



Nigeria and the Al-Qa'ida Challenge: National, Regional, and Global Implications

March 23, 2012

Published by



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Arlington, Virginia, USA 22203
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Program

The latest terrorist attacks in France underscore the al-Qa'ida's continuing brutalization of democracies. A decade after 9/11 a serious strategic challenge is the expanding globalization of jihadist networks. The intensification of violence in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, and the world's eleventh largest oil producer, is triggered by Boko Haram ("Western Education is Forbidden"). Its aim is to promote Salafist ideology not only in Nigeria itself but possibly in other countries in the region and beyond. Its collaborative links are evident with AQIM, al-Shabaab, and other Middle East terrorist affiliates.

These unfolding terrorist developments pose security and economic dangers to the international community and therefore require public dialogue on threat assessments and strategic responses in the coming months and years. The distinguished panel of participant-observers will offer analysis on the political, social, and economic context of Nigeria, Boko Haram's profile (origin, modus operandi, foreign connections, etc.), the regional and inter-regional implications, and recommendations for short and long-term responses.

Date:

Friday, March 23, 2012

12:00Noon – 2:00PM

Place

The Potomac Institute for Policy Studies
901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 200
Arlington, VA 22203
(Ballston Metro Station, Orange Line)

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Selected Proceedings:

Prof. Osita Ogbu

Visiting Fellow, Africa Growth Initiative, Brookings Institution; Former Economic Advisor to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and Former CEO, National Planning Commission (Minister of Planning)

Jennifer G. Cooke

Director, Africa Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Prof. Gwendolyn Mikell

Professor of Anthropology and Foreign Service, Georgetown University

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Thank you very much, good afternoon. First and foremost let me express my gratitude for this invitation. I am a visiting fellow at Brookings and as an economist I am wondering what am I going to say about security issues?

Let me say, first and foremost, the idea that the Washington policy community is actually determined to discuss Nigeria and terrorism issues is one we should not take for granted as Nigerians. We are very grateful for this, that you are spending some intellectual capital on this matter. But I also wanted to say that I hope that it is not only the issue of terrorism that should bring us together to discuss the multiple challenges that Nigerian and other African countries face. And that we should be able and must, as people that have a common humanity, come together to discuss other challenges as they arise, or even before they arise. And the challenges are many, and there are also successes too that we must talk about. So when we discuss terrorism, let us remember the wider context in which they exist.

Having listened to the Ambassador and Gus I think mine will be to add a footnote, because I think the Ambassador already covered what I would like to say. When I came in I thought I would be alone in trying to situate this discussion within the context of economic justice and poverty and all that. I can see that this is really a widely held view of what is happening in Nigeria.

On some of those issues I will dare to make a few suggestions. I started to ask myself whether I would eventually make the leap between Boko Haram and al-Qa'ida and whether in fact the evidence has been rigorously interrogated. I say this because, yes, the tactics might be the same, they are applying the same methods, sort of, but I think we must be careful, because once we make the leap and link Boko Haram to al-Qai'da the narrative will change. And if that narrative changes, the solutions will change. So I think it is important for us to understand the domestic origin of Boko Haram and how it remains very much a domestic issue and should be addressed as such without losing sight of the fact that they might be gaining influence and perhaps making links with other terror groups such as al-Qa'ida. As they say, the hood does not make the monk.

Let's look at a bit of history that you all know, Boko Haram was formed in 2002 in the northeast of Nigeria. There is a reason I decided to talk about their history. They were not actually radicalized until 2009. It was a group very much like what you have now with the Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa. It was opposed to huge gaps and there were other coincidences as well. In 1999-2000, if you guys remember, there was a movement to establish sharia in the northern part of the country and we never really understood why, but, I think, people are beginning to reason and question, why was this clamor? Because it was a clamor, popular clamor, for the implementation of sharia in northern Nigeria. We remember that when the group

that came to implement in Kano arrived they were well received in Kano. It was a way to tell us something was the signal for saying “Hmm, we have never been happy with what has been happening, we want an alternative system.”

And when the implementation of sharia failed as it did because if you steal goat you are going to have your hand chopped, but if you steal billions as a governor you are going to go free. It led and fed into the emergence of groups like Boko Haram, that here could be an alternative to the corrupt system. That was the reality. So you found a group that says ok, we are going to do things for ourselves. We will create our own schools, build our own clinics and that was beginning to happen between 2002 and 2009 until their leader was killed in a brutal fashion and the group indeed became radicalized. I think it is important for us to understand that aspect of sharia law were implemented predominantly in the 12 states that Gus had referred to, where poverty was most prevalent. So one can see clearly that the environment essentially, poor governance and the open defiance of authority and government gave birth to Boko Haram.

Someone wrote recently on the interpretation of book Haram, because this debate, as we speak here, is also going on in Nigeria. Boko Haram was interpreted to mean Western education or Western civilization is bad. And one interpretation that has been given to it is not to be literal about interpretation. It is to say, if all these people in power, over the years are Western educated, are products of Western civilization and they cannot solve our problems, perhaps there is another civilization that can rescue us.

So it is not the literally interpretation that Western education is bad, they are questioning the products of these education that are oppressing them. It also happens, of course, that the tactics of this groups has become one that we must all condemn. You can achieve these aims through other means. And we will have to get back to that and the parallel I draw is, as I was making my notes I said, let me look at the history of the Muslim world. If you go back to Egypt and when they were forming the Muslim Brotherhood, the ideas were the same with the non-violent Boko Haram. But now they have become legitimate. They are now forming governments, they won the election in Egypt and I think they are in power in Turkey and so on.

Let me also say that there have been other forms of challenges to the state that are not Boko Haram. And I think the ambassador was alluding to this. And they do not get quite the attention they deserve, because we are very reactive, we are not pre-emptive. In 2009 a band of young, defiant, we will call them armed robbers, seized a town in southeast Nigeria. A university town. For almost a whole day, they wanted to rob a set of banks and they did. But what was significant in the classical Robin Hood manner, they robbed and came out and they were distributing the money and they were being cheered on by the populace. The reason why you cannot call it an ordinary robbery is that they were not in a hurry to escape. They walked, they were cheered on, the crowd followed them, and they did a detour out of their way to a police station, which you can call a suicide mission, because a police station is supposed to have arms. a But what they did was go out of their way to attack the police station and they burned it down. What they were saying was: we want to attack any symbol of the state. We are not really here to steal money as such, because like I said, they were cheered, they were distributing it and in the process they actually killed the divisional police officer, as we call the head of the police in that area. And the question remains how they would know, we suspect that someone in the crowd might have

identified the police because he was not in a police uniform. And so surely again, the cheering populace, were in fact almost saying: “Yes, you are doing well in attacking the state.”

The ambassador has referred to this level of disenchantment that we see in Nigeria, especially in the second tier of governance. So, the attack on the instruments of the states seem to be a bit illegitimate in the eyes of the people and I want to ask why? Well the recent results that has come out from the poverty census tells a bit of the story. Nigeria is growing and has been growing for the past six, seven years between 6 to 7 percent and, guess what? Poverty got worse by about six percent in the same period. From 54 percent that it was in 2004 when we did the last survey, to 2010 when did last survey was done we moved from 54 percent to 61.

In fact there is a piece I have just done on how to grow an economy and reduce poverty at the same time. Some of what is innovative in this paper comes the roles the second and third tier of government should play. Nigerian has thirty six state governments and seven hundred and seventy four local governments. The federal government takes 52 percent of the centrally collected revenue, 48 percent of the revenue is shared by the states and local governments. And in fact we do make the point that the federal government is both strong and weak. It has strengths in the sense that it controls the enormous resources, which is becoming a problem, because there are actions that can lead to corruption and so on. But it is also weak, because there is no platform and no useful links for controlling what happens at the state and local governments. In fact a governor can tell the president not to show up in my state if that is what he wants. And so there is a lot of frustration among the citizens at that level. When we say the election has been free and fair, yes, we are speaking in relative terms. It should be understood that local governance decisions of who is going to govern and who is going to represent the people are still made somewhere else, not by the people. So I think our partners, the U.S. government, the international community, we still have a lot of work to do in the democratization process. So that people will have other avenue and channels of expressing themselves. So that the groups and citizens would have a sense of belonging. I think that is part of the issues that we must understand.

The other misconception I want to clear is that sometime the narrative is presented as if Nigeria has Muslim north and Christian south. That is not very correct, the north has a lot of Christians. Quite a number. Some statistics tell us that 50 percent of the southwestern Nigeria are Muslims. So how come we do not see this?, If Boko Haram is a Muslim-Christian or Christian-Muslim conflict, then this just does not fit. The radicalization of some elements of the Muslims in the north has deep roots in resentment of the deep poverty and economic conditions that exist. And even the elite in the north, all of us in Nigeria, cannot escape the blame. For too long we have just let it be, so we have created two nations in one. And as Gus and the Ambassador have said, this is an issue that requires urgent attention.

I must say that there are new developments that are a bit encouraging. And that is why I begin by questioning the al-Qai'da link, you know al-Qai'da is an analogy, al-Qa'ida does not really lend itself to discussion, because you cannot really pinpoint their grievances, except some national grievance. But at least we are beginning to read that the government through a back channel is trying to reach the Boko Haram and engage them in some discussions. And I think people are going to say, well, “Why do you talk to terrorists?” But given the circumstances we find

ourselves in, it might not be a bad idea if it did, allowing them to place their grievances on the table for a discussion.

Some of our friends, intellectuals and others in the media have also asked the question, “Is this a crisis of the nation building?” Nigeria has known, since 1999, the ideas of democracy. Quite frankly our democracy is still mimicking the military regime. The governor is a sole administrator and the institutions that are supposed to check the governor is controlled by the governor.

So again, we must insist on paying attention to what is happening at this level, at the States and local governments. In fact, if you look at the local government chairman, selected not through any popular mandate, what do expect with respect to the persons sensitivity to the delivery of services to the citizens at that level. How can we then assist the federal government to be able to deal with this issue of performance monitoring? How can we establish a platform that allows for the Federal government that is hamstrung by the constitution to begin to reach into the performance and evaluate how the states of the federation are working. And these are areas which we are beginning to invest our human capital in.

On the international dimension of Boko Haram , I think that has already been covered, in the sense that Nigeria is not just an important player, close to 160 million people, fourth largest exporter of oil to the United States, eighth largest producer of oil in the world. And contributes to peacekeeping all over the world and so on and so forth. But I think that if the Nigerian attention, as it is right now, is diverted from real development to security, there is the danger of diverting attention from creating jobs and dealing with poverty. So Boko Haram is a major distraction. The earlier we resolve this, the better we are able to get back to the real issues of development and deal with the challenges that Nigeria faces. My sort of parting short comes from Condoleezza Rice’s book “No Higher Honor,” memoir of her eight years in Washington, DC. And I want to quote what she said: “While freedom and democracy sustain each other, they are not the same thing. Democracy is both a process and a system of governance that protects freedom. The process is begun with the elections- the first step towards stable democracy. The harder task is to construct institutional arrangements that define the relationship of the individual’s rights to the state’s authority, and sustain the contract over time”. We are still in the process of constructing these institutional arrangements in Nigeria.

From military to civilian regimes, and the inheritance of constitution that was basically written under the direction of the military to the institutions of democracy that are fragile, here is where we have a lot of work to do. And until we address this very important issue, the institutional arrangements that guarantees people’s right, I think it will be very difficult for us to fully, fully grasp these security and developmental challenges and dimensions. And I must end by saying that the reason why Boko Haram would like to be linked to al-Qa’ida is because it increases their awe and increases the fear that they are injecting into the system. The government also likes the link, as a matter of fact, because it does say “Look, it is beyond us,” when in fact the tools with which we are going to deal with them might be within. So why do we invest this human capital which is useful in order to understand what’s going on in Nigeria and the nature of the incentives that drives them? I think it’s important for us to pay attention, to rebuild these institutions and to know that elections are not enough. Thank you very much.

Jennifer G. Cooke:

Director, Africa Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Thank you very much to the organizers and to the audience. I feel there aren't a whole lot of gaps left to fill at this point, and as people were talking I was ticking off some of the points that I wanted to make. I wanted to start with the point the Professor made last. I think we have to be very conscious about too precipitously connecting dots that are there, because if you miss a dot you'll get a circle instead of a square, and I think we may jump too quickly to the wrong conclusions and that may then make us miss opportunities and solutions that might be there. I think the point is important that to too quickly link Boko Haram to al-Qa'ida may give the government a certain way an out. And I'm not putting the onus of the problem of Boko Haram entirely on the government, but think we should be careful about that as we analyze the Nigerian context and in addressing both al-Qa'ida in Maghreb and Boko Haram. We may ultimately emphasize the wrong solutions or overemphasize one solution at the cost the other. So I think that was an extremely important point that both the Professor and Augustine made.

There is evidence and, you know, I do not have access to classified information, but it's pretty intuitive that there are links between the two in terms of training, in terms of escalation of tactics, the sophistication of tactics, and so forth. But I think that most analysts agree that the objectives are quite different, and that Boko Haram remains very much focused on Nigerian-specific objectives. And I think that's important to keep in mind.

On the other hand what do we mean when we say Boko Haram? Boko Haram itself is very fractured, I think there's a tendency, as the Ambassador said at the outset, to attribute anything bad that happens to Boko Haram, or for ordinary criminals to take on the label of Boko Haram to kind of fly under that umbrella. So Boko Haram is fractured, it's ambiguous, there is clearly a core perhaps of ideologues who were attached to the founder, Yusuf, who may be more religiously hardline in some ways. There are reportedly links with northern politicians both in Maiduguri, but perhaps also politicians with national ambitions who are using Boko Haram, maybe supporting Boko Haram, to make the Jonathan administration look ineffective. The administration itself has said there are Boko Haram loyalists within the government. (That's a pretty shocking admission without a whole lot of follow-up action I have to say, and that's troubling itself.) And then there are there the criminal elements, the bank robbers, perhaps now the kidnappings, which is part of the newer phenomena, although it's not, again, entirely clear that it was Boko Haram who conducted the kidnapping or, again, that this was kind of opportunistic crime who eventually sold the hostages over to the Boko Haram or al-Qa'ida in the Maghreb.

Al-Qa'ida in the Maghreb too is very much fractured. The origins were very much ideological, focused initially on Algeria. As Algeria was successful in tamping down the challenge, it moved down into the Sahel. I think there, there are ideological elements, surely, but there are opportunistic, kind of money-making criminal networks who work in quasi-alliance with the ideologues and I think it's important to keep in mind. The common cause between al-Qa'ida in the Maghreb and Boko Haram is not entirely clear, although it's been made clear that there is a certain ripeness there in terms of the narrative taking root among disenfranchised, angry, and resentful northern youth.

The kidnapping phenomenon whether again for ideological reasons or money raising issues does pose a major challenge.

The frequency of the attacks, which frankly have killed many more Muslims in the north than Christians, this is something that has to be dealt with in the immediate term. There is a security response that is needed, a hard and immediate security response. But that response has to be nuanced, it has to be calibrated, and it has to be couched within a much broader national response.

Intelligence sharing, intelligence within Nigeria I think has been a major failing. Boko Haram is not brand new but I think it was somewhat dismissed in the early years, even after the killing of Yusuf who was extra-judicially killed by police forces, there was never full investigation into that. The movement kind of went underground at that point, it was quiescent for a while. There wasn't any real follow-up. It's not clear why this was not earlier on the Nigerian radar screen. Intelligence collection also requires strong policing capacities; the Ambassador made the point about policing. Our tendency in the United States to focus on the military, that is also Nigeria's tendency, to send the military when other security forces will not do. Militaries are not best suited for this kind of effort, for community engagement, for gaining cooperation. The military has a not entirely positive reputation in Nigerians often being sent into situations, again, they were not suited, and very ham-handed, very heavy-handed. But the police would be, in this instance, totally ineffectual, I think. The police have been for many decades underfunded and kind of the poor brother of the military. You see, police up in the northern states kind of rat-tag, often shaking people down for money because they are not getting adequately paid. Policing has never been taken as seriously as it should be in Nigeria. And that's the case in much of Africa, I think, as well. The police force is a federal force and police are often deployed into areas where they don't really know the language, with local communities they're not familiar with, they don't know really who's who and they are largely mistrusted. Here in the United States most of the time you tell your kid: "If you are in trouble, run to the policeman." In Nigeria it's just "Get out of there and go to somebody else, anybody but police!" That whole culture of policing, I think it's something that Nigerian and many other African states need to take more seriously. I also think it is something that the United States should support (and CSIS has written a bit about this, needs to get its head around in terms of how do we do this better). Many bureaucratic obstacles to that, it's been something of the missing link of some of our security engagement here.

The communities again are extremely important. I was interested to hear Augustine saying that Boko Haram maybe gaining popularity among certain groups. My impression had been that it hasn't garnered that much popular support at this point. And that is an extremely important advantage for Nigerian government to hang on to if it can, and if it's losing that, it spells real trouble I think going forward. Just because the community does not support Boko Haram that doesn't mean it has been necessarily cooperative with the Nigerian government, and that's because police, military go in with heavy-handed tactics, broad brush strokes, arresting, shooting, really alienating the community much further. Those are the kind of things and responses that will turn the average Nigerian, who is not getting a good response from the government, is unemployed, very little hope of employment or participation and then being

beaten up by the security forces. That's not the kind of relationship that you want to have with your citizens if you are trying to win their cooperation.

At the national scale, I think, the notion of having a national narrative and a strategic communication, has been notably absent in Nigeria, unfortunately. The elections were technically among the best, considered them the freest and fairest, with big problems but improvements from 2003, vast improvement from 2007. But actually the aftermath was the most violent of all three of those elections, particularly in the North. I was deployed up to Sokoto during the elections. Buhari the northern candidate, won obviously in that state and there was vast jubilation, hundreds of young men running in the streets celebrating. The next days or two days later when the national results were announced they went on the rampage, interestingly targeting the sultans of Sokoto's home, who was seen, as many of traditional religious leaders in the north are seen, as too close, colluding, with the government, a government that is perceived as corrupted, that has delivered to very little to the people.

And I think this again--so much has been said today-- but I think the government will need to set out a compelling story of what is going to do going forward for the economies of the north. Northern mainstays of agriculture and manufacturing have essentially collapsed over the many decades since the independence as everybody focused their eye on the oil sector. So levels of employment, poverty, malnutrition and so forth are much higher in the north. But I think that's something that fundamentally the government is chipping away at in some ways. There are investments in mining and trying to get something going on agricultural issues and so forth, but they are not conveying that in a way that's compelling.

Augustine recommended a point-person for northern affairs. Nigeria has to be careful about that. There's often a tendency to, "OK, let's appoint a commission to look at northern affairs." There've been a gazillion commissions studying the Niger Delta which has a whole other set of problems, but very little has been delivered. And I think, my hope is that the current crisis really galvanizes Nigerian leadership, and that's the political leadership, that's opinion leaders, that's also the religious leadership to say "Something fundamentally has to shift here." We need a new political narrative, a new national narrative to develop kind of a new sense of nationhood that is different from what's gone before. I think the U.S. needs to tread very carefully in this. Because the security responses from the Nigerian government have been so unpopular, I think we want to be very careful about not aligning us ourselves too closely with that and not getting caught up in that hard security response. But I think there are a kind of specialized responses in counter insurgency, in intelligence collection, in community policy, there are specific skills we can be trying to work with the Nigerians on.

I am going to keep it short because we are almost out of time. Just a word on Mali, I think that the coup in Mali has been a huge step back for Mali's democracy, its reputation. It's also a big step back in the fight against AQIM. The Touareg rebellion and their response to that had already distracted the Mali government away from the fight against AQIM and now with the military assistance to be suspended by European Union, by France, by the United States, you are going to have a big vacuum there. The fallout from Libya, and the potential impacts on Mali, having a vacuum with Mali at this point bodes no good for Nigeria nor for any other states of the region.

I'm going to leave it at that to give Gwen time to speak. Thank you very much.

Gwendolyn Mikell

Professor of Anthropology and Foreign Service, Georgetown University

Thank you. Sometimes it's good to come last and sometimes it's really terrible to come last, because everything has been said. I think that our presenters have been just absolutely wonderful.

I thought that I would be the lone voice here talking about the importance of coming at this issue from the ground up and I find that indeed lots of people here are on the same wavelength. I had entitled mine "Closing the Gaps: Institution Building against Terrorism in Nigeria" and we already hear that theme coming out from a number of our presenters. So when I think about what we have tended to call the "arch of instability" across the Maghreb and the Sahel, my tendency was, as many of you also said, to say: "Yes, it's there, but let's not exaggerate it." Sub-Saharan African countries are not quite the same as the Maghreb and portions of the Sahel. There is another dynamic present in terms of people's relations to community and people's relations to the state that may make it more difficult for al-Qa'ida in the Maghreb to actually penetrate in a way that it obviously is desiring and attempting to do.

So while I know that we need to heighten the capacity to do the hard security that you are talking about—its really very important – it is also essential that we think in terms of the soft power approach, the soft security approach. And why do I say this? I say this because I do not interpret Boko Haram to be radically different from the earlier movements that we saw in the northern areas of Nigeria. In the 1980s you had the Yan Tatsine movement talking about the "evil state," the "sinful state," and the horrible northern Muslim millionaires who cared little for their own. That narrative is picked up and continued in the Boko Haram. What's changed, I think, is something that you've pinpointed: it is the flow of arms and of weapons that now come down into the Sub-Saharan area as a result of the Arab Spring and the successful containment of the authoritarian regimes in the north. Of course, the northern containment was really a good thing. But you are absolutely right, whoever said this – was it you, Professor – that the impact for Nigeria and a number of other states is negative in the sense that those who have an anti-state narrative before, now have more resources with which to implement the anti-state rhetoric. And that's a big problem.

But I'm an anthropologist, and anthropologists always think that your problem is never just at the state level; your problem is also at the intermediary level and your problem is at the grass roots level. So I am going to fall back on one of my mentors here, Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, who was in residence at Princeton. One of the things he did was to come up with book called *Interpretations of Culture*. One of the chapters in that book was focused on what he called "The Integrative Revolution: the primordial sentiments and the politics in new states." That was really critical, because what he says is that these young states like Nigeria do indeed have a problem of identity groups that have not seen themselves as connected to each other in the past even though they were connected and had interlinked interests, in economic trading, and many other ways. But the building of a new state requires something that is going to give these identity groups a means and give them a mechanism and give them a narrative on why it is they should work together.

Geertz talked about what he called the “domestication of these primordial sentiments.” How are you going to put these people together in a way that helps them to understand that their interests are really served by working with each other? Institution building, is what he was describing, and of course that’s something we are all talking about now. This is the necessity to build the kinds of institutions within Nigeria that have not been there before for the reasons that you all gave. The earlier military governance did not contribute to the construction of these kind of coherent governance institutions, or construction of institutions of civil society that can have productive dialogue with your state institutions. The real challenge, I think, is for us to figure out how we can work with Nigeria to do some of the things that I hear them saying that Goodluck Jonathan and others want to do, which is to push down to the local level this kind of institution building and dialogue, so that you build the connections that are needed.

I am going to take us back in order to move forward, and point out that Boko Haram is picking up on something significant but marginal in these northern areas. Jennifer and I, and many others were there in 2003 for something that was called “A Dialogue on Islam” and it was co-sponsored by the Kano Emirate and the American Embassy. They called together people from the Kano Emirate, scholars from the northern universities, Americans from NGOs and academic institutions in the U.S. This was in 2003 before the invasion of Iraq. The goal was to really see what 9/11 meant to the Nigerians. And we found some very interesting things, because they were saying “We are not like the radicals that are north of us. We are moderates.” But we are also looking at and listening to the language of the street

Of course, they were talking about the Yan Tatsine movement, and other before it that we had seen in the North. And the language of that street was a harsher language. It was a language that is very critical of what you, the US, has done and what we, the Nigerian state, have done. And if you invade Iraq that language is going to shift. While it’s never going to be the al-Qa’ida language, it is going to become a dangerous language that can be exploited. I thought that was a really amazing set of insights for us. But, of course we invaded Iraq, and of course the language of the street shifted, and of course it presented new opportunities for Boko Haram.

But there are limits to that harsh language, because the ordinary folk in the Northern communities, are not backing this kind of radical anger. I think both Muslims and Christians, north and south share this sentiment, which is against what Boko Haram stands for. But one of the things we have to deal with is their perception that we have never favored Northern Muslims; that we, the United States, have always been interested in southern Christians, that we, the United States, are only interested in oil; that we, the United States, will only move in to assist strategies for the Niger Delta, that were effective in limiting that crisis so that the pumping of oil would proceed without difficulty. This is that narrative, and the question is: what is Nigeria going to do about that narrative? What we are going to do about that narrative?

I think there were opportunities for reconciliation that were lost in 2007 with the execution of the leader of Boko Haram when the military moved in a dramatic way; and other opportunities were lost again in 2009, when the state moved against them in a dramatic way. So the question is: what can be done now?

I think one of the things that needs to be done now is to help build up the institutional capacity – Nigeria’s institutional capacity, to deal in a multi-level way with communities across Nigeria so that you build an alternative narrative. This alternative is “Yes we the state are interested in the absence of education in your communities, we are interested in the absence of medical facilities, we interested in having a dialogue with you about we can do something to change that.” Something that is not coming from above, but it’s actually taking place on multiple levels. I call it “governing collaboratively.” That means it’s happening also from the bottom up. Nigerian civil society is enormously capable. We discovered this in the 1990’s during the regime of General Sani Abacha when the pro-democratic forces in the south – we didn’t fund anymore though the state – were identified, and we funded the NGOs in the south. The pro-democracy movement was enormously effective. So when Abacha died in 1998, God rest his soul, then the people who could move forward were from a civil society that was stronger and was much more vibrant. But civil society was stronger and more vibrant in the south, as opposed to the north. Now we need to begin to move in a way that helps rebuild the balance between north and south in institutional capacity. Nigerians are aware of this and there have been some interesting overtures.

One of the things that is happening, is that the Nigerian Governors Forum came to us at Georgetown University about two years ago, and said “We are the governors of all the 36 states. And we really need to know more training for our staff about how we can govern effectively, how we can begin to build the kinds of structures that enable us to interact with our public, interact with civil servants, address grass roots issues that are arising. So we got started with them, planned a training program with a series of meetings that would happen once in Washington and once out there, with six states at a time, diverse groups and representatives from the states. Then, that would happened again next year, so that you get representatives from all 36 states, sitting down together in training with each other – north, south, east, west. Well, elections came, and they were wonderful transparent elections. But the difficulties that were evident afterwards were heightened northern feelings of exploitation and southern feelings of concern and fear about Boko Haram. I suspect this has made it more difficult for the Nigerian Governors Forum to move forward in a way that I think they wanted to do and that would be enormously effective.

How do we continue to do other kinds of institution-building? I think that it is important for us to enable the kinds of civil society mechanisms that encourage the dialogue between state and the local levels. For example, on the U.S. side, Jennifer comes from CSIS, we belong to the Council on Foreign Relations, we have Brookings, Georgetown University, we have all of these mechanisms that bring representatives of government together with representatives of policy organizations, foundations, and civil society. Yet, you don’t have that same complex of civic organizations in Nigeria that will allow the kinds of dialogues that are extremely productive. Issues that we have in the U.S. related to security, get argued out in our forums. It is very difficult to argue out those kinds of issues in Nigeria because the institutions that exist are usually connected to government in some way. There not the private civic society organizations that can encourage this kind of dialogue. Nor have we, I’m thinking in terms of our Bi-National Commission with Nigeria -- nor have we tended to think in ways that would encourage the building up of this kind of institutional strength that helps pair hard security and soft security together in informed ways. Until we do that I think we will continue to have a problem.

I don't know that AFRICOM is the institution through which this should happen. It hasn't happened yet, although AFRICOM is sensitive to the needs. But AFRICOM has limitations, a problem of not bringing humanitarian and military initiatives together in ways that preempt what other civic or private sector institutions can and should do. On the African side, there is deep sensitivity to that as well. So I'm also searching for which venues can be used. I think that at this point, it has to be a conversation between not just our government, but the UK, and Canada, and others with Nigeria. How can we assist them in the kind of institution building that will enable the dialogues that cut through the narrative that Boko Haram has been using rather successfully, even though that narrative is opposed by the majority of Nigerians. Thank you.