against its members, and they have referenced U.S. and international collaboration with Nigerian security forces as a rationale for targeting the United Nations. The bombing may indicate an aspiration by some in Boko Haram to move beyond local politics toward an international jihadist agenda, or it may be part of an effort to elicit backing from international jihadists for the group's domestic agenda.

By most accounts, Boko Haram is not a monolithic organization. In fact, it appears increasingly diffuse. Its cells appear to operate largely autonomously, under state or regional level leadership. According to U.S. Government sources, the core group of Boko Haram militants may number in the hundreds, but the group may also draw support from a broader following of several thousand Nigerians, primarily from the northeast. Some observers have suggested that the attacks attributed to Boko Haram may actually be the work of several different groups, including criminal gangs. Others suggest that Boko Haram may be susceptible to fracturing, with a segment of the leadership working to build ties with the international al-Qaeda franchise, while most other elements of the group remain focused exclusively on a local agenda.

I want to highlight some of the key questions facing the administration and Congress with regard to this complex challenge. First, is Boko Haram a threat to the U.S. homeland and to U.S. interests in Nigeria? As you note, this is a complicated question. Earlier this year, and prior to the U.N. bombing, the Director of National Intelligence testified that Boko Haram appeared to remain largely focused on domestic issues. But he also suggested that Boko Haram may be pursuing interests it shares with AQIM. U.S. intelligence officials continue to warn that despite al-Qaeda's reportedly degraded capacity to carry out attacks against the United States, its sympathizers and affiliated groups still pose a significant threat. As CRS has noted, AQIM continues to pose the main transnational terrorist threat in North Africa and the Sahel. But to date, none of its actions indicate a clear threat to the U.S. homeland. The group does, however, continue to threaten U.S. and western targets in Algeria and the Sahel. If it were to work together with Boko Haram, the two groups could expand their operational reach.

AQIM and Boko Haram officials, as my colleague, Dr. Pham, has noted, they have both referenced growing ties in their public statements. Although many observers suggest that their relationship has been more aspirational than operational, U.S. officials report that contact between members of the groups is increasingly frequent. If reports of AQIM providing weapons, personnel, and training are accurate, they warrant increased vigilance. Some analysts caution, however, that the group's relationships may still be fairly limited in scope, and that a nominal link between Boko Haram and AQIM may be mutually beneficial to both groups. Publicly linking the two may serve to enhance Boko Haram's credentials among radicals to facilitate both recruitment and financial support. My counterparts are probably also going to discuss in their testimony

the possibility that Boko Haram or AQIM may try to acquire weapons systems from former Libyan stockpiles, including surface-to-air missiles, which, according to some reports, may be flowing south through Niger. Nigeria is one of only a handful of West African countries to which the U.S. airlines like Delta may fly directly from the United States. So this is of concern. President Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria's president—excuse me, sorry, I skipped a page. My apologies.

What is the basis of Boko Haram's appeal among Nigerians? The expansion of groups like Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has raised concerns that other Nigerians may be susceptible to recruitment by al-Qaeda or to groups hoping to use violence against international targets in Nigeria or abroad. To understand Boko Haram's appeal among some Nigerians in the far north, we need to understand the underlying development challenges facing northern Nigeria, where high rates of poverty and unemployment are exacerbated by extreme population growth and low levels of literacy.

This map indicates, as you will see, some of the low levels of development, particularly in the north, but throughout the country. These factors, combined with weak governance, rampant corruption, and inadequate public service delivery, have contributed to widespread disaffection that many suggest may facilitate Boko Haram recruitment. Some observers contend that elements of the northern political classes have tolerated Boko Haram out of frustration with the government and sympathy for some of the group's political aims.

A second question you may be considering is what are the Nigerian and U.S. governments doing about Boko Haram, and is it working? Boko Haram is a threat that most observers agree must ultimately be dealt with by the Nigerian government. But many consider the government's responses to date to be ineffective. Indeed, some critics contend that the government has contributed to the problem. The Nigerian government has deployed a joint task force, with military and police forces, to the area most affected by Boko Haram. It has established a heavy security presence in the capital of Borno State, Maiduguri, conducting house-to-house searches and generating considerable ill will among local communities for its at times aggressive response.

Many Nigeria experts caution that if Nigeria's security services continue their heavy-handed responses in the northeast, it may further alienate local communities. President Jonathan, president of Nigeria, has acknowledged the need to foster development in the north and to address the perceived marginalization that has fueled periodic protests against the government. It is unclear, however, if his government has the political will or clout to effect major changes. I want to note that the Obama administration considers Nigeria to be a key partner, and is providing the country with military training through a range of programs. An emphasis on human rights and civilian control of the military is an important component to these programs given Nigeria's history of military rule.

Mr. MEEHAN. Ms. Ploch, could I ask you to try to—because we will be able to get to some of this as well in your direct testimony. So could I ask you to try to summarize?

Ms. PLOCH. I will sum it up. In approaching the Boko Haram threat, the State Department has urged that the Nigerian government balance its security response with efforts to address some of the legitimate grievances of the northern Nigerian communities. Administration officials recognize the need to help Nigeria bolster its counterterrorism capabilities, but they are also pressing the Nigerian security forces and the federal and state governments be more effective in their response to Boko Haram.

Going forward, U.S. policymakers must determine the various risks, benefits, and trade-offs associated with the different counterterrorism and counterradicalization measures, and they must weigh their effects against other U.S. policy goals in the wider region. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you, Ms. Ploch.  
[The statement of Ms. Ploch follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LAUREN PLOCH

NOVEMBER 30, 2011

Chairman Meehan, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the House Subcommittee, thank you for inviting CRS to testify today regarding the threat posed by Boko Haram, a violent Islamist group in northern Nigeria that has grown increasingly active in the past year. While Boko Haram has remained primarily focused on a domestic agenda, there are indications that some elements of the group may be expanding ties with more developed violent Islamist groups in Africa, particularly the regional al-Qaeda affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Boko Haram emerged in the early 2000s as a small, radical Sunni Islamic sect that advocated a strict interpretation and implementation of Islamic law for the country. Calling itself Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa wa-al Jihad (JASLWJ; roughly translated from Arabic as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad"), the group is more popularly known as Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden"), a nickname given by local Hausa-speaking communities to describe the group's view that western education and culture have been corrupting influences in Nigeria. Periodic skirmishes with police occurred in Boko Haram's formative years, but the group's activities were limited in scope and contained within several highly impoverished states in the predominately Muslim northeast. Until this year, the Nigerian government appears to have primarily considered Boko Haram to have been merely a nuisance, particularly in comparison to secular militant groups threatening oil production in the southern Niger Delta region.

In July 2009, the Nigerian government's attempts to stop Boko Haram's attacks on police stations and other government buildings resulted in at least 700 deaths. In the course of that violence, the group's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic young cleric who had studied in Saudi Arabia, was killed while in police custody.<sup>1</sup> A sizeable number of Yusuf's followers were also killed or arrested.

Boko Haram appeared to dissipate after the heavy-handed security crackdown, but reemerged a year later, orchestrating a large-scale prison break in September 2010 that freed 700 prisoners, including more than 100 of its own members. The group's attacks have since increased substantially in frequency, reach, and lethality, now occurring almost daily in northeast Nigeria. They now periodically reach as far as the capital city of Abuja. The group has primarily focused its attacks on state and federal targets such as police and military facilities and other government buildings, but has also targeted civilians in churches, mosques, and beer halls. Bank robberies have also been attributed to the group and may contribute to its financing, although Nigerian authorities warn that criminal groups may also be opportunistically posing as Boko Haram militants.

By most accounts, Boko Haram is not a monolithic organization. As it has evolved, it appears increasingly diffuse. Its cells appear to operate largely autonomously under state or regional-level leadership, although leadership is generally attributed to Yusuf's former second-in-command, Abubakar Shekau. According to U.S. Govern-

<sup>1</sup>"Islamic Death 'Good for Nigeria,'" BBC, July 31, 2009.

ment sources, the core group of Boko Haram militants may number in the hundreds, but the group also draws support from a broader following of several thousand Nigerians, primarily from the northeast. Some observers suggest that attacks attributed to Boko Haram may actually be the work of several different groups, noting variations in the tactics and bomb-making styles employed in recent attacks. Others suggest Boko Haram may be susceptible to fracturing, with a segment of the leadership working to build ties with the international al-Qaeda franchise while most other elements of the group remain focused exclusively on a local agenda.

Since its reemergence, Boko Haram has appeared increasingly committed to acts that aim to discredit and delegitimize the Nigerian state by exposing the weakness of its security apparatus and creating generalized insecurity. Targeted shootings from motorbikes have been a hallmark of Boko Haram, although attacks attributed to the group since 2010 have increasingly featured improvised explosive devices (IEDs), car bombs, and, more recently, suicide attacks.<sup>2</sup> In a region where small arms are fairly easy to acquire, the low-cost use of gunmen to intimidate opponents, instill fear, and create a heightened sense of insecurity has been remarkably effective. The state of Borno, where many of Boko Haram's attacks have occurred, is now described by some observers as a police state, albeit an ineffective one. On November 4, armed men claiming affiliation with Boko Haram committed the group's most deadly spate of bombings and shootings to date, killing as many as 130 people in attacks against government buildings, banks, churches, and mosques in the northeastern state of Yobe. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 425 people, including politicians, community and religious leaders, members of the security forces, and civilians have been killed in attacks attributed to Boko Haram.<sup>3</sup>

#### IS BOKO HARAM EVOLVING FROM A DOMESTIC TO A TRANSNATIONAL THREAT?

The August 24 suicide bombing of the United Nations building in Abuja has put Boko Haram under increased international scrutiny. The targeting of the United Nations by a suicide bomber marks a major departure from the group's previous focus on domestic targets. Likewise, it was Boko Haram's first clearly intentional suicide bombing.<sup>4</sup> Spokesmen for the group have claimed responsibility for the attack, declaring it to be retribution for the state's heavy-handed security response against its members. They have also have referenced U.S. and international "collaboration" with the Nigerian government and its security apparatus as rationale for targeting the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> As the group's first known operation against an international target, the U.N. bombing may indicate an aspiration by some in Boko Haram to move beyond local and national politics toward an international jihadist agenda, or it may be part of an effort to elicit backing from international groups for its domestic agenda.

Media reports suggest that, in the wake of the July 2009 crackdown against Boko Haram, some of its members and senior leaders may have dispersed to neighboring countries to regroup and receive paramilitary training at AQIM camps. Cross-border transit by Boko Haram militants to and from neighboring Chad and Niger remains a serious concern. Experts have noted that Boko Haram's attacks show increasing coordination and sophistication and that their tactics at times resemble those of al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The U.N. attack is reminiscent of the deadly 2007 attack by AQIM on a U.N. building in Algeria. That attack, conducted in coordination with bombings of several government buildings, marked a shift in AQIM's tactics to large-scale suicide attacks after the Algerian militant Islamist group formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) changed its name to AQIM.

In Congressional hearings earlier this year, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper highlighted a range of security concerns in Nigeria as potential threats to U.S. National interests, touching on political and sectarian violence and militancy in the Niger Delta as well as in the northeast, where Boko Haram was becoming increasingly active.

In his testimony, he suggested that although Boko Haram appeared to remain largely focused on domestic issues, "it may be pursuing interests it shares with"

<sup>2</sup>The June 2011 attack on the National Police Headquarters in Abuja is reported to be Boko Haram's first use of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

<sup>3</sup>Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Nigeria: Boko Haram Attacks Indefensible," November 8, 2011.

<sup>4</sup>Some refer to a June 2011 bombing of the police headquarters in Abuja as a suicide attack, but others suggest the bomber's death may not have been intentional.

<sup>5</sup>"Alleged Islamic Sect 'Spokesman' Claims Deadly Attack on U.N. in Nigeria," AFP, August 26, 2011; and "Nigerian Islamists Claim Responsibility for U.N. Building Blast," Xinhua, August 28, 2011.

AQIM.<sup>6</sup> More recently, CIA Director David Petraeus named the group during a joint hearing of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees on threats to the United States.

U.S. intelligence officials continue to warn that despite the reportedly degraded capacity of al-Qaeda to carry out attacks against the U.S. homeland, al-Qaeda sympathizers and affiliated groups still pose a significant threat. As CRS has noted in its coverage of al-Qaeda's affiliated groups, AQIM continues to pose the main transnational terrorist threat in North Africa and the Sahel, but to date none of AQIM's actions indicate a clear threat to the U.S. homeland.<sup>7</sup> AQIM does, however, continue to threaten U.S. and Western targets in Algeria and the Sahel, and if it were to work together with Boko Haram the groups could expand their operational reach. AQIM has expressed support for the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria, and AQIM leader Abdelmalik Droukdel publicly offered Boko Haram assistance in early 2010.<sup>8</sup> In October 2010, AQIM's media arm published a statement by Shekau that is cited by analysts as the first time AQIM had disseminated an official message from another group.<sup>9</sup> AQIM and Boko Haram officials have referenced growing ties in public statements, although many observers suggest their relationship has been more "aspirational" than operational.<sup>10</sup> U.S. officials report that contact between members of the groups is increasingly frequent.<sup>11</sup>

If reports of AQIM providing weapons, personnel, and training are accurate, they warrant increased vigilance.<sup>12</sup> Boko Haram's explosives have reportedly grown increasingly sophisticated and by some accounts may bear hallmarks of bomb-making techniques used by al-Qaeda affiliates. Some analysts caution, however, that the groups' relationship may still be fairly limited in scope and that a nominal link between Boko Haram and AQIM may be mutually beneficial to both groups. Publicly linking the two may serve to enhance Boko Haram's credentials among radicals to facilitate recruitment and financial support.

Concerns have been raised that Boko Haram may follow through on threats to target Nigeria's oil infrastructure, although many analysts argue that it would have a difficult time operating in the south, where the oil is produced. The May 2011 kidnapping of British and Italian citizens from northern Nigeria highlights a threat to foreign citizens in the region, and some experts speculate that Boko Haram may try to fundraise through kidnappings-for-ransom, a hallmark of AQIM and other Nigerian militant groups. Also of concern is the possibility that Boko Haram or AQIM may try to acquire weapons systems from former Libyan stockpiles, including surface-to-air missiles, which according to some reports may be flowing south through Niger.<sup>13</sup> Nigeria is one of only a handful of West African countries to which U.S. airlines may fly directly from the United States.

Given the jurisdiction of your committee, I understand that the attempted terror attack in December 2009 by a Nigerian passenger, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, on an American airliner en route to Detroit heightens concerns regarding radicalization within Nigeria's sizeable Muslim population and raises questions as to whether one of Boko Haram's followers might attempt something similar. Abdulmutallab, the son of a respected Nigerian banker and former government minister, had no known ties to Boko Haram; instead reports suggest that he became radicalized while living abroad. He received training and sponsorship in Yemen from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Nevertheless, the expansion of groups like Boko Haram in northern Nigeria have raised concerns that other Nigerians may be susceptible to recruitment by al-Qaeda or other groups hoping to use violence against government or civilian targets in Nigeria or abroad.

<sup>6</sup> See the February 2011 hearings by the House and Senate intelligence communities on worldwide threats. See also a joint hearing by the House and Senate Select Intelligence Committees, "Threats Against the United States Since September 11, 2001," held on September 13, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> CRS Report R41070, *Al Qaeda and its Affiliates*, by John Rollins et al.

<sup>8</sup> "Fertile Ground: The Potential for Jihad in Nigeria," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Open Source Center, "Terrorism—AQLIM Publication of Boko Haram Statement Indicates Ties," *OSC Report FEA20101020010563*, October 19, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., "Boko Haram 'Spokesman' Claims Al-Qaeda Links," AFP, November 24, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group Finds Fertile Territory in Nigeria as Killings Escalate," CNN, November 18, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Robyn Dixon, "Nigeria Militant Group Boko Haram's Attacks Attract Speculation," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., "Report Reveals Inflow of Arms Into Northern Nigeria Through Niger, Chad Borders," *Nigerian Tribune Online*, October 3, 2011.

## BOKO HARAM IN THE CONTEXT OF NIGERIA

Understanding Boko Haram's appeal among some citizens in Nigeria's far north requires an examination of the underlying development challenges facing northern Nigeria, where high rates of poverty and unemployment are exacerbated by extreme population growth and low levels of literacy. These factors, combined with weak governance, rampant corruption, and inadequate public service delivery, have contributed to widespread disaffection that some suggest may facilitate Boko Haram recruitment. Some observers contend that elements of the northern political classes have "tolerated" Boko Haram out of frustration with the government and sympathy for some of the group's political aims.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with over 150 million people, roughly half Muslim and half Christian. It is also Africa's second-largest economy, after South Africa, and its largest producer of oil. Despite its oil wealth, Nigeria remains severely underdeveloped, and development indicators are lowest in the north (see attached maps). Poor governance and widespread corruption nationwide have severely limited infrastructure development and the provision of social services, thus hindering economic growth and leaving much of the country mired in poverty.

Northern Nigeria was governed separately from the south under the British colonial administration. Military leaders from the north dominated Nigerian politics until the transition to civilian rule in 1999, but the north shows little sign today of having benefited from their influence in government. The north is predominately Sunni Muslim, and twelve northern states have adopted sharia law since 1999 to adjudicate criminal and civil matters for Muslims.<sup>14</sup> In some states, the introduction of sharia was a flashpoint between Muslims and Christians.<sup>15</sup> The State Department reports that sharia "technically does not apply to non-Muslims in civil and criminal proceedings," although observers note that Islamic mores are often enforced in public without regard for citizens' religion. In some areas, state-funded vigilante groups known as hisbah patrol public areas to enforce sharia rulings. Many analysts nonetheless see the interpretation and implementation of Nigerian sharia as moderate in comparison to that of some other Muslim-majority countries.

In Nigeria, divisions between ethnic groups, between regions, and between Christians and Muslims often stem from perceived differences in access to land and social and economic development. Clashes among communities in the culturally diverse "Middle Belt" (where north and south meet) in the past decade reflect tensions that are both religious and ethnic. These tensions stem from a competition over resources—land, education, government jobs—between ethnic groups classified as settlers or "indigene" (original inhabitants of the state), a designation that conveys political and economic benefits.<sup>16</sup> Some political elites fan communal resentments, leading periodically to considerable unrest and displacement. By some estimates, as many as 13,000 Nigerians have been killed in sectarian violence since the return to civilian rule. Some analysts warn that these tensions, if left unaddressed, may ultimately threaten both the stability of the state and the wider region. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom suggests that the government has tolerated the violence by failing to prevent or respond to it.<sup>17</sup>

A history of poor governance, corruption, and flawed elections has undermined the authority and legitimacy of the Nigerian state. Elections in the 2000s were deemed progressively worse than the last. Most observers, including U.S. officials, consider the April 2011 elections to have been a significant improvement, but the elections were not without problems.<sup>18</sup> Supporters of the leading opposition candidate for the presidency, a former northern military leader, alleged that the ruling party had rigged the poll to favor incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Chris-

<sup>14</sup> Nigerian law protects freedom of religion and permits states to establish courts based on common law or customary law systems. Non-sharia based common law and customary law courts adjudicate cases involving non-Muslims in these states, and sharia-based criminal law courts are elective for non-Muslims.

<sup>15</sup> In 2000, for example, an estimated 2,000 people were killed in Kaduna in clashes sparked by the introduction of Islamic law in the state.

<sup>16</sup> Communities classified as indigene vary from state to state.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2011*, May 2011.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., the White House, *Statement by President Obama on Elections in Nigeria*, May 4, 2011; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, *Press Release: Election in Nigeria*, April 19, 2011. Several political rallies were marred by bombings, predominantly in one of the Niger Delta states. There were at least six bombings in Borno state. Boko Haram claimed responsibility in January for the assassination of Borno's leading gubernatorial candidate and several of his supporters. Responsibility for the bombing of the state election commission headquarters in Niger state remains in question.



tian.<sup>19</sup> The widespread post-election rioting and violence that broke out across the north in protest of Jonathan's win highlighted mistrust and grievances that many northerners feel have yet to be addressed. During that violence, which occurred largely along religious and ethnic lines, at least 800 people were killed, and more than 65,000 displaced.<sup>20</sup>

According to the State Department, corruption in Nigeria is "massive, widespread, and pervasive."<sup>21</sup> The country is a major drug trans-shipment point and a significant center for criminal financial activity. It is also considered by the State Department to be a major center for money laundering, and the government only recently criminalized terrorist financing.<sup>22</sup> Observers suggest Nigeria's development will be hamstrung until it can reverse its perceived culture of impunity for political and economic crimes. Last week, Nigeria's President replaced the head of the country's anti-corruption agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), as part of his effort to "revitalize the fight against corruption."<sup>23</sup> Critics remain skeptical of the agency's effectiveness.<sup>24</sup>

The Nigerian government faces mounting, and at times competing, internal and external pressures to implement reforms deemed key to addressing corruption and other development and security challenges. Its ability to address real grievances in both the restive Niger Delta region and in the populous north are critical to achieving the government's overall development goals and attracting much-needed foreign investment.

#### THE NIGERIAN RESPONSE TO BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is a threat that most observers agree must ultimately be dealt with by the Nigerian government, but many consider its responses to date to be ineffective. Indeed, some critics contend that the government has contributed to the problem. In September 2011, a commission appointed by President Jonathan to investigate the security challenges emanating from the northeast reported that security force lapses and heavy-handedness, weak governance, and underdevelopment had all contributed to the rise in violence in the region.

The commission also recommended that the government engage Boko Haram in a dialogue, in effect trying to replicate negotiations with Niger Delta militants that led in 2009 to an amnesty and rehabilitation program that has, to date, been fairly successful in quieting militia attacks. Views on the proposed negotiations are mixed, given Boko Haram's loose organizational structure and perceptions that the demands of the hardline leadership of the group are not open to compromise. The Jonathan administration has been skeptical of negotiations, but has acknowledged the need to foster development in the north and address the perceived marginalization that has fueled periodic protests against the government. It is unclear, however, whether the Jonathan government has the political will or clout to affect major changes.

Some reports suggest that Boko Haram may receive political patronage and sponsorship from certain northern elites.<sup>25</sup> Nigerian police recently arrested a ruling party senator on suspicion of providing funding for the group, after an alleged Boko Haram spokesman, now in custody, reportedly linked him to the group. The motivations for certain elites to support the group are likely varied. Some may seek to embarrass President Jonathan or discredit the security services, while others may seek

<sup>19</sup>There has been an unwritten agreement since 1999 that the presidency should rotate among regions. The death of President Umaru Yar'Adua in office in 2010 complicated that rotation. Yar'Adua, a northerner, was succeeded by his vice president, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta. Jonathan won the support of key northern ruling party leaders to stand as the party's candidate in the 2011 elections, despite warnings that suspending the regional rotation could increase the potential for regional conflict.

<sup>20</sup>HRW, "Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800," May 16, 2011.

<sup>21</sup>U.S. Department of State, "Nigeria," *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009*, March 2010.

<sup>22</sup>U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, Volume 2, March 2011, and *Money Laundering and Financial Crimes Country Database*, May 2011.

<sup>23</sup>"Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Chief Farida Waziri Sacked," BBC, November 23, 2011.

<sup>24</sup>HRW, *Corruption on Trial? The Record of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission*, August 25, 2011.

<sup>25</sup>An alleged Boko Haram spokesman, Ali Sanda Umar Konduga, who was arrested in November 2011, has reportedly implicated Senator Mohammed Ali Ndume of the country's ruling party as a sponsor. Ndume is a member of a committee appointed by President Jonathan to consider peace negotiations with Boko Haram. Konduga may also have implicated other former members of the Nigerian government, including an ambassador who is now deceased and a former governor. "Arrest of Senator, Alleged Voice of a Radical Muslim Sect in Nigeria Brings More Questions," Associated Press, November 23, 2011.

to use the group to serve local political ambitions or settle scores with opponents. The use of private militias by politicians has been an all-too-common occurrence in Nigerian politics.

While successive Nigerian administrations have been supportive of international counterterrorism initiatives, the government has been slow to adopt anti-terrorism legislation. The Nigerian parliament finally adopted long-debated anti-terrorism and money laundering laws earlier this year amid mounting political pressure after a series of bombings. If allegations of financing by northern elites are credible, the Nigerian government may benefit from technical assistance in forensic accounting. Given sensitivities regarding general corruption, however, it is unclear whether the government would welcome such an offer. Interested donors may also consider efforts to support the Jonathan administration's attempts to increase interagency coordination and restructure the Nigerian security services to better respond to terrorist threats.

As the violence in the northeast escalated in mid-2011, the Nigerian government determined that the police lacked the capacity to counter the threat posed by Boko Haram and deployed a Joint Task Force (composed of military and police) to the northeast. The Task Force has established a heavy security presence in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, conducting house-to-house searches, and generating considerable ill-will among local communities for its at times aggressive and intrusive response. Several respected northern leaders have called on the government to withdraw the force. Nigerian security forces, particularly the police, have historically been accused of serious human rights abuses. Activists suggest that the government has done little to address issues of impunity and corruption within the police force. In 2007, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture reported that "torture is an intrinsic part of how law enforcement services operate within the country."<sup>26</sup> The State Department's annual human rights reports on Nigeria document numerous serious abuses by security forces. Many Nigeria experts caution that if Nigerian security services continue their heavy-handed response in the northeast, it may further alienate local communities.

The State Department's 2009 human rights report noted serious abuses by both police and soldiers during the July 2009 Boko Haram uprising and cited "credible media reports" claiming that police executed Yusuf. Nigerian officials have acknowledged some abuses, and in July 2011 criminal charges were finally filed against five police officers, including three who hold fairly senior positions, for the killing of Yusuf and his followers. In August 2011, the military commenced the court marshal of a military commander in charge of forces responsible for the deaths of 42 militants during the June 2009 violence.

#### U.S. INTERESTS IN NIGERIA AND U.S. ENGAGEMENT ON THE BOKO HARAM THREAT

The Obama administration considers Nigeria to be one of its key strategic partners on the continent, and various U.S. Government agencies appear to be considering the threat posed by Boko Haram through different lenses. The United States and Nigeria, which currently sits on the U.N. Security Council, often find common ground in international fora. The country plays a significant role in peace and stability operations across Africa and is a major troop contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world. Its geostrategic position in West Africa and its role as significant supplier of oil to the United States are also key considerations in U.S.-Nigeria relations. Additionally, Nigerians comprise the largest percentage of African immigrants living in the United States.

Given Nigeria's strategic potential, the United States provides the country with military training, emphasizing professionalism and respect for human rights and civilian authority through a range of programs. Efforts to enhance Nigeria's peacekeeping capabilities are a primary focus, as are initiatives to secure its land and maritime borders. Nigeria participates in the State Department's Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a U.S. interagency effort that aims to increase border protection and regional counter-terrorism capabilities. However, it has historically played a comparatively minor role in that initiative in contrast to the Sahel states affected by AQIM. The Nigerian military has also received counterterrorism assistance through the Department of Defense, although the amount it has received is smaller than that received by the Sahel states or the East African countries neighboring Somalia. Human rights and corruption concerns have limited U.S. assistance for the Nigerian police.

<sup>26</sup>U.N. Press Release, "Special Rapporteur on Torture Concludes Visit to Nigeria," March 12, 2007.

The United States is the largest bilateral donor in Nigeria, providing over \$600 million annually in recent years to bolster democratic governance, agriculture and economic reform, education and health services, and to professionalize and reform the security services. The overwhelming majority of that aid is focused on health programs. The U.S. Government has urged greater attention to development in the north, and USAID implements several “flagship” programs in two northern Nigerian states: Sokoto and Bauchi (the latter is located in the northeast and has suffered Boko Haram attacks in the past year). These programs, which are designed to concentrate resources and achieve maximum impact, aim to strengthen state and local government education and primary health care systems, and to build local public-private partnerships in an attempt to improve accountability and service delivery. Other programs that may benefit the north include U.S. efforts to support reforms to the country’s power sector that may increase access to electricity. The Obama administration is also initiating new conflict mitigation programs to address extremism in the north. The State Department maintains 10 “American Corners” (regional resource centers) in Nigeria to share information on American culture and values.

Cooperation on counterterrorism reportedly improved in the aftermath of the December 2009 airliner bombing attempt, although some government officials remain sensitive to perceived foreign intrusion in domestic affairs. The Nigerian government has coordinated with the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the International Civil Aviation Organization to strengthen security systems at Nigeria’s international airports, and began using full body scanners in 2010. The Nigerian government has also reportedly been receptive to post-blast investigative support by the Federal Bureau of Investigation since the August 2011 U.N. bombing.

In approaching the threat posed by Boko Haram, the State Department has urged the Nigerian government to balance its security response with efforts to address some of the legitimate grievances voiced by northern communities. Obama administration officials have recognized the need to help Nigeria bolster its counterterrorism capabilities and secure its borders, but will likely press for more effective responses from Nigeria’s security forces and its federal and state government structures in responding to the Boko Haram phenomenon. Boko Haram may not find widespread support for its tactics in northern Nigeria, but it does enjoy some sympathy for its cause. Going forward, U.S. policymakers must determine the various risks, benefits, and tradeoffs associated with the different counterterrorism and counter-radicalization measures in their toolkit and weigh their effects against other U.S. policy goals in the country and the wider region.

Mr. MEEHAN. Dr. Laremont.

**STATEMENT OF RICARDO RENÉ LARÉMONT, PROFESSOR OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIOLOGY, BINGHAMTON UNI-  
VERSITY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

Mr. LAREMONT. Chairman Meehan, Ranking Member Speier, and other distinguished Members of this subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss my views concerning Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al-Shabaab. NATO’s prosecution of a combined counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaign in Pakistan and Afghanistan have decimated the ranks of what has been known as al-Qaeda Central, and has caused its remnants to seek—hereinafter as AQ—to seek havens elsewhere, notably in Yemen, the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and the Sahel.

Al-Qaeda has an established pattern of attempting to create safe havens for operations in regions of the world where governmental presence is minimal. While America and NATO have surged in Afghanistan and Pakistan, al-Qaeda has also surged in the regions mentioned above. One of our tasks today is to assess both the evidence and the potential threat of collaboration among Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al-Shabaab.

Now, as has been mentioned by both the Members of this committee and the members of this panel, Boko Haram was estab-

lished in 2002. It is essentially an Islamist religious sect, and it has operated principally in the northeastern Nigerian states of Borno and Yobe, which are substantially isolated from the rest of the country. Boko Haram has opposed the Government of Nigeria because it claims that the government is both secular and corrupt. Boko Haram is offering an alternative, to create an Islamic state in Nigeria that would render justice and provide transparency in government in Nigeria. It is trying to do this even though Nigeria is essentially a bi-religious society, with approximately 55 percent of the population being Muslim, and the remainder being Christians or practitioners of African traditional religions. Since 2009, Boko Haram has attacked police officers and Army officers, and politicians and clerics, and even ordinary citizens, but primarily in northeastern Nigeria. They have been doing so by using assailants who use mopeds in drive-by attacks, and they have used handguns, rifles, and small explosives.

The key event that has caused perhaps the attention of this committee is that in the beginning of June 16, 2011, Boko Haram changed its choice of targets for the first time, and also moved from attacking northern Nigeria to striking the capital. On that date, it exploded a car bomb in the parking lot of police headquarters in Abuja, not killing anyone, but destroying 40 vehicles in that parking lot. This, however, signaled a shift from the United States of drive-by assailants on mopeds to the first use of a vehicle and improvised explosive device.

Subsequently, on August 26, 2011, the Boko Haram launched a second attack against U.N. headquarters in Abuja, killing 18 persons in that attack. Since then, soft targets, including upscale hotels in Abuja, including the Hilton, the Sheraton, and the Nikon Luxury have been targeted. I can't believe I have 1 minute left.

Let me, with my remaining 60 seconds, cut to the chase, although I won't touch on all the issues that are particularly relevant. I think that what this committee needs to focus upon is on what other panelists have said. North Africa and the Sahel need to be seen as a continuum, one that extends from southern Algeria and southern Libya to northern Nigeria, and embracing a region from the west with Mauritania, and ending in Sahel. What the intelligence community and what the Congress has failed to do is to look at this region the way AQ looks at this region. That is that the Sahel is a continuum. I have zero time left, so let me add one more thing that I think is relevant to what you need to think about moving forward. That is that the fall of the Qadhafi regime in Libya is the single most important development upon which we need to focus our attention.

The looting of high-grade armaments from the Ajdabiya and Benghazi arms depot has meant that those armaments have been sacked by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has already indicated, by its public declarations, that it seeks to link with both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. So to underline what I am trying to say is that in this space where there is limited governmental operations, we have a series of groups operating who have clearly, in their public declarations, signaled their intent to unify. When we take their intent with the availability of the sophisticated armaments that have been looted in

Libya, we have a—well, it is the potential for an extraordinarily destabilizing combination.

In order to address that concern, the United States Government needs to acquire the information that it does not have, which is: How many persons are actually engaged in this insurgency, what are their aspirations, which we have a sense of, but more importantly, what is their capacity? Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Laremont follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RICARDO RENÉ LARÉMONT

Chairman Meehan, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss my views concerning Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al Shabab.

NATO's prosecution of a combined counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaign in Pakistan and Afghanistan has decimated the ranks of what has been known as al-Qaeda Central and has caused its remnants (hereinafter AQ) to seek safe havens elsewhere, notably in Yemen, the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and the Sahel. AQ has an established pattern of attempting to create safe havens for operations in regions of the world where governmental presence is minimal. While America and NATO have "surged" in Afghanistan and Pakistan, AQ has also "surged" in the regions mentioned above. One of our tasks today is to assess both the evidence and the potential threat of collaboration among Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al Shabab.

Boko Haram, which was founded in 2002, is an Islamist religious sect operating primarily in the northeastern Nigerian states of Borno and Yobe. Boko Haram opposes the government of Nigeria because it claims that the government is secular and corrupt. Boko Haram endeavors to create an Islamic state in Nigeria that it claims would render justice and provide transparency in government in Nigeria. It is seeking to establish an Islamic state even though Nigeria is a bi-religious society with approximately 55% of the population being Muslim with the remainder being Christians or practitioners of African traditional religions. Since 2009 Boko Haram has attacked police and army officers, politicians, clerics, and ordinary citizens, primarily in northern Nigeria. Its attacks have mostly involved assailants who use mopeds in "drive-by" attacks employing handguns, rifles, or small explosives. Beginning on June 16, 2011, however, Boko Haram changed its choice of targets by striking beyond northern Nigeria for the first time. It struck Police Headquarters in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, destroying 40 vehicles in the Police Headquarters parking lot. It also changed tactics by moving from "drive-by shootings" to detonating an improvised explosive device (IED). The use of an IED in this attack involved a level of sophistication regarding bomb construction that arguably was obtained elsewhere, most likely from resources within the al-Qaeda network. On August 26, 2011 Boko Haram undertook a second IED attack in Abuja, this time using a suicide bomber who drove an explosives-laden truck into the headquarters for the United Nations, killing 18 persons in that attack.<sup>1</sup> Since the attack on the United Nations headquarters, Nigeria's State Security Service has disclosed it has information that Boko Haram intends to target up-scale hotels in Abuja, notably the Hilton, the Sheraton, and the Nikon Luxury.<sup>2</sup> This shift in tactics and location of attacks changes the nature of Boko Haram's threat with Western interests now being targeted. Also of interest for the security community has been an alleged attempt to link the operations of Boko Haram with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which is a larger, more effective, and more lethal Islamist jihadist group presently operating in Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is an Islamist jihadist group that originally was formed to depose the government of Algeria but it has become a transnational group operating in Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and now—because of possible linkages with Boko Haram—Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> While AQIM in northern

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/26/nigeria-attack-islamists-claim-responsibility>, accessed 23 November 2011.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nigeriadailynews.com/general/30688-luxury-hotels-in-abuja-deserted-over-threat-of-attack-by-boko-haram.html>, accessed 23 November 2011.

<sup>3</sup> For more on AQIM, see Ricardo René Laremont, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Sahel," *African Security*. Vol. 4 (2011): 242–268 and Steven Harmon, "From GSFC to AQIM: The Evolution of an African Islamist terrorist group into an

Continued

Algeria primarily focuses upon attacking police and military officials in a region that extends from the capital Algiers and then moves towards the east into the Kabylie mountains, AQIM in the Sahel is an organization that hopes to play a greater and clearly destabilizing role in that region. AQIM's aspirations for expanded range of operations and tactical effectiveness may increase in the near future because of the security vacuum that has been generated by the fall of Muammar al-Qaddafi's regime in Libya, which was a regime that was firmly opposed to Islamist jihadism in the Sahel.

When security analysts examine the possibility for instability in the Sahel they cannot assess Boko Haram, AQIM, and Al Shabab in isolation. The Sahel—which stretches from Mauritania to Somalia and from southern Algeria to northern Nigeria—must be understood as a continuum. The Sahel is either desert or savannah and its residents—from pastoralists to manual workers—largely disregard the borders of the countries that comprise it. Similarly, violent jihadists of various schools—from Boko Haram to AQIM and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and the Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group—also understand this region as a united continuum upon which they plan their future operations.

In the wake of the fall of the Qaddafi's regime in Libya, it is rather clear that AQIM and its potential allies of Boko Haram and Al Shabab aspire to expand their operations. Muammar Qaddafi opposed Islamist jihadist groups in the region and he used either money (by funding social, education, or construction programs) or arms (using his security forces) to inhibit their operations. With Qaddafi gone and a security vacuum being created, AQIM and its allies find themselves in a situation within which they plan to expand. We must obviously concede that there will be gaps between AQIM's and Boko Haram's aspirations for expansion and their accomplishment of these objectives.

Nevertheless, there is evidence being obtained from various sources—including open-source materials, newspaper accounts, and interviews with officials in the Sahel—that lead us to conclude that AQIM in particular hopes to seize upon the chaos created by the fall of Qaddafi to advance their regional objectives. In Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger AQIM intends to expand their already existing links with local Tuareg tribes who have episodically opposed central governments in the region. Also, in these same countries discussions have already taken place to establish better working relationships between AQIM and former Malian and Nigerian Tuareg soldiers who had been in the employ of Qaddafi's now disbanded African Legion. That Legion employed approximately 1,000 soldiers who fought for Qaddafi. These soldiers have seized high-quality armaments in Libya, including anti-aircraft artillery, SA-7 surface-to-air missiles, and other armaments.<sup>4</sup>

Besides expanding their operations in Algeria, Mali, and Niger, AQIM will also attempt to relink with members or former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), some of whom are participating in the formation of Libya's new government. Among LIFG members playing prominent roles in Libya's National Transitional Council include Abd al-Hakim Belhaj (the commander of Tripoli's Military Council) and Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi.<sup>5</sup> Belhaj has publicly alleged being tortured by the CIA in Bangkok and he has also acknowledged past ties to al-Qaeda and to his having met Osama bin Laden. He now claims to have modified his political views and he has declared his desire to create a pluralist and inclusive political structure in Libya that will be tolerant of diverse points of view.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its implications for the Sahara-Sahel region," <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>, accessed 23 November 2011.

<sup>4</sup>Daya Gamage, "Libyan Rebel Commander Admits Link to al-Qaeda: Chad President says al-Qaeda-Acquired Weapons in Rebel Zone," [www.asiantribune.com/news/2011/03/28/libyan-rebel-commander-admits-link-al-qaeda-chad-president-says-al-qaeda-acquired-we](http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2011/03/28/libyan-rebel-commander-admits-link-al-qaeda-chad-president-says-al-qaeda-acquired-we), accessed March 30, 2011; Felipe Pathé Duarte, "Maghrebien Militant Maneuvers: AQIM as a Strategic Challenge," <http://csis.org/publication/maghrebien-militant-maneuvers-aqim-strategic-challenge>, accessed 23 November 2011.

<sup>5</sup>Praveen Swami, Nick Squires and Duncan Gardham, "Libyan rebel commander admits his fighters have al-Qaeda links," *The Telegraph*, 23 November 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocan/libya/8407047/Libyan-rebelcommander-admits-his-fighters-have-al-Qaeda-links.html>, accessed 23 November 2011; Omar Ashour, "Ex-Jihadists in the New Libya," *Foreign Policy*, 29 August 2011, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/29/post\\_qaddafi\\_libya\\_islamists\\_arms\\_and\\_democracy\\_0](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/29/post_qaddafi_libya_islamists_arms_and_democracy_0), accessed 23 November 2011; Souad Mekhennet and Eric Schmidt, "Exiled Islamists Watch Rebellion Unfold at Home," *The New York Times*, 18 July 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/19/world/africa/19rebel.html>, accessed 23 November 2011.

<sup>6</sup>Abdel Hakim Belhaj, "The revolution belongs to all Libyans, secular or not," *The Guardian*, 26 September 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/27/revolution-belongs-to-all-libyans>, accessed 23 November 2011; Hadeel Al-Shalchi and Maggie Michael, "Abdel Hakim Belhaj, Libya Rebel Commander, Plays Down Islamist Past," *The Huffington Post*, 23

Moving beyond Algeria, Mali, Niger, and Libya, we will see that AQIM will attempt to link with and assist Boko Haram in Nigeria. Indeed, AQIM's leader, Abu Musab Abd Al Wadoud told Al Jazeera that his group would provide Boko Haram with support.<sup>7</sup> The Nigerian and the Algerian governments are right now investigating now to see whether a Boko Haram-AQIM link exists.<sup>8</sup> While the evidence at this moment in time is weak and inconclusive, we should remain vigilant because a viable connection between AQIM and Boko Haram makes sense from AQIM's and Boko Haram's strategic perspectives.

If AQIM were to link successfully with Boko Haram in Nigeria, this development would not only affect Nigeria; such a development would arguably have destabilizing effects throughout West Africa. Nigeria is the pivotal state in West Africa. When it becomes weaker or unstable, the entire West African region is affected. That is why this issue of Boko Haram and AQIM that we are examining in this hearing needs to be dealt with now while it is in its earliest stages, before what presently seems a weak and inconclusive link becomes more real and dangerous. It would seem that a thorough-going security analysis of the political, social, and economic factors that make northern Nigeria particularly susceptible to targeting by jihadist groups would be in order. It would seem that an investment in the acquisition of relevant data for security analysis now would enhance the security of the United States and would cost less than waiting until these trends worsen (as they did previously in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen).

This needed security analysis would lead us to understand why northern Nigeria in particular has become fertile ground for Islamist jihadist recruiters. Nigeria is a diverse country with its residents' religious affiliations being arranged over a Muslim-Christian divide. That is one reason for tension between the religions. Furthermore, wide differences in wealth exist between an essentially destitute northern region and a somewhat more prosperous south. (The south substantially obtains most of its income from petroleum exploration and sales.) Given the extraordinary levels of poverty in the north and its widespread rates of illiteracy, we can understand why dissidents within the north often choose to affiliate with Islamist movements that claim that they will improve the living standards of the poor by establishing a more just and transparent government that would be ruled by Islamic law. According to some analyses no more than 40 percent of males in northern Nigeria are literate while female literacy hovers around 20 percent. These figures contrast with Nigeria's south where the literacy rate for males is approximately 74 percent while the rate for women is between 55 to 60 percent. Professor Ibrahim Gambari, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General, recently disclosed vast disparities regarding the education of girls in Nigeria. He said that while 85 percent of girls were being educated in the southeastern and southwestern regions of the country, school enrollment rates for girls in the northeast were 20 percent while in the northwest they were 25 percent.<sup>9</sup> Jobs simply cannot be created with such high levels of illiteracy and under-enrollment of children in schools. Going forward with our security analysis we will need to recognize that northern Nigeria's poverty is extreme and structural and that this impediment will have to be addressed if we are to deal with the security threat being created by Boko Haram and its possible alliance with its larger and more effective affiliate AQIM. A comprehensive security analysis of both Nigeria and the Sahelian region is in order because it is both clear and predictable that it is within the Sahel and also the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula that al-Qaeda and its affiliates hope to expand their operations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the subcommittee.

November 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/02/abdel-hakim-belhaj\\_n\\_946518.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/02/abdel-hakim-belhaj_n_946518.html), accessed 23 November 2011; David Poort, "Q&A: Top NTC commander Abdel Hakim Belhadj," <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/11/20111117102116501736.html>, accessed 23 November 2011; [sic].

<sup>7</sup> STRATFOR, "The Rising Threat from Nigeria's Boko Haram Militant Group, 10 November 2011," <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20111109-rising-threat-nigerias-boko-haram-militant-group>, accessed 24 November 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, "Al Qaeda-linked group finds fertile territory in Nigeria as killings escalate," <http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/18/world/africa/nigeria-militants/index.html>, accessed 23 November 2011; Karen Leigh, "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Al-Qaeda's New Friend in Africa?" *Time Magazine*, 31 August 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2091137,00.html>, accessed 23 November 2011; Robyn Dixon, "Nigeria militant group Boko Haram's attacks attract speculation," *The Los Angeles Times*, 13 September 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/sep/13/world/la-fg-nigeria-boko-haram20110914>, accessed 23 November 2011; Lamine Chikhi, "Algeria says Nigeria's Boko Haram tied to al Qaeda," Reuters, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E7AD01H20111114>, accessed 24 November 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Emma Ujah & Luka Binniyat, "Northern Nigeria Has World Highest Illiterate—World Bank", [www.thenigerianvoice.com/nvnews/53569/1/northern-nigeria-has-world-highest-illiterate-uorl.html](http://www.thenigerianvoice.com/nvnews/53569/1/northern-nigeria-has-world-highest-illiterate-uorl.html), accessed 24 November 2011.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you, Dr. Laremont. But please recognize as well your written testimony is fully part of the record, and available not just for us to review, but for those who follow the important testimony of this hearing. I thank you for that.

Mr. MEEHAN. Ms. Cooke.

**STATEMENT OF JENNIFER G. COOKE, DIRECTOR, AFRICA PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Ms. COOKE. Yes. Thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members. My colleagues have covered a lot of ground, so I thought I would limit my remarks to just a few points on Boko Haram and offer some thoughts on implications for U.S. policy. First, since the death of founder Mohammed Yusuf, the group's structure is fractured and evolving. Although the overall structure is nebulous, observers point to the emergence of three main groups, a religiously ideological element, a more politically oriented faction funded by state and national political figures, and a more opportunistic which uses the Boko Haram brand as a cover for criminal activity.

These divisions within Boko Haram are not always clear-cut, and the group's leadership will often issue conflicting and competing public messages. Second point is the possibility for dialogue and negotiation remains on the table. There is some suggestion that elements of Boko Haram remain open to this possibility. Nigerian President Jonathan has indicated that he might be willing to engage. That is a position encouraged by Borno state government, by local traditional authorities, and, according to a recent national poll, by the majority of Nigerians. Third, although its methods at present are rejected by most northerners, Boko Haram is a product of deepening economic decline and growing political alienation in the north. My colleagues have mentioned this.

The traditional mainstays of Nigeria's northern economy, agriculture, textiles, manufacturing, have collapsed since the advent of the oil economy. Unemployment, indicators in health, education, sanitation, are among the worst in the country. The violent response to President Jonathan's reelection in 2011 reflected the perception of northerners that they are the losers in the zero sum game of Nigerian politics.

My fourth and final point is that Boko Haram does not, at present, enjoy broad community support in the areas in which it operates. This is an important advantage and opportunity in crafting an effective national and international response. It is an advantage that the Nigerian government and its partners should do their utmost to preserve. Heavy-handed security and counter-terror tactics risk alienating a potentially vital source of cooperation and intelligence. That is the communities.

So, and this is very abbreviated, what are the implications for U.S. policy? First and foremost, the U.S. approach should be nuanced and low-key, being careful to avoid actions that escalate the crisis, alienate communities, and limit options for negotiation. Diplomatically, the United States should press the Nigerian government to articulate a national security strategy—it has not done so yet—that commits the government to a comprehensive, balanced



approach that can help guide Nigerian agencies and international partners. Second, because Boko Haram's leadership and structure do appear to be fractured, the United States should be very careful and give very careful consideration to potential consequences of designating the group as a foreign terrorist organization. In the short term, the designation risks further radicalizing Boko Haram, lending a coherence to a group that already appears to be fracturing, and narrowing the opportunity for dialogue and negotiation, which as I said, is still possible with some elements of the group.

Third, the United States should seek ways to engage more fully and meaningfully with the communities in northern Nigeria, particularly in northeastern states of Borno and Yobe. As a first step, the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization might undertake an in-depth assessment to better gauge northern priorities, northern community priorities in development, economic growth, security, conflict mitigation, and identify areas of opportunity for U.S. engagement.

Finally, in responding to Boko Haram, the United States should limit its security engagement to strengthening Nigerian intelligence capacities, advising on civilian protection measures, promoting community engagement, and encouraging professionalism, restraint, and accountability. More direct engagement risks association with intrusive and deeply unpopular security responses to Boko Haram and creates a perception that the United States is powering the federal government to take coercive action against northerners.

In the longer term, I have a few suggestions. The United States have a greater focus on West African cooperation. On security and counterterrorism, it is doing this. It will need to expand that in the future. Consider broadening diplomatic presence in Nigeria's north. For example, the suggestion of a consulate in the state of Kano has been raised before as a means of engaging local, state leaders, civil society, religious leaders.

Then finally, encouraging the Nigerian government in a longer-term strategy of economic revitalization in the north. Seeking opportunities for foreign direct investment, infrastructure enhancement, investment in agriculture productivity and processing, employment, and incentives to state governments and local governments for good governance. I know this isn't really within this subcommittee's purview, but it is important, I think, to have your voices at the table in pushing for that comprehensive approach to dealing with Boko Haram at its source. Thank you very much, and I am happy to take your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Cooke follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENNIFER G. COOKE

NOVEMBER 30, 2011

Chairman Meehan, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished Members of the House subcommittee, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Boko Haram.<sup>1</sup> I will limit my remarks to a few brief points on Boko Haram's evo-

<sup>1</sup> Boko Haram, meaning "Western education is a sin," is the colloquial name given to the group which formally calls itself Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad ("People Committed to

lution and the context in which it operates and offer some thoughts on implications for U.S. engagement.

Established in 2002, Boko Haram's initial incarnation was as a fairly narrow, insulated sect operating in the remote northeast corner of Nigeria in the Borno state capital of Maiduguri. Its founding leader Muhammed Yussuf called for a rejection of the corrupting influence of western culture and state authority and of traditional religious authorities who were seen as degenerate collaborators in a fundamentally immoral government system. The group drew its adherents largely from disaffected university students and unemployed youth, with few prospects of economic opportunity or social advancement. Boko Haram is not the first group to violently oppose secular and religious authority structures in northern Nigeria, but its expanding array of targets and gradual adoption of modern terror tactics is a new and deeply alarming turn, setting a dangerous precedent for potential successor groups that may arise from among Nigeria's politically alienated, economically marginalized, and largely youthful northern populations.

The suicide attacks on U.N. headquarters in Abuja on August 26, 2011, propelled the group to international notoriety. But they also revealed a Nigerian federal administration wholly unprepared to deal with the escalating threat in a coherent, strategic, and calibrated way. Coming on the heels of the April 2011 post-election crisis that left some 800 northerners dead, the attacks further underscored the failure of successive Nigerian administrations to bridge the growing economic and political rift between the country's north and south. Boko Haram is simply one manifestation of the profound failure of successive Nigerian governments to curb corruption, deliver public services, generate economic opportunity, establish accountable security institutions, and engage communities in both the north and south in a more fully national polity.

The Nigerian government's response to Boko Haram will need to be integrated into a comprehensive political, economic, and security strategy that offers some promise of real improvement to northern populations and communities and limits the appeal of Boko Haram and its potential successors. The United States would do well to avoid any association with ham-handed, short-sighted security responses emanating from Abuja and instead press the government to plan and pursue a comprehensive and strategic approach with urgency and commitment.

The core aims of Boko Haram appear at present to remain limited to the Nigerian domestic scene, even though western targets within Nigeria will appeal because of their visibility and political impact. There is the possibility of greater collusion with al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, with reports of members training with AQIM in Mauritania and Mali and possible sharing of information on tactics and technologies. But there is little sign at present, apart from an occasional rhetorical flourish, of any global or even regional ambitions on the part of Boko Haram leadership.

Boko Haram poses little immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, although U.S. citizens and assets in Nigeria may well be vulnerable as the group seeks high-profile, high-impact targets. The more imminent threat is a fundamentally destabilizing crisis within Nigeria, which as an important energy supplier, security partner, and regional and continental powerhouse, is one of the United States' most strategically important allies in Africa.

Some points to keep in mind:

#### BOKO HARAM IS FRACTURED AND EVOLVING

The group's fluidity and seemingly divided leadership will pose an intelligence challenge but may also offer opportunities to "peel away" individuals or factions and isolate more purely criminal or recalcitrant elements.

The killing of founder Mohammed Yussuf while in police custody in July 2009 marked something of a turning point for the movement. Along with an escalation of tactics and an expanding range of targets, the vacuum left by Yussuf has led to an apparent fracturing of its leadership and coherence. There remains a great deal that is unknown about Boko Haram's inner workings; nonetheless, observers point to the emergence of three main groups: The first is a more religiously ideological hard-core element, led by Abubakar Shakau, a close associate of Yussuf. Despite this faction's ideological bent, some observers suggest that Shakau may be open to a negotiated settlement with federal authorities.

A second faction is thought to derive support from state and national political figures whose ambition is to undermine local authorities, or reveal President Goodluck Jonathan as weak and ineffective, possibly precipitating a recall by ruling party

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the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad," in Arabic). At its inception, the group was also locally known as the Nigerian Taliban.

leadership or at the very least assuring the return of the presidency to the north in the country's next national election.

Finally, observers point to a more opportunistic grouping, which many allege simply uses the Boko Haram brand and associated insecurity as cover for criminal activity and self-enrichment. This group may draw inspiration from the money-making tactics and kidnap-for-ransom operations by militants in the Niger Delta or Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb affiliates in the Sahel. These divisions within Boko Haram are not always clear-cut, and the group's "leadership" will often issue conflicting public messages.

#### A POSSIBILITY FOR DIALOGUE AND NEGOTIATION REMAINS ON THE TABLE

There is some suggestion, as noted above, that Abubakar Shaka remains open to the possibility of dialogue and negotiation. Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has indicated that he is open to dialogue, although his enthusiasm may be waning. A presidentially-appointed panel concluded in September 2011 that "the federal government should fundamentally consider the option of dialogue and negotiation which should be contingent upon the renunciation of all forms of violence and surrender of arms to be followed by rehabilitation." Borno State governor Kashim Shettima has reiterated the call for "sincere dialogue," and a group of Borno state elders have called on President Jonathan to initiate engagement. A national opinion poll by the Nigerian CLEEN Foundation indicates that 58 percent of Nigerians support dialogue (80 percent in the northeast region most affected).

The group's demands range from the improbable—including full implementation of Shari'a in northern Nigeria (with some adherents advocating Shari'a for all of Nigeria), to the more plausible—including full accountability for police and security forces involved in the extra-judicial killing of Yussuf and the associated violence that left 700 dead; public access to a former national security adviser's investigation and report on the 2009 crackdown; the release of imprisoned Boko Haram members; and the rebuilding of mosques and other buildings destroyed by security forces.

Any strategy to engage Boko Haram—whether negotiations, pay-offs, or amnesty offers—will have inherent risks. Negotiations with one element of Boko Haram may cause further splintering or hardening among other factions. Pay-offs set a dangerous precedent in creating incentives for other actors to take up arms, and broad amnesty offers may create a culture of impunity that leaves victims without recourse to justice. But while Boko Haram remains a relatively new grouping and its leadership and structure in flux, there may be opportunities to peel off factions and leaders more amenable to negotiation and isolate less intractable factions. Dialogue is worth pursuing, and compromise on objectively reasonable demands, such as police accountability and community reconstruction warrants testing.

#### BOKO HARAM IS ONE MANIFESTATION OF GROWING ALIENATION IN THE NORTH THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED IN A LONG-TERM RESPONSE

Although its methods are at present rejected by most northerners, Boko Haram is a product of deepening economic decline and growing political alienation in the north. This decline has seen a loss of respect for state and local authorities who have failed to deliver even the most basic services to their constituents, and to some extent an erosion of traditional religious authorities who are often perceived to be in collusion with a corrupt political establishment.

The greatest axis of division and resentment is the growing economic disparity between the northern Nigeria and the wealthier south and the perception that southern political elites have ignored the interests and priorities of northern populations. Many northerners felt it was "their" turn at the presidency in 2011, since the late President Yar'Adua failed to serve his full term. The violent response to President Jonathan's victory reflected the perception of northerners that they are the losers in the zero-sum game of Nigerian politics.

The traditional mainstays of Nigeria's northern economy—agriculture, textiles, manufacturing—have collapsed since independence as successive governments (of both northern and southern origin) focused exclusively on the lucrative oil sector. Unemployment in some northern states is estimated at 90 percent, and indicators in health, education, and sanitation are among the lowest in the country. Poverty alleviation and development efforts have largely bypassed the north, focusing instead on the volatile Niger Delta region, where militant groups have threatened international companies and the global oil supply.

Failure to address these fundamental vulnerabilities may ultimately lead Boko Haram and potential successors to make common cause with growing segments of Nigeria's northern population. An accumulation and convergence of grievances with combined with an escalation of violent confrontation and terror tactics could prove

a profoundly destabilizing to the Nigerian state. Reversing the north's long-standing economic decline and bridging the north-south divide will constitute a long-term endeavor, but it is one that should begin immediately and with urgency.

#### BOKO HARAM DOES NOT ENJOY BROAD COMMUNITY SUPPORT

At present, Boko Haram enjoys little support in the communities in which it operates, and this is perhaps the greatest advantage and opportunity in crafting an effective national and international response. It is an advantage that the Nigerian government should do its utmost to preserve.

Unlike militant groups in the oil-producing Niger Delta, Boko Haram has not presented itself primarily as an interlocutor for poor and disenfranchised northern populations. Although its adherents are influenced by the same political and socioeconomic factors that have led to a widespread sense of alienation and resentment among northern populations, the group's political/religious agenda and demands have had little resonance across the north. Thousands have fled the towns in which Boko Haram has launched its attacks, and local community members have been intimidated by assassinations of clerics who disagree with the group's preachings or individuals suspected of collaborating with security forces.

The Nigerian government should seek to capitalize on this lack of popular support for Boko Haram and engage the communities that ultimately will need to be part of a comprehensive solution. Instead, however, the government's heavy-handed and overwhelmingly security-focused response have led to further alienation and deepening distrust. A major Joint Task Force deployment (of military and police personnel) to Borno in summer 2011 inflamed tensions, with widespread accusations of arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial killings, torture, and intimidation. Police corruption and abuse has become one of the defining grievances of Boko Haram and one that is very likely to resonate with communities in the north (and nationally). The federal structure of Nigeria's police means that officers are usually not from the areas to which they are deployed, have little empathy with, or understanding of, local communities, and generally have adversarial relations with local populations.

#### THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY IS NOT YET CLEAR

Ultimately, for better or worse, the onus of responding to Boko Haram rests with the Nigerian government. There is considerable concern that the government may lack the capacity and political will to mount an effective, comprehensive response. The most visible response to date has been an overweening security presence in the north that has antagonized and intimidated local populations. At present, there appear to be divisions within the federal government on how best to engage with Boko Haram; little coordination, communication, or intelligence sharing among the government's multiple security agencies; suggestions of a potential free-for-all with private security firms bidding for government contracts; and no clearly articulated national strategy or security framework to guide a comprehensive response. President Jonathan has promised that "with the renewed vigour [sic] by Nigeria's security agencies to curb the menace of Boko Haram, the existence of the group in the shores of Nigeria will soon be history." But this claim holds little promise for a nuanced, calibrated response that engages communities or addresses urgent long-term vulnerabilities.

#### WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY?

What do these various factors mean for U.S. policy? First and foremost, the U.S. approach should be nuanced and low-key, being careful to avoid actions that escalate the crisis, alienate communities, and limit options for negotiation.

In the short term:

- Diplomatically, the United States must press and encourage the Nigerian government to formulate and articulate a national security strategy that commits the government to comprehensive, balanced approach and can help guide a more coordinate and effective national and international response.
- Because Boko Haram's leadership and structure appear to be fluid and fracturing, with some elements open to the possibility of dialogue, the United States should give careful consideration to the potential consequences of officially designating the group as a foreign terrorist organization. In the short term, the designation risks further radicalizing Boko Haram, lending coherence to a group that appears to be fractured, and narrowing the opportunity for dialogue and negotiation, which the majority of Nigerians, particularly in areas most affected by Boko Haram, appear to support.
- The United States should seek ways to engage more fully and meaningfully with communities in northern Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern states

of Borno and Yobe. As a first step, the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations might consider working with the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, the Nigerian government, and nongovernmental organizations to better gauge northern community priorities in development, economic growth, security, and conflict mitigation to identify areas of opportunity and help guide a longer-term U.S. (and possibly Nigerian) interagency response.

- The United States Government should consider working with the Nigerian federal government and northern state governments, to devise quick-impact projects that give some sense of renewed government engagement on local needs and development priorities, whether in infrastructure, construction, sanitation, health. The purpose would be to win some short-term good will from local communities and leaders, although they should not be viewed as substitutes for longer-term investments in sustainable development.
- In responding to Boko Haram, the United States should limit its security engagement to strengthening Nigerian intelligence capacities; advising on civilian protection measures; promoting community engagement; and encouraging professionalism, restraint, and accountability. More direct engagement risks association with intrusive and deeply unpopular security responses to Boko Haram and creates a perception that the United States is empowering the federal government to take coercive action against northerners.

In the longer-term:

- The United States should consider opening a U.S. consulate in the northern Nigeria to expand contact and engagement with state and local government leaders, civil society, business leaders, and ordinary citizens. Establishment of a consulate in Kano has been under consideration for some time: The 2011 post-election crisis in the north and the rise of the Boko Haram phenomenon warrant greater diplomatic engagement, not withdrawal.
- The United States should encourage the Nigerian government in a longer-term strategy of economic revitalization in the north, seeking opportunities for foreign direct investment, infrastructure enhancement, investment in agricultural productivity and processing, employment generation, and offering incentive programs to state and local governments that make good faith investments in development, social service delivery, and transparency. In a country the size of Nigeria, the administration might consider devising a Millennium Challenge Account model that could operate at a sub-national level to incentivize and reward good governance and unlock economic potential.
- The United States should continue to strengthen regional security cooperation and intelligence sharing within ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) and the states of the Maghreb to improve capacities to monitor and interdict flows of arms and personnel and to track possible links among criminal or terrorist networks.

Mr. MEEHAN. Well, I want to thank each of the panelists for your testimony. I appreciate the need to try to take such a complex issue and simplify it is—we need that for time constraints, but this is the opportunity for us, as we ask questions, to develop the essence of your points, I think, a little bit each.

So at this point in time the Chair will recognize himself for 5 minutes of questioning. The testimony that I was able to review from each of you was compelling. A common theme I see, of course, is the recognition of Nigeria's importance throughout the entire African region, and the fact that it really is a critical state not only in relations with the United States, but with respect to the integrity of an economy of the entire continent. There also appears to be an appreciation for a great amount of opportunity in those regions because of the unsettled nature of many of those and the metastasization of al-Qaeda, which they are looking for places to be able to spread their interests.

Does this create a fertile area? We are trying to assess how that dynamic may create a threat here to the United States homeland. But of course, in addition to the United States' interests. Dr. Laremont, I was struck by your written testimony in which you talk about the issue of destabilization in West Africa, its pivotal

role, as I have said, but the need for this issue of Boko Haram and its association with AQIM to be dealt with now, while it is in its earliest stages, because there is what—before a weak and inconclusive link becomes real and dangerous. The panel did a very good job, I think, of identifying this dramatic transformation that has taken place. Dr. Pham, those were your words in your testimony, written testimony, I think a dramatic transformation that we have seen of Boko Haram in just a very short period. We have seen the ability for them to not only reach against Nigerian targets, but against outposts of western culture as well.

The panelists have identified the tactical and functional upgrade of its capabilities. Panelists have also talked about the expansion of its tactics, including sophisticated vehicle-borne IEDs and the use of suicide bombers. Panelists have talked about the expansion of their territorial reach beyond the north now down into Abuja, hitting soft targets. The panelists have talked about the choice of target, the identification of the United Nations offices, not just strictly a Nigerian place. The panelists have talked about the connections with the existing al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations, particularly the Islamic Maghreb among them.

We have identified that there may be splits going on simultaneously. An awful lot of dynamics. Those are some of the signals that we seemed to miss when we earlier evaluated TTP, we earlier evaluated the al-Qaeda influence in Yemen. Both of them ended up with strikes against the United States. So what we are really asking today is, and I am going to ask each of the panelists, does the Boko Haram leadership, in their intent to unify with al-Qaeda or others, have any intent or capability to cause harm to the people of the United States either here or abroad? That is the fundamental question we are trying to ask.

There is a lot more to it to be sure, and a lot of other follow-up, but a sense, what is your sense of whether or not Boko Haram creates a threat to the United States? Dr. Pham, let me begin with you.

Mr. PHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Does it have the intent? I think it is evolving very quickly in that direction. We have gotten signals, most recently in the pronouncements of Abubakar Shekau, where he links the jihad that he is fighting with a transnational global jihad, salutes in fact the so-called martyrs in Iraq who were targeting U.S. troops there. So the aspiration is there. As this transformation of its capabilities, if the opportunity presents itself, I think they would seize upon it. It would certainly raise their stature within the terrorist networks in which they are trying to link up with. So if the opportunity presents itself, I think they will use it accordingly.

Mr. MEEHAN. Ms. Ploch.

Ms. PLOCH. Thank you. I think Dr. Pham raises several very valid points. I want to caution when we talk about Boko Haram as a group and its intent that there are likely several intents. He mentioned Shekau's statements, clearly indicating some inspiration, aspiration to target U.S. and western interests. I think those should be taken with extreme seriousness. I don't see currently from reporting that the larger Boko Haram following intends to target the United States or U.S. interests. Notable, though, is

AQIM's regular practice of kidnapping of western targets. Back in May, we had the targeting of a British and an Italian citizen from northern Nigeria. Their whereabouts are debated right now, but some indications they may still be in northern Nigeria. We don't know whether Boko Haram was responsible for that kidnapping or not, but we do need to be very concerned about U.S. citizens in northern Nigeria and the potential they may be kidnapped by AQIM, Boko Haram, or others.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you. Dr. Laremont.

Mr. LAREMONT. Chairman Speier and other Members of the committee, I think, with all respect, it may not be a question of looking for a smoking gun, we have found a document that indicates that, you know, we, Boko Haram, intend to attack the United States or its interests in Europe, et cetera, et cetera. I don't think that is really the right way of looking at this particular question.

I think you have to think about what is the right question to ask? All right. I think the right question to ask is: What is the operational space and where are we at this moment in time? The operational space that we are considering, whether we are talking about Boko Haram or we are talking about Al-Shabaab, or we are talking about AQIM, is an operational space in which there is not governmental capacity. AQ always operates in spaces where there isn't governmental capacity. That is why they went to the frontier region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. That is why they are redeploying to Somalia and Yemen, and why they are redeploying to the Sahel.

So that is the first question to ask. You are not looking for a smoking gun. What is the operational space? The second and most important thing for this committee to consider is the moment in historical time. This is 2011. This is a revolutionary year. This is a year similar to the Iranian revolution in 1979. It is similar to the revolutions of 1968. It is similar to the Russian revolution of 1917 and the European revolutions of 1848. This is a revolutionary moment, which has transformed North Africa in terms of how we need to position ourselves with regard to emerging governments in North Africa. It also requires us to realize that because it is a revolutionary time, we need to think about this space called the Sahel in a different way than we have considered it in the past. Once we do that, once we recognize those two key factors, then we can proceed with our analysis of what is in the security interests of the United States? But unless you frame the question properly, and unless you understand the historical moment, and if you are looking for a smoking gun then you are not going to get the right answers.

So that is what I would propose to the committee, you have to understand the space. We have understood that before. AQ always goes into spaces——

Mr. MEEHAN. Dr. Laremont, let me do this. I want to follow up with some questions on that. But let me get Ms. Cooke, because I have to be careful about my minutes. I need to get to my colleagues. But I will follow up with that. Thanks.

Ms. COOKE. My sense at present is that Boko Haram poses little imminent threat to the U.S. homeland, although I do think U.S. citizens and assets in Nigeria may well be vulnerable. As the group

seeks high-profile, high-impact targets, and the U.N. building was a step up from local police units or even the police headquarters in terms of garnering Nigeria's national attention. Nigerians, unfortunately, are fairly inured to fairly high levels of political violence. You have hundreds and hundreds of people killed in the post-election violence. You know, the country does go on. I think, you know, that is one of the troubling aspects of Nigeria. But I think hitting an international institution garnered very quick attention. I think the core aims of Boko Haram, despite occasional rhetorical flourishes, remain centered on limited to Nigerian domestic politics. There is growing evidence of ties from local politicians who are trying to make Goodluck Jonathan look ineffective or undermine local government authorities.

So obviously, the possibilities are always there. I guess it is your task to gauge the plausibility of that. The possibility is there. The plausibility is perhaps much less than the possibility. You do have lone wolves like the underpants bomber, Umar, I am sorry—that is the wrong phrase—who did not grow up in Boko Haram. He was raised mostly in England, trained in Yemen, and so forth. There is always going to be the potential of that kind of alienated young person isolated who falls prey to influences, whether external, and so forth. But Boko Haram as a unit seeking to launch targets against the United States at this time, I think that is minimal.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you. I now turn to the Ranking Member, Ms. Speier, for her questions.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, each of you, for really a very thoughtful discussion on this issue. I really very much appreciate it. At the outset let me say that after my questioning, I am going to have to leave because I have a bill up in another committee that I really must attend to. But I want to try and get my arms around this, which is, I think, a little hard to do. I don't think we pay enough attention to Africa as a hotbed of concern that we should.

I think the fact that in Nigeria right now, we have a very young population. The Pew study, poll, showed that only 38 percent of Nigeria's 75 million Muslims have a favorable view of the United States compared to 90 percent of the Nigerian Christians. All of you touched on the fact that northern Nigeria is impoverished, that agriculture has been left fallow, that the poverty may be, in many respects, fueling organizations like Boko Haram. I guess my question to you is, one: How large do we think Boko Haram is in numbers? How are they financed? Are we best served by engaging in northern Nigeria in a way where we are helping the country, the young with employment opportunities and educational opportunities to somehow bridge the gap that exists in terms of how they perceive the United States?

So if I could just have you answer those three or four questions as you feel that you can. Dr. Pham, would you like to begin?

Mr. PHAM. Thank you, Representative Speier. How large of a group, I think the consensus of most analysts is probably a core group of no more than several hundred, but a wider community of support, which leads to the financing question. Just last week, the Nigerian government arrested a sitting senator from the ruling party, the PDP, accusing him of having ties and financing with



Boko Haram. Whether the accusation is true or not, we leave to the judicial process. But it does ring true that certain elements of northern political elites have tried to hijack the alienation, the sentiments of the youth population and the general population for their creating a perpetual crisis for their own political ends. So I have no doubt that there is some financing there. As well as from other—the Sahel, as Dr. Laremont's point, the space is full of all sorts of financing opportunities, from drug running to protection to narcotraffickers, we have seen AQIM engage in both, to even hiring out of mercenaries from various disaffected groups. AQIM has contracted out kidnappings to mercenaries or to Polisario fighters.

So there is all sorts of financing opportunities. As for U.S. engagement, I would say we have to be very careful on our CT, counterterrorism engagement, to not look like we are driving the Nigerian Government. But on development and those other issues, certainly I think there is a role to be played. We have talked for more than a decade about getting a U.S. diplomatic presence up and running in northern Nigeria. For a variety of security concerns, as well as budgetary concerns, that has never taken place. So we have an embassy in Abuja, we have a diplomatic presence in the largely Christian south, but we have nothing in the north.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you. Ms. Ploch.

Ms. PLOCH. Thank you. I think Dr. Pham has covered the financing issue fairly well. I would also add that a number of bank robberies have been attributed to the group. Some of these may be the acts of other criminal gangs that the Nigerian security forces are claiming are Boko Haram. But it would provide some financing opportunity. On the issue of the U.S. Government response in northern Nigeria to underdevelopment, the U.S. Government provides about \$600 million a year to Nigeria in foreign assistance. Of course that is nationally, and a lot of it is focused on health programs. But USAID in the last few years has focused on two flagship programs in two northern states. Their attempt, with a country the size of Nigeria, was to really kind of maximize impact in a few places.

So they have been working with the state governments of Bauchi State and Sokoto. Bauchi is in the Boko Haram-affected area of northeast, and Sokoto is in the northwest. They have been working with the local government in trying to improve their education and service delivery, health care programs, and also to build between the state and federal government some public-private partnerships with local businesses.

So I think that is one area. Also in terms of U.S. Government responses, the U.S. Government has been working with Nigeria's anti-corruption authority for several years. In terms of forensic accounting, if, as Dr. Pham mentions, the reports of northern elites potentially financing elements of Boko Haram are true, there may be an avenue for us to expand engagement with the financial authorities in Nigeria to track down the sources of potential elite financing.

Mr. LAREMONT. I concur there are several hundred militants within Boko Haram. What the committee needs to grasp is that there are many Nigerias, but there are really two Nigerias. There is a southern Nigeria that is substantially more wealthy than the

north and better educated. I have spent time in Maiduguri, so I know it. The levels of poverty, the levels of illiteracy, especially among girls, is extraordinary. So that if we were to have an impact with regard to this question, I concur with Dr. Pham that escalating military collaboration isn't probably going to solve the problem. What we really need do is we need to have a greater diplomatic presence in the north, starting with Kano, and then with Kaduna, and then possibly Jos, because they are more populous. But then the heart of the Boko Haram question would then be Maiduguri.

In an era of contracted resources in the United States and a contraction of our operations on the diplomatic front, we need to, as a country and as a committee, assess whether that is really in our interests. No one is in the north from the U.S. diplomatic community. Consequently, we don't know what is going up in the north. Just a few academicians. No one is in Maiduguri. I have been there. Very few people are in Kano. A few more in Kaduna. So how can you possibly form policy when you don't have any information? So if this committee is charged with trying to secure or obtain the security of the United States, we then need to assess, even in constrained financial circumstances, what kinds of investments on the diplomatic side and on the informational side we need to do to assess the threat. That is your job. Okay. But that is my bit of advice. The military not so much. Diplomatic presence doesn't exist outside of Abuja. The north is not—there are no consulates in the north. Consequently, we don't have any information.

Ms. SPEIER. My time is really expiring. I would like to get to Ms. Cooke. Thank you, Doctor, very much.

Ms. COOKE. Well, I don't have too much to add. I would like to echo Lauren Ploch's point on the forensic accounting, the possibility of cooperation there. It is problematic in Nigeria because once you run up against vested interests, those kinds of investigations are often blocked politically. That has happened in the Niger Delta. That is a diplomatic issue that we just have to keep pressing the Nigerian government on. Development in the north, absolutely. Economic revitalization that provides jobs, meaning, and hope for the disenfranchised young people there. An expanded diplomatic presence. You know, there are partners with whom we can engage on these things to better understand institutions, civil societies, universities. There is lots of options for people-to-people engagement as well that I think will be important going forward.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Speier. I appreciate the need to attend to other committee work. But I thank you for your attendance here this morning for this important part. I would like to turn to the questions now to the Ranking Member of the full committee.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank the witnesses for what I think has been very enlightening testimony. My takeaway is that this committee ought to be looking at the broader public policy questions of: How do we address organizational problems like the one we are talking about here rather than focusing on the individual group? I have been to Abuja. I talked to a lot of the leadership in Nigeria as a country. I agree

with everyone here, it is a fractured country. But it is also one that is ripe for an entity like this one.

The operational space is void in an area, bad people take advantage of it. So I understand that. So from my perspective, our committee should be saying what is it we can put in place so that entities like Boko Haram won't be as viable?

Now, what I hear is rather than trying to go the conventional route of saying this is a terrorist organization, they are bad people; it might behoove us to say: Well, what are we doing on the diplomatic side to engage the country they operate in to do more so that these things don't occur? I say that is a problem. When I look at our foreign aid to Africa as a whole, and the population of Africa, it is a pittance compared to the rest of the world.

So if we are serious about engaging this threat, and if the United Nations and other entities are our partners, we have to invest in it. So I am happy that our witnesses across the board said we have to invest in diplomatic efforts, whether it is consulates in the north, whether it is more USAID-type funds to do basic things we know that countries need and deserve.

So I am going to give each Member to give the committee the public policy position on addressing organizations like Boko Haram not as a specific entity, but as the public policy—when these entities come up, what would you suggest that we do to address it rather than just take the quick fix and say that these are bad people and we need to label them? What are the points before you get to that labeling that we should make sure we have done? Dr. Pham.

Mr. PHAM. Well, thank you, Mr. Thompson. I agree with what you have said about the need for the investment, the need for the aid. If there is one thing I could ask the committee and really recommend to the United States Government in general, we need to invest in knowledge. For example, if you look at the strategic importance of Nigeria and Africa for our national interests, economic, political, humanitarian, we have very little information. That is even less when you look at the space of the Sahel. We have invested next to nothing in acquiring information. So we need to get information to know the space, and then we can begin crafting all these policies and specific initiatives to deal with all these issues. But we need to invest in acquiring that knowledge of the geopolitical space as such. We have had 50 or more years to do that with the Middle East and we still stumble. In this part of the world, we haven't even begun to build that base. Once we build it, then I think a lot can come out of that. But we need to invest in that knowledge. That can inform everything from intelligence to, when necessary, military operations, to economic policy, to diplomatic initiatives.

Ms. PLOCH. Thank you. I will start with the security response and U.S. engagement with Nigerian security forces. I think we have heard over and over again from Nigeria experts that the response has, to date, been heavy-handed, and that Nigerian security services are often seen more as attacking Boko Haram rather than protecting citizens. What happens often in that case is that the local citizenry feels increasingly disenfranchised, and quite frankly may be more likely to tolerate the activities of Boko Haram than

the security forces. These door-to-door searches have reportedly been a significant problem.

On the other hand, we do need to be working with the Nigerian security forces to enhance their border security capacity. I think one of the more frightening aspects of all of this, as we have talked about this continuum of the Sahel and these borders, which are not well-policed, and the idea that some of these Libyan weapons may be traveling south, and the Nigerian security forces may not be able to catch those. So border security is really important here. On the development aspects, I think we have gone into this in a fair amount of detail. You have a very large, young population in northern Nigeria with very few job prospects. When they have nothing else to do and there are charismatic preachers preaching a different line of thought, it brings some people into the fold. So we need to be looking at some of those development issues. My engagement with administration officials responsible for the issue of Boko Haram and Nigeria suggests that they take the threat very seriously and they are open to consulting with you on possible responses.

Mr. LAREMONT. Well, as they say in church, the Lord works in mysterious ways. You know, because this is entirely unplanned, but let me make three points. The first is, in terms of public policy initiatives, would be to increase the diplomatic presence in the north, first in Kano, second in Kaduna, third in Jos, and fourth in Maiduguri. That is in declining level of population. If you don't have a diplomatic presence in the north, that is where you begin. First Kano, then Kaduna, then Jos, then Maiduguri.

I say the Lord works in mysterious ways because Dr. Pham said we need information. We don't have information. Well, I presently have a proposal before DOD for a program to acquire information on the Sahel. That was entirely unplanned. But there are ways of acquiring information about threats in this area in a cost-effective way. Third, if you really want to make an impact in terms of public policy, I would focus on two things in the longer term, and this would implicate USAID and other agencies, would be to focus on fertility and literacy. When you look at how violence declines over time in a variety of cases across the world, it is as fertility decreases to 2.0, 2.1 or 1.8 per child, then the demographic pressures on the economy simultaneously decrease. So if we were to think cost-effectively about moving forward, focus on fertility.

The second thing is not focus on economics, but maybe even before economics is the question of literacy. You cannot have economic growth in the north when 20 percent of the women in the north are literate and 80 percent are illiterate. So the third public policy takeaway would be to focus on fertility and literacy.

Ms. COOKE. Yeah, I think understanding the context and the dynamics at play is something that we have not always been particularly good at in complicated places like Somalia, for example. So things that we do for a short-term purpose have unintended consequences and backlash. I think we have to be very careful about that in places like northern Nigeria, where we haven't had a lot of long-term partnerships, intelligence, and kind of community engagement. So kind of slapping labels, you know, on fundamental-

ists, you know, these kind of things create backlash that we don't intend, but can complicate our engagement.

So avoiding the good guy-bad guy dichotomy, in Nigeria, in particular, you know, these communities do have real, real grievances with their local, their state government, and the central government, and have seen a steady decline since independence of the economy, while the south grows. So there is something real there that we have to acknowledge and focus on. Engaging the communities, as I have said, I think it is extremely important. Working with security forces on a kind of a nuanced professional approach.

The Nigerian police have become—one of Boko Haram's core grievances is against the unprofessionalism and police abuse. That is something that all Nigerians complain about, and something that the Nigerian Government has to take more seriously. We don't do a lot in terms of helping governments with police reform. I think it is an area we need do more of, particularly in an era of counterterrorism, drug trafficking, where the police are often the closest to the communities, but the least well-equipped security force to deal with those kind of challenges in an effective way.

Then obviously, to embed our security engagement, which you wish to promote in nuanced, calibrated approaches, within a broader political and economic strategy. I have talked a little bit about revitalizing the economies. Perhaps our greatest counterterror tool is to create job opportunities in the northern Nigeria over the longer term. So I will end there.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you for your thoughts. I would like to do one more question for the group myself personally. I think you have developed the picture of a complex region. We appreciate the challenges that are associated with the poverty, lack of education, and the opportunity that creates. How do we reconcile the need to try to address those as a world to approach those problems and challenges with the recognition that to some extent we have this exploitation of that by AQIM, coupled with this potential presence of new weaponry from Libya, so that we—how do we find the balance of sort of in effect not accusing before the act, but not sitting back and missing the potential that those weapons get used, groups get radicalized, and they act out in the manner that al-Qaeda has acted out by taking advantage of some of these same factors in other parts of the world?

There may be a difference here between people acting out of poverty versus those like we see in the Middle East who are saying they don't want any American presence, they are trying to get rid of. But do we have to be concerned about the threat while we are trying to determine whether there is ways that we can help Nigeria develop itself into an economy and a government that can sustain itself on its own merits?

Let me start with you, Ms. Cooke, and we will go the opposite direction, because you always have to wait for everybody else.

Ms. COOKE. No, then I have to say something original. Yeah, I mean, I think we have to understand that you can't do security or development in a vacuum. You do have to do both. But I think you have to recognize that unless that security response, or the development response is given adequate weight, you are going to have

to come back again and again to do the security capacity-building and so forth.

Mr. MEEHAN. Do you think it is a mistake for us to identify this group, Boko Haram, as a foreign terrorist organization?

Ms. COOKE. Well, as I said in my testimony, just that formal label might not get us very far in terms of what we gain from it. But because the group is in flux, it may then create kind of a hardening of lines, create a coherence that is not there right now, and create some blowback that we might not have anticipated. While it doesn't get us—it doesn't give us many gains, it may have potential consequences, particularly at this early stage when the group is still trying to formulate and is fissured. That is my take on that.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you. Dr. Laremont.

Mr. LAREMONT. You know, we have been studying al-Qaeda and its various manifestations for 10 or 11 years now. Now we understand that there is a predictable game plan. That is it will always seek to develop itself in areas that are poorly governed, where there isn't a governmental presence. So if we know that, and now that we have 10 years of experience, we can predict that their next places of principal operation will be Somalia, Yemen, and the Sahel. Now that we have the benefit of those 10 years, now the question is what is it that we need to do because we are smarter than we were 10 years ago. So we need to have a buy-back program for those armaments. That would probably take place in Libya and in Mali, and to some extent in Niger, because that is where the armaments are. I don't think they have gone as far south as Nigeria.

Mr. MEEHAN. Can something like that be successful, appreciating the broad number of weapons that are out there? Do you ever get enough weapons back that you can assure that you are now safer?

Mr. LAREMONT. You may not get them all, but you will get some. I was in Mali this summer and ran into some of—ran into, I sought them out, rebels who were moving into Libya. You know, they would go to work for Qadhafi for a week and make a thousand dollars a week. So they work for 3 weeks and they come home. They are not really interested in fighting, they are interested in getting paid. So if they have these armaments, some of them, not all of them, will surrender these armaments in a buy-back program. It won't be completely successful, but it will be partially successful. But going back to my original set of statements, if we have been studying AQ for 10, 11 years now, and we know their game plan, and we know that they are going into ungoverned spaces, from the benefit of that experience let's go out there and get the information so they don't get a chance to reassemble themselves in these less-governed places. The third point then focuses on what elsewhere has been discussed is that you have this terrain of underdevelopment in which you have high levels of fertility and high levels of illiteracy. So you do the buy-back program, you do the informational program, and then you focus on fertility and literacy. I think you can make a big impact.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you. Ms. Ploch.

Ms. PLOCH. Thank you. I am trying to figure out the best way to tackle this. You know, I think when we look at places that al-Qaeda and some of its affiliates are operating, we are talking about the term "ungoverned spaces." Of course, northern Nigeria is not

an ungoverned space, it is a poorly governed space. To tackle that, this is, as I mentioned before, really the Nigerian government's responsibility to deal with. I think most people feel that they could do better and they could do more. So we have a real diplomatic challenge here in the United States in engaging a very important partner for the United States Government, the Nigerian government, in a responsible way to push them to hold their security forces accountable, to hold their politicians accountable, to provide government services to these poor youth who may be looking for things to do. Basically to help delegitimize the message that al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups are sending out, that Boko Haram is sending out, that this is not an accountable government, that it is full of corrupt politicians who have been influenced and bought off by the west. So it is the different ways that we can find to massage that diplomatic relationship I think that are probably going to be key. Recognizing that the term "ungoverned spaces" and how we get to that with each of these various groups is important. The same thing in Somalia with the Somali Federal Government not really being able to provide enough services to its people, and not being able to at this point in time respond to the current humanitarian crisis there.

Mr. MEEHAN. Thank you.

Mr. PHAM. Mr. Chairman, I just want to make two points. I think one is I think the subcommittee has done a great service by preparing the report it has prepared. Because I think one of the problems I have encountered repeatedly in Africa and studying of violence, extremism, has been biases introduced into the analysis which become hardened so we end up repeating mantras and clichés, and are blindsided when things happen.

So I think raising the question, playing the devil's advocate, I think, is a very useful function. It actually raises our need to understand better this threat. Second point with regard to the designation of Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organization formally under U.S. law, I think we are perhaps a little soon on that in the sense we need to gather a little more information.

However, I think the threat of declaring it a foreign terrorist organization might be useful as a diplomatic tool to push our Nigerian friends to be more proactive and to deal with it, with the threat of the embarrassment of having a declared foreign terrorist organization operating on their soil. Once we acquire the additional information on the organization, understand better its operations, then a designation might also be useful because then we can target those senior officials or others who engage in financing it individually and collectively.

So that presents us with another tool. So as a tool in the toolkit of broader U.S. power, U.S. diplomacy, I think it is something that should be left on the table and perhaps waived to incentivize the type of behavior we seek in greater cooperation.

Mr. MEEHAN. I want to thank each of the members of the panel for your insight. Dr. Pham, thank you for categorizing it in that way, and your identification of really what the objective of the committee is. Part of the report was to begin to frame the question. I think hearings like this allow us to start framing the question and then to take it to the logical conclusion—not logical conclusion, to

be able to ask the next logical questions. First, to give it the right context, and then to ask the questions within the context, as Dr. Laremont, you identified with regard to this continuum that we need to appreciate of this region and the appropriate way we should be asking questions about the environment that is in there right now.

So, this has been very helpful in our continuing effort to try to create the baseline of understanding, which I take from the testimony of each of you is the importance of, and frankly the lack of the real knowledge that we need to have about what is going on in that area, to then legitimately be able to assess the extent to which we have a threat, so to speak, but to understand what the real nature of this relationship is from Boko Haram and the threat that we do appreciate, which is al-Qaeda.

So this has been a very instructive hearing, certainly from the perspective of those of us here in the Congress. I thank you for your efforts, because you are the experts who best understand that region to the extent that we do have knowledge. If there is something for a minute or two that each Member believes we should have as part of the record, I will invite you to make any kind of a closing observation if you think there is something that we missed or an important point that you think we ought to consider moving forward. But it is not necessary. I just, you are a very engaging and knowledgeable panel on an area in which admittedly we don't have enough understanding. So I really want to give you the opportunity to conclude with anything that you think we may be missing or we ought to further consider.

There doesn't have to be. That gives me an opportunity for another long speech. I just want to express my deep appreciation to each and every one of you for your testimony and for the work that you put in preparing for this. There may be questions from time to time that other panelists may have, and I ask you if we do have those and they submit them to you, you do your best to try to be responsive to those for the record.

The record of the hearing will be open for 10 days, which is customary. So without objection, the committee stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:41 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

