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QUICK LOOK: NIGER

“A MILITARY-BASED APPROACH, WHILE ESSENTIAL, WILL NOT BRING AN END TO THE BOKO HARAM THREAT”

SITUATION

The security situation in Nigeria continues to deteriorate each year – Niger’s people can no longer “hold on.” In January 2018, over 141 people were killed by Boko Haram—the highest number of killings for any single month. Since 2015, Boko Haram’s terror campaign in Niger has resulted in over 580 deaths with tens of thousands displaced from their homes. Among the worst affected places is Diffa, which was attacked over 48 times between January and March.

Despite over a decade of joint military training with neighboring nations (e.g., Chad, Nigeria) as well with western nations (e.g., France, the U.S.), Niger has been unable to reduce the influence of Boko Haram because it fails to address the underlying grievances within Niger’s population. Niger’s over-reliance on traditional security coupled with its geographic location and a high percentage of disenfranchised youth (i.e. > 50% of the population under age 15), has created conditions ripe for Boko Haram’s further expansion into Northern Africa.



Niger’s population is comprised of predominantly subsistence-based farming communities with very high fertility rates (i.e. over 7.5 children per woman), which create opportunities for Boko Haram to carry out local recruitment campaigns in rural areas. Furthermore, its location, poor border security, and corruption (e.g., bribes along Burkina Faso-Niger border) have granted terrorists from neighboring Nigeria a gateway to establish their influence.

RECENT EVENTS



On October 4, 2017, four U.S. service members, along with four Nigerien soldiers, were killed in an ambush a few miles north of Niamey. The soldiers were tracking an accomplice of Abu Adnan al-Sahraoui, a former member of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The event gained worldwide attention and shed light on the ineffectiveness of traditional security approaches to reduce terrorist violence in Niger.

On March 23, 2018, five civilians were killed and several others were wounded in the southeastern city of Diffa. In response to the incident, the city's Governor Mahamadou Laoualy Dan declared, "We ask the people to hold on... 2018 will be a decisive year in the war against Boko Haram."

APPROACH

Niger-based Boko Haram exploit a social and economic vacuum created by rising unemployment, a poorly diversified economy, and the failure of Niger's security forces to engage border communities. ENODO analysts used a population-centric approach to examine Boko Haram's expansion in two regions—Niamey and Diffa—in order to uncover the unique social and economic factors that have created a void and allowed for Boko Haram's expansion.

"THE MAIN PROBLEM FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE MAY BE BOREDOM,
LACK OF LEARNING AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES."

FINDINGS

ENODO conducted an initial investigation of the social and economic environments of Niger's capital city Niamey and the Southeastern city of Diffa to uncover social tensions that underpin broader security challenges and affect regional stability in Niger and in the larger North African Sahel region.





YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Boko Haram has found opportunities to recruit marginalized youth—particularly in rural Diffa. Unemployment is exacerbated due to Niger's overall high fertility rates (over 7.5 children per family) and the nation's rising unemployment (up by 0.5% since 2007). Additionally, drought in Diffa since 2013 has made the region even poorer, enabling Boko Haram to lure the region's youth in promise of money, food, and a purpose. For the few who choose to leave a life of crime, efforts by Diffa's Governor Dano to re-integrate ex-Boko Haram fighters (e.g. the DDR strategy or Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) has largely failed due to the lack of vocational training to help educate and re-integrate youth into the workforce.

RISE OF SHARIA

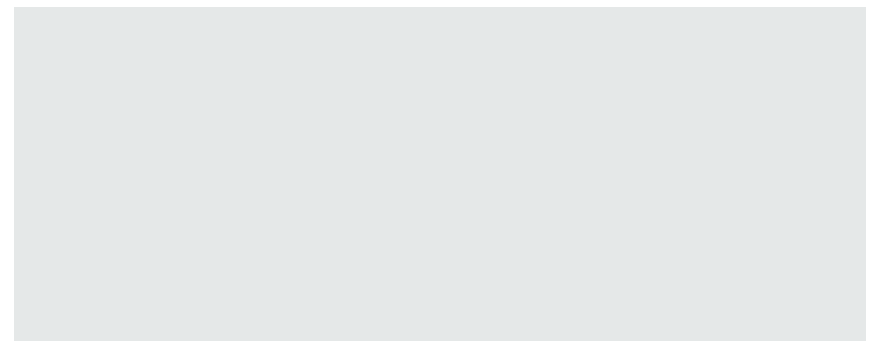


Niger is one of the most Islamic nations in the world. Ninety-eight percent of its population are Sunni Muslim. Many Nigerien Muslims see support for Sharia as an extreme and often dogmatic position. A 2013 Afrobarometer survey found that 67% of Nigeriens supported the inclusion of sharia in their constitution. Moreover, many Nigeriens connect their dissatisfaction with the country's economic malaise and secular democracy to their religious beliefs and stress the need to adopt Sharia to improve both. Nigeriens believe sharia would resolve corruption, as leaders would be accountable to God. Boko Haram's messaging on sharia has effectively tapped into the religious identity of people who see sharia as the solution to their social and economic conditions.

CULTURE OF INSECURITY

Poor security infrastructure (e.g. along Niger's borders) has made Niger's capital city Niamey vulnerable to violence flowing from nearby Burkina Faso and Mali, located just a few miles from the capital. Niger's over-reliance on traditional security (i.e. national defense spending up by 50% in 2017) has failed to engage local communities and has created a culture of insecurity—a sense of alienation amongst people who view traditional security as a threat to their safety in Niamey.

The Nigerien government has not convinced citizens it has devised an effective security strategy to secure Niamey from Boko Haram's expansion. Other terrorist groups, including Jihadist groups affiliated with al Qaeda and the Islamic State, have repeatedly attacked military and civilian targets along the porous border between Mali and Niger, which has worsened feelings of vulnerability amongst Niamey's citizens.



OUTLIERS



The Niger government has failed to integrate its population's needs to create conditions that will foster an environment of security and reduce violence. The people of Diffa and Niamey represent the portion of the Nigerien population most vulnerable to the influence of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups due to unresolved underlying grievances over the following issues:

EDUCATION: Niger's government attempts to resolve poor education and implement vocational capabilities within its young population, have been ineffective. As such, the poor education system and little hope for economic stability make Niger's vulnerable youth population susceptible to insurgent recruiters and continue to undermine security objectives.

AGRICULTURE: The lack of targeted agricultural policies in high drought areas (e.g. around Lake Chad) create conditions of food insecurity. According to the World Food Program, the Sahel drought has affected an estimated 750,000 Nigeriens which provides a robust pool of potential recruits with no other way to provide for their families.



ENGAGEMENT: Poor coordination between different levels of Niger's security apparatus (i.e., state, local, and national) separatist groups in rural and northern Niger (e.g., Fulani, Kanuri, Arabs, Toubou, and Taureg), and local communities in southern Niger along the Niger River watershed which supports the majority of the population (90%).

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS): No clear plans to manage Niger's internally displaced persons (IDP) (e.g. IDP camp in Borno with 191 households occupied by Boko Haram since 2016)

CONCLUSION



“THE IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC CONCERNS PROMINENTLY THREAD THROUGH NATIONAL SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS UNDERSCORE THE NEED FOR TIMELY SOLUTIONS THAT ADDRESS LOCAL INTERESTS IN POPULATION CENTERS SUCH AS NIAMEY AND DIFFA.”

The ongoing conflict between militants and security forces negatively impacts the long-term stability of Niger society. Niger's government must adopt a population-centric security framework focused on economic development initiatives that target education and job creation programs to help Niger's population develop internal resilience to counter the effects of external threats emanating from regional instability (e.g. Boko Haram). Vocational training, rural economic opportunity, water and food security, realistic reintegration programs, and stronger border controls build trust with the government, strengthen communities, and deny terrorist organizations the ability to operate, which thereby decrease instability in Niger. If not addressed, the country could devolve into a failed state ruled by regional extremist groups.



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