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with Brent Bambury

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Four reasons why Nigeria's military can't contain Boko Haram

Thursday, January 15, 2015 | Categories: Day 6 Blog 17

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Amnesty International released [new satellite images](#) this week of a horrific attack in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram militants. Earlier this month, [insurgents rampaged](#) through the town of Baga. Amnesty International says as many as 2000 civilians were killed in more than a dozen towns. Despite having one of the continent's biggest and best-funded militaries, Nigeria's army couldn't fight off Boko Haram. What explains that? Brent asks [Chris Ngwodo](#), Nigerian writer and political analyst. Here are four reasons why Nigeria's military can't contain Boko Haram.

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1. Nigeria's army isn't trained to fight insurgencies

According to Chris Ngwodo, Nigeria has consistently misread the nature of the threat from Boko Haram at both the military and political levels. He says the army is struggling to prosecute a counterinsurgency campaign which it was never designed or trained to fight. "The Nigerian military is a classical fighting force," says Ngwodo. "It just has found itself out of its depth when it comes to dealing with an irregular fighting force such as Boko Haram." Because Nigeria came out of three decades of military dictatorship, Ngwodo says its defensive and security strategies were developed to protect the regime in power, not to protect the nation-state and its citizens.

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2. Not enough equipment and resources



Although the Nigerian military is one of the largest and well-funded in Africa, soldiers have frequently found themselves outgunned against Boko Haram militants. Nigeria's defence budget was \$5.8 billion in 2014, and its military includes conventional weapons as well as fleets of jets, drones and helicopters. Ngwodo says they are all being used by Nigerian forces, but that soldiers say they don't cut it. "They [soldiers] do not feel that they have been resourced well enough to engage the enemy on equal footing," says Ngwodo. He says the result has been considerable discontent among soldiers on the frontlines. In December, a court martial [sentenced 54 Nigerian soldiers to death](#) for mutiny.

3. Corruption keeps weapons from getting to the frontlines



Ngwodo says corruption and financial misappropriation among Nigeria's top officials prevent Nigerian troops from getting the resources they need to adequately counter Boko Haram. Money that should go toward weapons or materials for soldiers may instead be end up in the pockets of senior government and military officials. "The very high levels, where strategic direction and armament procurement for the war effort are being directed - that's where you would be looking to understand exactly how these resources are allocated. Basically, it's a question of following the paper trail," says Ngwodo.

4. The US won't sell Nigeria arms over human rights concerns

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The United States **says the Leahy Law** prevents it from providing military arms to countries with a record of human rights violations. But Ngwodo says Nigerians see this argument as selective, pointing to the U.S. offering military aid to countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt which also have histories of human rights abuse. "We find a lot of hypocrisy in this kind of posturing by the United States. The Nigerian perspective is that that argument does not hold water," says Ngwodo.

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David in Alberta

"The United States says the Leahy Law prevents it from providing military arms to countries with a record of human rights violations."

Saudi Arabia. The United States makes exceptions for those with money. Saudi Arabia consistently and openly violates human rights in a systematic way.

31 minutes ago 0 Likes

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robinwood60

The big problem. Mr Good luck Jonathan. The army is only there to protect him and the other looters of Nigeria.

49 minutes ago 1 Like

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J7J7J7

Corruption...
Swiss number account
France Riviera beach house
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Jill Kirchmann

I don't understand how the Nigerian army were, in large part, responsible for ending the civil war in Sierra Leone but they can't fight Boko Haram? They seemed successful in combatting RUF, which was hardly "classical fighting". I know that this is over-simplifying two very complex issues but I just fail to see how the Nigerian Army are so ineffective.

1 hour ago 2 Likes

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GregNixon

Excuses excuses excuses. Sounds like Nigeria really does not care to defend itself and will eventually be over run by muslim terrorists.

2 hours ago 1 Like

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Nivo

I think the reality here is it's just too many conflicts to deal with.

Islamic aggression is happening in Africa, all in the name of creating a caliphate. Islamic aggression is happening all over Asia between Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Phillipines with the same goal. We have a new area regarded as a caliphate in Syria/Iraq, where does one start?

Let's not forget to blame the Christians while we're at it though.

2 hours ago 1 Like

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milkweed ...

Looking ahead, who does it really benefit if the world allows Boko Haram to gradually take over Nigeria and then surrounding countries? Why are villages not provided with arms and military support to protect themselves? I don't believe that the futility now is just the result of high-up officials being greedy.

2 hours ago 0 Likes

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polypeptidepunk

UN Security Council needs to get off its collective A** and act. Unfortunately, China has veto power and would block any kind of direct military intervention in Africa as they've got many economic interests in the region.

3 hours ago 2 Likes

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ducimus1

I have been involved over the years in multiple training missions (or capacity building) with militaries in the Caribbean, Central America and Africa. Despite our best efforts it is difficult to overcome the corruption and culture that can only be described as a malaise. We could only give them the tools and show them how they are to be used but the rest was up to them and quite often when we returned for follow up training they had reverted to their previous standards. It was very much a case of... » more

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tapilot

@Norm Head

If you do not fund their military, nations such as Nigeria cease to exist within a few years.

3 hours ago 0 Likes

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NewsDisector

@Norm Head

So with that line of thinking Boko Haram will eventually overrun Nigeria. How else is Nigeria going to defend themselves against a superior military? Boco Haram are certainly not going to throw all their weapons away and stop killing when you ask them nicely.

I subscribe to the motto, walk softly and carry a big stick.

Our thriving democracies in the west have been build on the blood of millions that were willing to stand up and die for it.

Almost 1 million Canadians fought in... » more

3 hours ago 3 Likes

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ducimus1

There was an interview with an exiled Nigerian politician yesterday in which he state the current government is deliberately underfunding the military in anticipation of the upcoming election out of fear it will try and influence the outcome.

4 hours ago 0 Likes

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