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Boko Haram in Context: The Terrorist Organizations's Roots in Nigeria's Social History

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Abstract: *Since May 2013, the federal government of Nigeria has been trying to address the threat of Boko Haram by military means. These operations are ongoing and its details are shrouded in secrecy, but judging by the results, they have so far failed to root out the immediate and ever present threat of terrorist activity in the region, where BH has the apparent ability to strike at will. Our paper proposes a radical solution to the threat of terrorism in Northern Nigeria where the local 'law of the land' prevails as a source of legal jurisdiction and where feudal elements have managed to retain their social and political primacy. Our solution proposes that the tacit Western backing for the traditional Fulani ruling elements, habitual since colonial times, should now be abandoned. The policy of helping traditional emirs might have been well suited for the early-to mid-20th century, but it is now part of the problem instead of a solution. Identifying alternatives to the Fulani aristocracy is a job for intelligence services, building on forces that offer alternatives to the current status quo.*

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Africa, Nigeria, Terrorism in Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, Fulani aristocracy, Joint Task Force*

Introduction

Since May 2013, Nigeria's federal government has kept its special units, the Joint Task Force, in the turbulent North-Eastern States of the country: Yobe, Borno and Adamawa. They made copious use of curfews, and even shut down mobile phone operations in a desperate attempt to gain advantage over extremists claiming affiliation with Islam (*ECAI*) that had previously established those three states as their home base. Government forces bombarded their training camps, and have been trying to hunt down their forces ever since. Although news coming out of the area are unreliable, it seems clear that the region is far from being pacified. Indeed, the insurgency seems to go on and Boko Haram still strikes essentially at will in these three states. Continued military action is obviously a necessity under these circumstances. However, the authors of this article feel that military action has not been properly complemented by the intelligence services of neither Nigeria, nor of friendly nations within the broader international community. We feel that the traditional Western reliance on the local Fulani feudal aristocracy as arbiters of peace and guardians of local custom, a source of law in the form of 'the law of the land' beyond Sharia itself in Nigeria, is outdated and is now a liability for the international community and from the point of view of moderate nations who want to work for the elimination of dangerous radicalism.

Boko Haram

The *ECAI* insurgency and the bloody conflict that finally resulted in May 2013, Nigerian governmental action, Joint Task Force operations and aerial bombardments, had started about a decade earlier, in 2002, when Imam Mohammed Yusuf launched his extremist group the Yusufiyya, complete with mosque and madrasa in Maiduguri (the capital of Borno state – it had been called Yerwa before, in a desert area bordering Chad). The organizations's official name, *Jamaatu ahlis sunna lidda'awaati wal-jihad* (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings and to Propagating Jihad). They are rather known as just *Boko Haram*, a group that claims that Western education is *haram*, sin. Their world view is medieval and arcane, their leader once claiming on a Youtube broadcast that the earth was flat.¹ They ban Western clothes such as trousers and shirts. They abhor the representatives of the Nigerian federal state that they consider ungodly and evil. They attack, kidnap and kill Westerners, representatives of the federal Nigerian state such as policemen, and they murder Muslims that support them, including ones that frequent beauty parlours and bars.

In this essay, we propose an entirely new way of looking at the Boko Haram threat and what the international community should do to address the problems associated with it. We claim that Boko Haram is a perverted version of a social movement that draws its militants from the wells of Northern Nigerian poverty and desperation. Western toleration/collusion with the traditional Northern Nigerian elite has worked for about 110 years. However, the very socio-political system that maintained the status quo and that had brought long lasting peace to Northern Nigeria, has now created its very antithesis, Boko Haram in its womb. We feel that it is time to readdress Western attitudes towards the Northern Nigerian elite and its vested interests.

¹ This video was removed from YouTube at some point between March-May 2013.

Boko Haram (BH) is not an isolated phenomenon and it did not appear out of the blue. Its predecessor was the well known *Maitatsine* grouping and their bloody uprising in 1982-1985.² The Maitatsine riots, and Boko Haram, both sprang up on Northern Nigeria's arid soil, and any foreign involvement (Libyan, Saudi, Malian, or any other) came only later. Northern Nigeria has a very special socio-economic system that maintains its feudal characteristics more than most. As opposed to countries like India (where the princely system was abolished with the president's quasi constitutional *coup de grace* in 1970), in Northern Nigeria, despite reform in 1976, feudalism is a near intact phenomenon. There is a problem of conflict between modern public administration and the traditional way of governing.³ The authors of this article are aware that the very term 'feudalism' may very easily be associated with ideological verbiage, especially the obsolete Soviet-sponsored variety, in the developing world. At the same time, there are some specific loci in this world where the term retains its meaning and validity,⁴ and the authors of this article opine that we ignore this at our peril.

Before embarking on a discussion on why we think BH is the child of Northern Nigeria's specific socio-economic system, we have to ask the question: is there any alternative in Northern Nigeria? Is there anyone else there capable of presenting the West with options, other than the Fulani feudalists and their respective politicians. Our answer to this is 'yes'. There have always been alternatives. In the 1960s and 1970s, those were Mallam Aminu Kano⁵ and the People's Redemption Party, with Balarabe Musa, Yusufu Bala Usman and others. As it happened, they were pushed into the arms of the USSR and its representatives, by the mere fact that they dared challenge Northern Nigeria's medieval socio-political system. This might have been a wise or unwise policy back then, when peace still reigned in Northern Nigeria. Today, however, we see no escaping from a reassessment. Naturally, finding alternatives on the ground is a task for diplomats and intelligence services. However, it is safe to claim even in an academic work such as this that there are nuclei of modernization even among the ethnic Fulani in Northern Nigeria. People who have built Western educational institutions in the North, businesspeople in the modern sectors, and yes, sometimes, perhaps, even opposition figures and trade union representatives. 'Sitting on bayonets' is famously impossible, and irrespective of what President Goodluck Jonathan's current army and air force manouvers bring to Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, a workable system has to emerge in Northern Nigeria, one that is committed to modernization and to – for lack of a better word – what we call enlightenment.

The authors of this article bring not only academic knowledge of Nigeria but hands on local expertise on African and Northern Nigerian matters. Indeed, Lieutenant Colonel Janos Besenyo has served in various capacities in Western Sahara, the Sudan and Afghanistan and wrote books and innumerable articles on peacebuilding in Africa, whilst Adam Mayer has taught for three years at an American University in Northern Nigeria. The latter is currently a site of the ongoing Boko Haram campaign.

² Yusufu Bala Usman, *The Manipulation of Politics in Nigeria*, Vanguard, 1987.

³ Maria Bordas, "Tradition and Modernization in the Public Administration", *Journal of US-China Public Administration*, USA, 2012. pp.10-11.

⁴ Dan Isaacs, "Nigeria's emirs: Power behind the throne", BBC News Africa, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11418542> (accessed 19 September 2010).

⁵ Alan Feinstein, *African Revolutionary – Aminu Kano*, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 1987.

In our introduction, we claimed that Boko Haram is the illegitimate child of Northern feudalism. Let us, before any detailed discussion, furnish the reader with a relevant fact. BH bans trousers and shirts. The Northern Nigerian elite on its part, has lobbied for the abolition of Western style court regalia for justices in federal Nigeria, as something that in their view, ‘denigrated their culture’ for many years now.⁶ No wonder then that members of the Northern elite were the very people that introduced Sharia in Nigerian states (first in Zamfara back in 1999, then in every other Northern state except Adamawa). It is time the international community made a choice against the status quo, before the status quo brings untold misery in the form of a strengthened ECAI insurgency.

Historical Facts

Christianity and Islam both have a long history in Nigeria. Islam arrived in the 14th century from Chad (the first Muslims were the court and courtiers of Idris Aloma *mai* (1571-1603), king of Kanem-Borno. Christianity appeared with the Portuguese in the late 15th century (in its Roman Catholic form), followed by Anglicanism spread by the British (the Episcopal Church in US parlance). From about 160 million Nigerians (estimates range from 130 million to 180 million, due to the complete unreliability of censuses since 1963), half are supposed to be Christian, half Muslim. This is as heavily contested as such figures were in the Lebanon of 1975. From the Christian populace, about 20 million are Catholics, 17 million are Anglicans, six million are Baptists, and the rest belong to various new protestant charismatic churches that are spreading very fast in Nigeria. Most of the Muslims are Sunni. Some claim adherence to Shia Islam, but that phenomenon appeared more as a result of Khomeini’s successes in the late 1970s than any organic development.⁷ Sufi *tarikas* (brotherhoods), were historically strongest in Northern Nigeria, especially at the courts. In 1804, then came Usman don Fodio’s Fulani so called jihad against the Hausa kingdoms with their syncretistic beliefs and ‘infidel’ customs.⁸ Don Fodio established the Sokoto Caliphate, an umbrella empire over the Hausa and Middle Belt emirates, in the region. While not an enlightened ruler, one must make mention of the fact that don Fodio belonged to the Qadiriyya *tarika*.⁹ His version of Islam was still very far from the purism of the Wahabiyya, the Saudi sect that kick-started international political Islamism in its well known current, fundamentalist form. That came to Nigeria only in the 1960s with Abubakar Gummi, Grand Kadi of Northern Nigeria, friend and ally of Saudi Arabia (received the King Faisal Prize for his proselytising activity),¹⁰ aided by the famous Northern Nigerian politician, the sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello (died 1966).

⁶ Ádám Mayer, “A Boko Haram mint biztonságpolitikai veszélyforrás és mint társadalmi jelenség”, *Sereg Szemle*, Oct-Dec 2012, p.138.

⁷ O.P. Joseph Kenny, “Sharia and Christianity in Nigeria: Islam and a “Secular’ State”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXVI, 4, p.344.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 340.

⁹ John Hunwick, “An African Case Study of Political Islam: Nigeria”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 524, Nov 1992, p.153.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.151.

We have to understand that both Christianity and Islam are heavily missionary, proselytising religions in the Nigerian context today. Nigerians take religion very seriously – especially when it comes to protection from *juju*, ostentatious ritual, and as a marker of identity. Religions also serve as emotional aids in the drab reality of contemporary Nigerian life.

Some further factors that strengthen them are that there are almost no formal employment opportunities, no good schools, no private enterprises, no productive economic activity, and not even much subsistence agriculture any more. The North is a place where polio is endemic because Northern women are afraid that polio vaccinations are a Western plot to make Muslims infertile. The North lives with a daunting lack of skills for the 21st century, and a world view that is positively medieval, reinforced by a feudalist elite that takes disproportionately, from the regional cake as Nigeria is a petro state where petro incomes are channeled according to population figures to constituent states of the federation.¹¹

Northern Nigeria underwent waves of Islamization under the Sokoto caliphate, but more surprisingly, under British indirect rule too, when Christian missionary activity was banned, then later allowed but heavily curtailed. The core of Islamization was always the Fulani ethnic group with its herdsmen and its courts and ulama, who constituted a small minority in the sea of local Hausa and Kanuri groups. The Hausas and the Kanuris had their own traditional animistic religions up until the mid-20th century. The South-Western Yorubas, who also have a Muslim element in their midst, still openly retain their old Yoruba religion in some cases. Others however, although they obviously incorporate old customs and beliefs into their actual religious practice, do not confess openly, their adherence to old animistic religions on the whole. Indeed, association with old animistic religions is frowned upon in Nigeria. It is considered not only a sign of backwardness but a sign of moral disrepute. A curious sign of this is the Nigerian attitude to African art: with the partial exception of Calabar and Lagos, African art is considered junk at best, inspired by the devil at worst, by Nigerians themselves. This shows to us very forcefully, how disconnected the Nigerians of today usually are, from their traditional belief systems and their traditional world view.

An interesting addition to the spreading of salafi/wahabi versions of Islam, is the equally striking gains that charismatic Christian churches have made in Nigeria. The single biggest group of Christian denominations in Nigeria today may loosely be defined as Charismatic Protestant. American televangelists often visit the country, and the likes of the Reverend Pat Robertson carry a lot of intellectual weight in the Nigerian South. Indeed, we are compelled to say that significant segments of Nigerian South are under the influence of what is sometimes called ‘Christian Zionism,’ for lack of a better expression. What is especially striking is how political and extremist Islamism and Christian Zionism coexist in the same country. This may well colour the conflict that we are addressing in this article.

Let us now turn our attention to economic and political matters. Nigeria ever since 1960, developed a *prebendal* political economy. This is political science parlance for the understanding that there is no proper distinction between public and private funds as such in Nigeria, and that governmental income gets channelled into the financial pools of clientelistic networks of patronage. During the

¹¹ Ádám Mayer, “A keresztény-muszlim konfliktus Nigériában”, *Sereg Szemle*, January-March 2013, p.140.

democratic periods of modern Nigeria (1960-1966, 1979-1983, 1999-) there have been democratic elections – democratic in form, tribal and prebendal in content. In periods of military dictatorship (1966-1979, 1983-1985, 1985-1993, 1993-1999) contest for elite positions was more limited. One has to make mention of the fact however that in both cases, the Northern elite fared fairly well. Democracy and dictatorship are so indistinguishable in Nigeria that one of its military dictators (Olusegun Obasanjo, late 1970s) reemerged as a civilian president more than two decades later, just to stay on for two terms, and be impeached to prevent a third.

Let us look into Nigeria's political history in some detail. Between 1860 and 1960, Nigeria was a British colony (first a collection of colonies and protectorates). It is almost shocking in its frivolity that Nigeria was given its name by the then girlfriend, of the British high representative Baron Lugard (her name was Flora Shaw, and she named Nigeria thus after the river Niger). Apart from the Sokoto Caliphate in the North that was governed indirectly, through British residents and with a lot of leeway regarding domestic politics, there were the famous marionette kingdoms of the Yoruba, and the acephalous village communities of the Igbo, apart from hundreds of smaller ethno-linguistic groups. Some areas, such as the cities of Lagos and Calabar, were, and have since been, way more advanced than others. The areas that the colonialists referred to as 'the native interior' and especially its Northern Nigerian areas lagged behind those two very considerably. In Northern Nigeria, groundnuts were the most important industrial cash crop that the British collected, marketed and sold abroad. The British built railways in the country (those fell into disrepair after independence – only one line is operational now, having been reopened in early 2013). Independence was achieved by the method of peaceful conference table discussions and was managed by the British.

Independent Nigeria followed the Westminster model until 1978 when military Head of State Obasanjo changed the country's political system to presidential (closely following the U.S. political system). The first prime minister was Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. He concentrated federal power in the hands of the Northern Muslim elite. In January 1966, General Ironsi (a Southern Christian and an Igbo) threw a coup d'état against the government, but in July he himself was counter-couped by Yakubu Gowon, a Northern Christian. There were pogroms in the North against the Igbo, and other Christians.

From 1967 to 1970, the Igbo, led by General Ojukwu, fought a bloody civil war (1 to 2 million dead) for an independent country under the Biafran flag. The Nigerian federal government was propped up with Soviet and Czech armaments and defeated Ojukwu, who only returned to Nigeria decades later, to become an MP (died 2011). After winning the war, Nigeria resumed its strictly pro-American foreign policy stance.¹²

In 1970, In July 1975, Yakubu Gowon was followed by Murtala Muhammed, a Northern Muslim, as military Head of State. Murtala Muhammed was such a tough leader that Nigerian civil servants famously showed up at 7:30 at their desks right on the next day after his successful coup.¹³ An honest administrator, he was quickly murdered in a counter-coup in February 1976. His second in command, Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba Christian, became military Head of State at that

¹² Maxim Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations*, Africa World Press, Asmara, 2003, p.105.

¹³ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Heinemann, London, 1983, p.9.

junction. Obasanjo was not strict, and never became strict, except for his infamously thrifty attitude to his own money. In 1978/1979, it was Obasanjo that changed the Westminster model, establishing 19 states in the new presidentially governed, federal republic. The new Nigerian political system was intended to be a copy of the US system in form – in content, sadly, it seemed closer to its caricature. Obasanjo did abandon military rule, and gave way to democratization in 1979.

Elections were won by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a Northern Muslim, in October 1979. In 1983, Muhammadu Buhari staged a coup against Shagari, and launched his 'discipline campaigns' in the country. He also made steps towards the deregulation of the economy. His successor, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, who ousted Buhari in his own 1985 coup, followed that course, and instituted one of the first IMF-sponsored, neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in sub-Saharan Africa. SAPs were more than a fiasco: they obliterated almost the entire middle class of Nigeria, sharply increasing social disparities.

Buhari and Babangida are both still alive and well, and are both big men, *ogas*, in Nigeria today. Babangida is a billionaire, Buhari is more of an austere Muslim and a soldier committed to simple living. So once again there is a problem of the culture of governance¹⁴ and efficient state,¹⁵ especially when we consider their influence.

In 1993, Babangida finally allowed for democratic elections. Those were won by Mashood Abiola, a Southern businessman, but since Abiola was disfavoured by Babangida, the latter appointed Ernest Shonekan instead as president. Defense minister Sani Abacha successfully launched a coup and toppled both, and became Nigeria's most infamous dictator. An introvert by nature, Sani Abacha had no qualms about how to run the country. Abacha made Nigeria an international pariah state with his reckless theft and philandering (according to John Campbell, his death was not exactly 'a coup from heaven'¹⁶ but rather administered by his enemies). Abdulsalami Abubakar assumed power upon Abacha's death, giving way to a reactivated Obasanjo in 1999. There were, at that point, already 36 states in Nigeria. In 1999, Zamfara state instituted Sharia. Obasanjo's party, the People's Democratic Party, has entered the ranks of power and has stayed in power ever since democratization in 1999. The PDP won national elections for the second time in 2007. After Obasanjo was not allowed to run for office for the third time, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a Muslim Northerner, became president. He died in 2010, leaving his vice president Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta, in command of the country. Jonathan won a presidential election in 2011. His success alienated the North, where it was believed that after Obasanjo's long reign, a Northern (Muslim) President was their right (there is indeed a tacit agreement within the ruling PDP to that effect).¹⁷ This has created unease and irritation with the federal government in Northern circles. So much so that even after thousands of Northerners had been murdered by Boko Haram, Northern political leaders urged Jonathan to issue an amnesty to Boko Haram's fighters.

¹⁴ Mária Bordás, *Corruption Risk Analyses – Development of Integrity-Based Administrative Culture Study in the Collection of Essays Published by the Hungarian State Audit Office Budapest 2012*. pp.20-22.

¹⁵ Mária Bordás, *The Economics of Public Administration – the Possibilities and Dilemmas of Economic Governance*, Textbook Unió Lap- és Könyvkiadó Kft. Budapest, 2009. pp.10-11.

¹⁶ Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen – Midnight in Nigeria*, Public Affairs, New York, 2000, p.5.

¹⁷ Aljazeera ed. Nigeria sets presidential poll date, *Aljazeera* on line, 07 September 2010, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2010/09/201097165121193355.html>, (accessed 04 October 2014).

Boko Haram in Operation

Boko Haram itself might not be as interesting as the colorful characters that inhabit Nigerian politics. BH leaders have been dour, their ideology bizarre, their savage attacks despicable. Their tactics have been so merciless and so unmindful of ‘collateral damage’ that their own splinter group, Ansaru, would in time scold them for their lack of consideration for the umma – a reference to the fact that BH has killed thousands of Muslims.

Boko Haram shows very interesting similarities with the Maitatsine uprising of 1982. The Maitatsine movement’s imam and quasi-prophet Buba Marwa, a.k.a. Maitatsine (his jihadist name) led riots that killed almost five thousand people, and stirred the entire region of Maiduguri, Kaduna, Yola, Gombe, and made tens of thousands homeless. The great Northern Nigerian historian Yusufu Bala Usman wrote a penetrating analysis on *The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria*, focussing, among other things, on the Maitatsine uprisings. The commonalities with BH are striking, including a dark undercurrent of rumours on the involvement of political actors in financing both uprisings.

Boko Haram, since 2009, has consistently called for sharia law for the entire country including the Christian south. Subjecting approximately 80 million Southerners to Sharia is needless to say, an impossible task under modern circumstances when populations are politicised and democratic pressures do exist. Thus, we have to conclude that albeit BH ostensibly calls for sharia in the entire country, its immediate goals are different: they are indeed aims of terrorizing Northerners into ‘purifying’ their faith according to Wahhabi prescriptions, follow stricter rules of conduct, and disobey the representatives of the Nigerian state that they see as corrupt and evil. BH also pushes for ethnic cleansing in the North: they want Igbos and other Christian elements that populate the Sabon Gari (literally: foreigners’ quarter) of each Northern town, to leave and never return.

In 2010, BH set hundreds of prisoners free from a prison in Bauchi. In December they detonated bombs that killed 80 people in Jos. On New Year’s Eve 2010, they attacked targets in Abuja for the first time. From 2010 onwards, they turned Maiduguri, then Mubi into veritable battlefields. When Jonathan was reelected in May 2011, they bombed many state capitals in the North. Still in the same year, they attacked Police Headquarters in Abuja, as well as the U.N. Mission in August. In November 2011, they attacked churches, markets, Igbo owned shops, bars, beauty parlours, and Igbo conference halls in Yobe and Borno states. By January 2012, Nigerian media started to talk about a new civil war. In the spring, there were kidnappings and murders of Westerners, prison mutinies, and suicide bombings at churches. In October, 41 university students were butchered with machetes and guns in Mubi. In 2012 alone, BH killed about 1,200 people. By early May 2013, the cumulative number of people killed by BH (from 2009) had already exceeded 4,000.¹⁸ Boko Haram also developed its own foreign policy stance and its own international linkages.¹⁹ It killed two Nigerian soldiers destined for the French-led Mali operation.²⁰ Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

¹⁸ Farouk Chotia, ‘Who are Nigeria’s Boko Haram Islamists?’, *BBC World News Africa*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13809501> (accessed 11 January 2013).

¹⁹ János Besenyő, A nemzetközi terrorizmus veszélye Észak-Afrikában, *Új Honvédségi Szemle* LXI. Évfolyam-2007/12, pp.41-50.

²⁰ Monday Atebo, Boko Haram attacks troops to Mali, *Premium Times*, <http://premiumtimesng.com/news/116058-boko-haram-attacks-nigerian-troop-to-mali-2-dead-five-injured.html> (accessed 19 January 2013).

and other organizations found their way to Boko Haram,²¹ effectively embracing the Nigerian organization.²² If at all possible, Boko Haram's modus operandi has become ever more inhuman: in July 2013, they burnt 29 students alive in a school in Yobe.

It was in May 2013 that president Goodluck Jonathan decided to act with decisive military force to pacify the region and obliterate BH – a campaign that is still ongoing and whose end results are still unclear.

Irrespective of the immediate results of the current campaign, Boko Haram, or a similar organization, will appear and create a terrible security problem for Nigeria and the international community, if the Northern Nigerian status quo is not challenged. The only sustainable way to challenge the Nigerian status quo is to allow for a general modernization drive that would effectively end feudalism in Northern Nigeria. This would entail a reorientation of Western cohabitation with Northern Nigerian feudalists and a reassessment of alliances with forces that are, ultimately, responsible for the appearance of organizations such as Boko Haram. In other words: Northern Nigerians should be given democratic options to exercise mastery over their own future, beyond the current dichotomy of Fulani feudalists or the Boko Haram. A possible way to go would be to seek avenues towards labour actors. Considered suspect during the Cold War, labour (in the form of the Nigeria Labour Congress and other umbrella organizations) could be an anchor for decent forces of moderation especially in the Northern part of the country.

The future

John Campbell, former U.S. ambassador and currently the foremost expert on Nigeria at the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States, famously opined that Nigeria is destined to fall and disintegrate into at least two independent nations.²³ This may happen in our view also. At the same time, we would like to draw the reader's attention to a historical parallel with South Asian partition (the Indo-Pakistan partition of 1947). That partition, based on Muslim and non-Muslim religious blocks, created not only tens of millions of dislocated refugees and more than a million casualties, but planted the seeds of three major Indo-Pakistani wars and currently, a nuclear stalemate. The 'partition option' thus seems far from ideal. This is not only a humanitarian concern but a vital security concern also. Indeed, as the tenth largest producer of crude oil, and as the fifth biggest supplier for the U.S., Nigeria has a global strategic weight that is unequalled in West Africa.

At the same time, experts on Nigeria are few in number. The country is not very hospitable and presents the researcher with scores of day to day nuisances. The same problems, in aggravated form,²⁴ constitute the daily life of most Nigerians, a very underprivileged group of people indeed.²⁵

²¹ János Besenyő, *Terrorexport a Szaharába – Al-Káida klón a sivatagban – A Földgömb*, a Magyar Földrajzi Társaság folyóirata, XIII (XXIX) évfolyam, 2011/5/257, July-August 2011, pp.38-41.

²² János Besenyő, *Vallási Konfliktusok újratöltve? - Honvédelmi Minisztérium honlapja*, http://www.regiment.hu/hirek/kulfoldi_hirek/vallasi_konfliktusok_ujratoltve (accessed 17 May 2010).

²³ John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*, Council on Foreign Relations, Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

²⁴ Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, Béatrice Hibou, *From Kleptocracy to the Felonious State?*, In: Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, Béatrice Hibou: *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*, The International African Institute, in assoc. with James Currey, 1999, p.10.

²⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook, Nigeria*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>

Independent for 53 years, Nigeria has not been able to provide electricity to its citizens. Households rely on diesel generator – rich households that is. Others make do with small Chinese generators that work an hour or two a day. Under these circumstances, production is nearly impossible because businesses do not have sufficient electricity to operate economically. It actually makes more economic sense to import everything from abroad – especially China. The substandard Chinese products that enter Nigeria are on the average barely usable even when they enter the country, but they go wrong in the course of a week with certainty. Everything is more expensive than in the EU, including basic food items. Most people are desperately poor. Educated Nigerians leave the country as a rule: there are more Nigerian doctors in the United States than in Nigeria. The terrible lack of skills that characterize Nigeria is especially striking in the North where Western learning arrived only very late and where it met a lot of opposition from the start. Not as marked as in the case of Boko Haram though – Boko Haram is a modern, 21st century phenomenon (despite its medieval ideology), similar in that sense to global political Islam itself.²⁶ Perhaps it would be time enough that the West developed a new way of looking at Northern Nigeria, and an attitude beyond following the current, especially now that the current seems to lead to nothing else but a maelstrom.

Conclusion

Given the specific historical circumstances in which Nigeria finds itself, a change of the status quo seems inevitable. A status quo that results in uprisings such as that of Boko Haram, is obviously unsustainable in the long run. The dismantling of legal inequality perpetuated in the 'law of the land' as a source of law in Nigeria seems crucial but this is not something that foreigners or the international community can force on Nigerians. However, there is a general Western policy to 'deal with' the traditional authority in Northern Nigeria. This seemed eminently expedient to the British who had built their method of 'indirect rule' on this basis. Certainly there is a clear need for an effective government and state.²⁷ However, in the early 21st century, this seems an outdated policy. Northern Nigerian traditional emirs have not been able to modernize their rule. What their domination resulted in was nothing else but insurgency itself. Thus the authors of this article feel that it is time that the international community changes its stance on Northern Nigerian politicians and starts to deal with those who offer a glimpse of hope for modernization. Obviously, it is the role of intelligence services, military and civilian, to identify moderate forces who are capable still, of making an impact in the region. This way, the federal government's Joint Task Force would not be on its own, trying to carry out its vital mission.

²⁶ János Besenyő, *Erősödő terrorizmus a Maghreb-régióban* - AFRIPORT.hu website, <http://www.afriport.hu/hirek/gazdasagi-hirek-magyarorszag/8998-ersoed-terrorizmus-a-maghreb-regioban-elemzes.html> (accessed 27 July 2011).

²⁷ Mária Bordás, *Corruption Risk Analyses – Development of Integrity-Based Administrative Culture*, Study in the Collection of Essays Published by the Hungarian State Audit Office Budapest 2012. pp.20-22.

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