

Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis (CPRA) –Pretoria



CPRA Daily Briefings

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The **CPRA Daily Briefings** are held weekday mornings in the CPRA Pretoria's Situation Room and the Briefing Notes are the minutes of this meeting during which each regional expert of the Programme reports on the latest human security developments in his/her region, followed by general discussions around the table. An intern then compiles a summary of the meeting, which is reviewed by the respective researchers, and a senior researcher edits the report and provides quality control before returning it to the intern to prepare it for dispatch to the mailing list to which you have subscribed.

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Summary of Briefings

West Africa

Nigeria's War against Boko Haram: Making Sense of a Troubling Confusion

Remark: This briefing was compiled by Ms Neus Ramis Segui of the Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis division of the ISS Addis Ababa office.

On 3 December, the ECOWAS Early Warning Daily reported that the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Boko Haram Salafist Jihadist group held secret peace talks in Senegal, with officials from Senegal and Mali mediating. *Punch*, a local Nigerian newspaper, was the first to run a report on these apparent mediation talks. The purpose of the negotiations was to find political alternatives to Boko Haram's terrorist activities, which the group has been perpetrating on Nigerian soil since approximately 2009. It is important to recall that Boko Haram has increased the level of violence of its attacks, with a record number of people killed this year (more than 770, according to the Associated Press count). It has also been reported that Boko Haram fighters support jihad in Algeria, Libya, Mali and Somalia, which can have serious implications for the rest of West Africa, and even other non-African countries.

According to the report, the Nigerian government's negotiating team was led by the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Godsdan Orubebe, who is one of President Goodluck Jonathan's closest associates. It is also claimed that the Boko Haram commander insisted that a ceasefire was only possible if the group's terms were met. While these terms were not disclosed in the report, it can safely be assumed that they were identical to the group's usual demands.

These supposed peace talks seem to suggest a troubling confusion in the prevailing government responses to the political violence committed by Boko Haram. First, it demonstrates an ambivalence or incoherence in the government strategy to end Boko Haram's attacks. On one hand, there is a strong military-oriented strategy that has in several cases led to a disproportionate use of force against Boko Haram since the beginning of its attacks. This approach has been supported and promoted by external actors like the European Union (EU). For instance, the reinforcement of the Nigerian army was the main issue discussed during a meeting held recently between the Nigerian Minister of State for Defence and an EU representative.

Second, the legitimacy of the negotiation talks should also be questioned. It is, for example, surprising that there is a negotiation process without a ceasefire having been agreed. Boko Haram is still perpetrating violence in northern Nigeria and the Nigerian security apparatus is still engaged in its campaign against radical Islamist groups. This suggests that these apparent political negotiations are less of a state-led process and more of a political strategy from strong supporters of the President Jonathan as part of his re-election bid for 2015.

Moreover, it may be time to question legitimising the philosophy of Boko Haram, which is based on the repudiation of Western education for societal good. If the ECOWAS report holds validity, then it appears that there is a clear political economy of violence that is manifested in the pattern, manifestation and motives of Boko Haram's activities. The report, for instance, indicated that this group demands the following: compensation for the rebuilding of their houses and mosques demolished by the government, and the release of their detained members. Two recommendations could be suggested: first, the Nigerian government should consider the possibility of moving beyond military-oriented responses, promoting a serious debate through dialogue mechanisms based on a bottom-up strategy that would revolve around identifying the grievances and main claims of Boko Haram's members. Most of those grievances would probably

be shared by other groups across Nigeria (such as the high rate of unemployment, the marginalisation of some groups in the political system, a deficient educative system, and a lack of adequate infrastructures). The management of this pattern of historical economic and social exclusion could be what has prevented violence in Katsina state, a northern state. This ought to be investigated further.

Second, the government approach in addressing this situation should be more 'political' and preventive, based on delivering public goods and services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure and good governance, and on enlarging the participation of citizens in the political and social space, in order to enhance the legitimacy and representativeness of the political system and to promote the rule of law.

Finally, it is clear that Boko Haram is a new dimension in the history and manifestation of political violence in Nigeria. Therefore, a system-wide re-think of the national governance structure remains the most enduring solution for a Nigerian renaissance.

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