

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XVIII, ISSUE 12

p.1

Brian M. Perkins

BRIEFS

p.3

Andrew Devereux

**Operation Iraqi
Heroes in Kirkuk**

p.5

Herbert Maack

**The Ban on
Hezbollah Activities
in Germany**

p.6

Michael Horton

**Is Nigeria Losing the
War Against Terrorists
in Borno State?**

UAE EXPANDS ITS INFLUENCE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Brian Perkins

The UAE has significantly increased its engagement in the Horn of Africa over the past several years, using security, development, and humanitarian projects to boost its regional diplomatic and economic influence. Some of these efforts have proved rather fruitful, such as the UAE's role in ending the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea while securing a deal to build an oil pipeline between the two countries. However, other efforts have come with significant complications, most notably in Somalia, where Abu Dhabi is vying for influence and upsetting the fragile political balance between Mogadishu and the semiautonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland.

The UAE has long had a strategic interest in Somalia and has worked to establish a string of ports across its strategically located coastline. The country trained thousands of Somali soldiers between 2014-2018 ([Al Arabiya](#), April 16, 2018). The fragmented nature of Somalia's territories, however, has proven difficult for Abu Dhabi to navigate. The UAE's strategic interests cover

the internationally recognized Somali state and the semi-autonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland. From its former training mission in Mogadishu to the Port of Bossaso in Puntland and the Port of Berbera in Somaliland, the Emiratis have attempted to spread influence across Somalia while trying to navigate the complex national politics.

The tensions created by this approach, as well as the UAE's anti-Qatar stance, have slowly eroded Abu Dhabi's ability to bring many of its projects to fruition and has seen diplomatic tensions with Mogadishu continuously increase. Tensions between Mogadishu and Abu Dhabi have continued to create a larger window of opportunity for the UAE's rivals, Qatar and Turkey, and have necessitated a shift that will see Turkey and the UAE continue to bolster opposing Somali governments and fuel other regional tensions.

The Port of Berbera is particularly emblematic of the Somali-Somaliland and UAE-Turkey competition. In early June, Somalia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Isse Awad accused Dubai-based DP World of stoking internal divisions and creating unity challenges between Somalia and the semiautonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland ([Garowe Online](#), June 9). The government

of Somaliland, however, responded to the comments, urging Somalia to stay out of its internal affairs and the development of the Port of Berbera—a key development project for Somaliland and a point of contention for Mogadishu.

The Port of Berbera has also pulled Ethiopia into the mix, as the port is the terminus of the UAE-funded Addis Ababa-Berbera highway, which connects landlocked Ethiopia to the Gulf of Aden. In a move that deeply unsettled Mogadishu, DP World made a deal to give a 19 percent stake in the port project to Ethiopia. The project will make Berbera a significant regional hub inextricably linked to Ethiopia's economy, granting Somaliland some implicit legitimacy and independence. The first 12 kilometers of the highway was inaugurated on June 1, just four months after Addis Ababa, with Turkish and Qatari sponsorship, hosted talks between the governments of Somalia and Somaliland ([Africa News](#), February 11). The leaders of Somalia and Somaliland met again in Djibouti on June 14, with Ethiopia's prime minister in attendance.

Ankara and Abu Dhabi's divergent interests have not only placed the governments of Somalia and Somaliland in a complicated position, but have also placed Ethiopia between Qatar and Turkey on the one side and the UAE on the other. Qatar and Turkey have pushed for influence in the region, and have urged Addis Ababa to mediate between Somalia and Somaliland. At the same time, however, the UAE has invested heavily in Ethiopia and has helped open significant economic opportunity for the country. As a result, Addis Ababa will need to strike a delicate balance between its support for Somalia and its acknowledgement of Somaliland's desire for independence.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

NEW IRANIAN BACKED TALIBAN FACTION MAY UNDERMINE PAKISTANI INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

Brian Perkins

As the United States seeks to make its exit from Afghanistan, despite persistent levels of Taliban violence over the past six months, the primary question has been whether the Taliban will ever adhere to the guidelines set out in the peace deal. An overlooked aspect of the Afghan peace deal is Pakistan's dual role in the process and the implications of its involvement. On one hand, Pakistan has been heavily involved in facilitating dialogue between the United States and the Taliban. Meanwhile, Islamabad bears significant responsibility for the longstanding networks that support the Taliban and for the direct involvement of thousands of Pakistani fighters in Afghanistan, particularly those belonging to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

The United States' policy toward Pakistan has long been contradictory and the Trump administration has likewise repeatedly found itself caught between scolding Islamabad and needing its help to facilitate dialogue—particularly with the Taliban, but also with the Afghan government. Most recently, on June 7, U.S. Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad met with Pakistani Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa in Islamabad to jumpstart stalled intra-Afghan negotiations ([Al Jazeera](#), June 8). Following the meetings Khalilzad praised Pakistan's role in bringing the Taliban to the table.

Diplomatically, the Taliban peace deal seemingly gives Islamabad everything it has dreamed of by vindicating its long-term strategy and policies toward Afghanistan and against India—particularly those of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)—while also placing the country back in the United States' good graces. Pakistan does, however, face an important balancing act in its support of the Taliban and the peace deal. The country has undoubtedly encouraged key Taliban stakeholders to engage in the peace process—which the organization already views as a sweeping victory—but is unlikely to ever apply any true coercive pressure that might threaten Islamabad's relationship to the militant group. A recent U.S. Department of Defense report indicated that Pakistan still harbors members of the Taliban and Haqqani Network. As Pakistan encourages the pro-

peace Taliban members to continue the process and prevent its collapse, anti-peace deal factions are beginning to emerge, threatening Pakistan's influence as well as its internal security.

The TTP has long found refuge in Afghanistan among the Afghan Taliban, and Pakistani military operations in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas over the past five years have severely disrupted the terrorist group's activities within Pakistan. However, the TTP is seemingly beginning to regroup within the country and two different scenarios could have serious implications on the TTP's operations. First, a politically empowered Taliban could continue to harbor and support the TTP, allowing it to build strength and renew operations in Pakistan. Conversely, if the Taliban adheres to the guidelines of ending support to terrorist groups, the TTP could lose its safe haven in Afghanistan and be forced to re-infiltrate Pakistan's border regions.

Meanwhile, reports have surfaced indicating the emergence of a new Taliban faction that opposes the peace deal. The new faction, Hezb-e Walayat-e Islami, reportedly formed in February after the signing of the peace deal and is currently based in Iran ([RFE/RL](#), June 9). The faction's strength and influence remains unknown, but it is among a growing number of Taliban offshoots with substantial links to Tehran, which is keen to find outlets of influence within Afghanistan. In its efforts to facilitate the Afghan peace deal, Pakistan is also partly responsible for fueling Taliban offshoots that it will have little influence over, instead ceding that role to other international players such as Iran. Pakistan will need to find a balance in its relationship with pro-peace Taliban members while hedging against the TTP and new anti-peace offshoots if Islamabad hopes to maintain its internal security and secure the diplomatic victory of helping to secure peace in Afghanistan.

Brian Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

Operation Iraqi Heroes in Kirkuk

Andrew Devereux

On June 2, Iraqi forces launched the second phase of operation 'Iraqi Heroes,' a military operation aimed at clearing Islamic State (IS) remnants from areas of southwestern Kirkuk ([Kurdistan24](#), June 4). The Iraqi Security Media Cell stated the operation was a success, as two suspected terrorists were neutralized, and weapons caches, resources and hideouts were seized ([al-Monitor](#), June 4). The first phase of the operation was launched in February, focusing on IS cells in Anbar province.

The joint operation was managed by Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service (ICTS) and involved input from the army, air force, the anti-IS coalition, intelligence agencies, the Shia-led Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU), and Peshmerga forces ([Alkhaleej](#), June 3). Newly inaugurated Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi visited Kirkuk during the operation to monitor progress and repeated his intention to force all remaining IS fighters from the area.

Strategically Important

The province of Kirkuk is of strategic importance to the central government, not least because of its abundant oil reserves. The area is the site of a long-standing dispute between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), despite the province being in the hands of the central government since 2017, when it was reclaimed from IS control. Security deficiencies intensified by the disputed nature of the province have been exploited by IS. The area near the Sunni heartland of Kirkuk and the wider Hamrin basin is known as the 'Triangle of Death,' owing to the presence of IS loyalists and the difficulty in combing the rough terrain for militant refuges ([Arab Weekly](#), May 18). Mountains, valleys, tunnels, and caves in the Hamrin Mountains are used by IS cells as effective hideouts to plan and execute attacks.

IS remnants retain a presence in numerous provinces, including Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Saladin, and Mosul, and the Center for Global Policy estimates there are 3,000-4,000 active fighters in Iraq ([Alkhaleej](#), June 3). Active cells are reverting back to insurgent tactics, using the isolated sanctuaries as staging grounds for ambushes targeting security forces and executions of suspected

informants. In recent weeks, militants have been increasingly targeting minority communities in Kirkuk and conducting crop fires during harvest season to extort locals into paying taxes ([KirkukNow](#), June 6).

In late April, IS militants attacked an intelligence bureau in Kirkuk, wounding three Iraqi service personnel—an attack in keeping with the *modus operandi* of the dispersed insurgents ([Asharq Al-Awsat](#), April 28). In the Hamrin basin area, militants have increased their operational tempo in recent months, but have not demonstrated the inclination or capability to capture population centers. This, however, will be no solace to the residents of Kirkuk who live in fear of IS incursions. A public display of military power demonstrating the ability to curtail IS activity and secure protection for civilians was a key objective of operation Iraqi Heroes.

Fragile Strength, Enduring Divisions

The lack of central military protection was a major catalyst for IS' capture of territory in northern Iraq during 2014. Operations such as 'Iraqi Heroes' are intended to show the resurrected strength of the national Iraqi military and intelligence agencies. Brigadier General Yahya Rasool made clear this was an operation primarily executed by joint domestic forces, despite US-led coalition forces stating intelligence was shared and coalition forces provided air support ([Rudaw](#), June 2). Even the name of the operation is a not-so-subtle nod toward the national-level agencies. While the Iraqi military is trying to demonstrate its strength and capability to build public confidence, the anti-IS coalition forces, primarily the United States, are still trying to justify their continued presence.

The on-ground effectiveness of the Iraqi forces is complicated by geopolitical brinkmanship and a delicate domestic situation. Following widespread protests at the end of 2019 and health and social crises exacerbated by the global coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the Iraqi forces are stretched in terms of manpower and resources. For years the military has been reliant on international cooperation, especially when countering the IS threat, but UK, French, Canadian, and other coalition members withdrew troops and suspended training programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic ([Middle East Eye](#), March 25). Despite the structural and domestic challenges, anti-IS clearing operations are an easy propaganda win for the military.

Hostility between the United States and Iran is influencing defense strategy across Iraq, including the anti-IS operations. Tehran has been attempting to infiltrate all aspects of political control in Iraq for years, and the influence of the PMU within the Iraqi military is growing. Reports indicate PMU leaders have increasingly been restricting the movement of U.S. ground troops. PMU leaders are positioning for inclusion in key talks between Iraq and the United States about the latter's continued in-country presence. Their seat at the table gives Iran an opportunity to lobby for the total withdrawal of U.S. troops ([Jerusalem Post](#), June 8). U.S. forces have been withdrawing from areas of strategic importance at an expedited rate: the K1 Air Base and Qayyarah Airfield West in Kirkuk have already been handed over to Iraqi forces ([Asharq Al-Awsat](#), March 30).

Conclusion

The overlapping agendas of numerous actors have proved a distraction from conventional military efforts to counter the terrorist threat. Despite this, the removal of IS remnants is one of the few strategic goals where the agendas of all involved parties converge. Operation 'Iraqi Heroes' is a display of strength meant to demonstrate the Iraqi military is able to protect the lives of its citizens without significant international assistance. IS cells will remain elusive, militants are adept at surviving in remote hideouts, and sweeps of the Hamrin Mountains are notoriously difficult to conduct. Insurgent attacks are highly likely to continue in Kirkuk and surrounding provinces, and with the multiplicity of issues impacting the Iraqi forces, no definitive victory against IS is forthcoming.

Andrew Devereux is an Associate Analyst in Counter-Terrorism at Healix International and HX Global, focusing on terrorist incidents, actors and the wider MENA region. He holds an MA in Global Security Studies, during which he focused on the impacts of the War on Terrorism and the geopolitical rationale behind US arms distribution. Prior to his work on counter-terrorism, Andrew worked as political and security threat analyst, focusing on the Americas.

The Ban on Hezbollah Activities in Germany

Herbert Maack

The German Ministry of Interior Horst Seehofer announced on April 30 that the Lebanese organization Hezbollah would be fully banned from carrying out any activity on German soil. The announcement was followed by raids on four mosques and organizations suspected of being linked to Hezbollah, as well as some private addresses.

The move was a result of years of legal contemplation and pressure from the United States and Israel. Germany had banned Hezbollah's terrorist activities already in 2013 as part of an EU-wide ban, but the designation was not applied to the wider organization. This balancing act was publicly criticized by Richard Grenell, the then-U.S. ambassador to Germany, according to whom the practice of distinguishing Hezbollah's "armed" and "political" activities by Berlin and several other EU-countries was purely artificial.

Germany's move came a year after all Hezbollah activities were banned in the UK. This led to renewed calls from German politicians for the total ban of all Hezbollah activity in order to ensure that it would not be able to raise funds in the country. These politicians cited Germany's special responsibility to Israel because of Nazi-era atrocities against Jews. A motion to this end was put forward and was adopted by the German parliament in December 2019 ([Tagesschau](#), December 19, 2019).

The April announcement of the total ban of Hezbollah was quite likely timed to curtail the anti-Israeli "al-Quds-Tag", ie. "al-Quds-day" demonstration, organized by Hezbollah-supporters yearly since 1983 in Berlin on the last Saturday before the end of Ramadan. For Germany, these demonstrations, with Hezbollah flags and anti-semitic and anti-Israeli parades, have been a deep embarrassment ([Berliner Zeitung](#), June 1, 2019).

The "al-Quds-day" demonstration mobilized up to 2,000 participants yearly. According to the German Security Service (BfV), Hezbollah has as many as 1,050 followers in Germany. These followers are organized through apolitical mosques, cultural associations, and clubs whose social media accounts and online websites

openly advertise their association with Hezbollah, helping map the entities linked to the group ([Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz](#), April 30).

German security authorities reportedly also received help from their Israeli counterparts. The Israelis carried out a months-long intelligence operation to assess the group's operations in Germany and presented their findings to the local intelligence and law agencies, including on key individuals in Hezbollah's operations in the country, financial networks used to launder cash and transfer millions of euros into the terrorist group's bank accounts, as well as the organization's fundraising activities ([Times of Israel](#), May 2).

While the branding of the entirety of Hezbollah is a dramatic departure from Berlin's previous policy, it is not the first time Germany has acted against the organization. In 2008 German authorities denied a broadcasting license for the Hezbollah al-Manar TV-station ([Deutscher Bundestag](#), January 1, 2009).

In 2014, the activities of the "Waisenkindprojekt Libanon e.V." association in Essen were banned. The association, established in 1997, was nominally working to alleviate the plight of orphans in Lebanon. However, the project had collected around three million euros across Germany and transferred these to an organization closely connected to Hezbollah ([Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz](#), April 8, 2014).

The police raids during the early hours of April 30 were conducted in order to ensure the "evidence of potential sub-organizations in Germany could not be destroyed when this ban was announced" ([Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat](#), April 30).

Law enforcement authorities searched the premises of four associations: "Imam-Madi Zentrum" in Munster in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia; "Moschee-Verein El-Irschad e.V." in Berlin-Neukölln; the "Al-Mustafa Gemeinschaft" in Bremen and the "Gemeinschaft libanesischer Emigranten e.V."—an association of Lebanese immigrants—in Dortmund. Additionally, the heads of the associations' homes were searched, resulting in the seizure of thousands of euros in cash, several computers and documents ([Tagesschau](#) April 30; [Die Welt](#), May 10).

As a consequence of the new ban and the following raids, the organizers cancelled the "al-Quds-day" demonstration ([Qudstag Jerusalemtag](#), May 13).

Germany's decision to ban Hezbollah provoked protests from Iran and Hezbollah. Government spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi criticized Germany for "ignoring the realities in West Asia," claiming that Hezbollah "is a formal and legitimate part of [Lebanon's] government and parliament" and has played a "key role in fighting the Islamic State terrorism in the region" ([Iran Press](#), May 1).

Three days later, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah criticized Germany for "giving in to U.S. and Israeli interests". According to Nasrallah, "The German decision was expected and we expect other European countries to follow", claiming that his organization had not been active in Europe for a long time ([Al-Arabiya](#), May 4).

Then-U.S. Ambassador Grenell welcomed Germany's decision and called on the rest of Europe to follow suit. Such action, however, is unlikely. France in particular, with its close historical ties to Lebanon, has been reluctant toward supporting a European-wide terrorism listing of all Hezbollah activities ([Deutsche Welle](#), April 30). Nevertheless, for Hezbollah, Germany's decision is a political blow to its attempts to present itself as a legitimate actor. With Germany now joining Britain and Netherlands in a tougher stance on Hezbollah, it is possible that some EU-countries will follow suit and help set a precedent for further restrictions by other international actors.

Herbert Maack is an analyst who specializes in terrorism.

Is Nigeria Losing the War Against Terrorists in Borno State?

Michael Horton

There are few places as conducive to insurgency and terrorism as Borno state in northeastern Nigeria. Grinding poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, illicit networks, environmental degradation, porous international borders, and vast tracts of lightly governed and un-governed spaces are all features of Borno state. On account of these, Borno has acted as an incubator for various insurgent and terrorist groups, most notably Boko Haram, Africa's most deadly terrorist organization. [1] The Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda affiliate Ansaru, are all active in Borno state and surrounding areas. [2]

Despite the deployment of—at times—over 70,000 Nigerian troops to Borno state alone, all three groups, but most particularly Boko Haram, have maintained their operational tempo. Recent reports indicate that the frequency and complexity of Boko Haram's attacks are, yet again, on the increase. On May 26, Boko Haram attacked homes, a church, and shops in three villages in the Biu local government area of Borno state ([Vanguard](#), May 26). This attack followed an attempt by Boko Haram to overrun a Nigerian Army forward operating base in Gajigana, a town located only fifty kilometers north of the capital of Borno state, Madiduguri ([Sahara Reporters](#), May 18). In this attack, Boko Haram used at least ten technicals mounted with heavy machine guns and recoilless rifles. On June 2, Boko Haram launched near simultaneous attacks using female suicide bombers on villages located across five different local government areas ([Daily Post](#), June 2). In addition to the reported attacks, Boko Haram and other groups carry out robberies, kidnappings, and assaults on an almost daily basis across large swaths of northeastern Nigeria.

The government of Nigeria and the Nigerian Army have repeatedly declared the defeat and weakening of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). However, the tempo and geographic extent of recent attacks by these groups—Boko Haram in particular—indicates that these organizations' operational capacity remains undiminished and may be on the increase yet again. Boko Haram's resiliency is due to the almost ideal

conditions for insurgency in Borno. It is also due to the Nigerian Army and security services' failure to adopt a more agile and responsive force structure. Rather than address these failures, the Nigerian Army is making moves that signal a retreat to Boko Haram and, most importantly, to the Nigerian citizens they are meant to protect.

Retreating to Super Camps

Nigerian officials announced the plan to establish so called "super camps" in the summer of 2019 ([All Africa](#), September 12, 2019). The plan was met with immediate criticism in the Nigerian press despite claims by army officials that the super camps would in fact facilitate the fight against Boko Haram and other insurgent groups ([This Day](#), September 16, 2019). The proposed plan eliminates smaller outposts in favor of creating a small number of highly fortified bases located in or on the outskirts of major towns. Nigerian troops will use the super camps as bases from which to launch extended patrols of surrounding areas. However, critics of the plan point to the fact that these patrols will not replace the permanent presence of troops at the smaller outposts. The deteriorating security situation in Borno state, and indeed in parts of surrounding states, points to the weaknesses of the super camp plan. Instead of contributing to the efficacy of operations, as Nigerian authorities claimed the super camp plan would, the frequency and effectiveness of Nigerian operations against Boko Haram have declined. The lack of forward bases impacts intelligence gathering and, ironically, may make Nigerian troops more vulnerable to attack. It was the ability of Boko Haram and other groups to attack and overrun the smaller camps that, far more than increasing the army's effectiveness, forced the Nigerian Army to create super camps. Yet, extended military patrols from the super camps mean that they are often more vulnerable to attack. The patrols are forced to operate farther away from the bases where already limited air support is further stretched. Boko Haram and ISWAP both enjoy excellent human intelligence and are likely to be more up to date on the movement of troops in and out of the super camps than military authorities in Abuja. [3] Both groups also have a long history of recruiting motorbike drivers (known as *okada* or *achaba* in Nigeria) as couriers and informants. [4] Boko Haram and ISWAP also use motorbikes to move around rural and urban areas quickly and inconspicuously since motorbikes are ubiquitous in many parts of Nigeria and the larger Lake Chad Basin. [5]

Boko Haram and ISWAP's agility and low profile contrasts with the plodding high visibility movements of Nigerian forces. The collapse of smaller camps into heavily fortified super camps has further compromised the Nigerian Army's ability to quickly field units capable of responding to attacks. Deployments from the super camps are heavily armored, slow moving and easily observed. While the use of larger well-protected and heavily armed units has reduced casualties among the army, this also means that the Nigerian Army is even less capable of securing and holding territory. Boko Haram and ISWAP detect the troop deployments, monitor their movements and withdraw rather than engage the armored columns. When the troops return to their bases, Boko Haram and ISWAP move back in and reassert control.

Losing Hearts and Minds

Even before the implementation of the super camp strategy, the Nigerian Army's responses to terrorists and insurgents in Borno and other states was unpredictable and lacking in precision. In many parts of Borno state, residents fear the military as much as they do Boko Haram and ISWAP. [6] The Nigerian Army and the security services are often heavy-handed in their approach and are responsible for hundreds, if not thousands, of civilian deaths. [7] The fall back to super camps will exacerbate these fears as officers and soldiers have less contact with the local populace. The small camps and bases that the Nigerian Army was using facilitated intelligence gathering and generally gave the soldiers posted to the camps "a feel" for the area as they came to know and recognize local residents. The camps also provided residents with some, albeit limited, security.

The limited security and predictability that the Nigerian Army and security services were providing is dissipating. As a result, the battle for hearts and minds in much of Borno state is being lost. The only real check on Boko Haram, and to a much lesser degree, ISWAP, is the groups themselves. Boko Haram's indiscriminate violence—the group kills far more Muslims than Christians or animists—limits the support that the group might receive if it were less brutal. This is less the case with ISWAP which, while violent, is more measured in how it deals with the populations it wants to control. Boko Haram's bloody tactics, inspired by its leader, Abubakar Shekau, are a leading cause of the tensions within Boko Haram and between ISWAP and Boko Haram.

Neither Boko Haram nor ISWAP are able to provide the communities they operate in with services and consistent predictable security. This inability also serves as a check on their influence in Borno. While both groups have grafted themselves onto the region's licit and illicit economies, they are, as yet, incapable of filling the voids left by the state. This contrasts with other groups like al-Shabaab in Somalia and the Taliban in Afghanistan, both of which often provide basic services and higher levels of predictability and security than their respective governments. This is not to say that these groups are not violent. They are. However, the violence and brutal tactics balance against a measure of relative predictability and security in the areas in which they operate, helping them secure support through both fear and genuine buy-in.

By abandoning large swaths of Borno state to ISWAP and Boko Haram, the Nigerian Army and security services are leaving many residents with little or no choice but to, at best, turn a blind eye to the terrorists and insurgents operating in and around their communities. If Boko Haram and ISWAP adopt a more measured strategy, like al-Shabaab, which Boko Haram has had contact with, the Nigerian government will face an even more intractable insurgency.

Outlook

Borno State and the surrounding states have the highest levels of poverty and illiteracy in Nigeria. Nigeria is one of the few countries in the world that has—at least pre-Coronavirus—seen an increase in extreme poverty, a trend that has been in place since 1990. The responses to coronavirus have all but ensured that the state of Nigeria, which is dependent on oil exports, will face serious budget constraints, increased unemployment and decreased foreign direct investment. All of this will impact the Nigerian Army's ability to combat insurgents while at the same time a deteriorating national economy will make tens of thousands more vulnerable to recruitment by ISWAP and Boko Haram.

Boko Haram and ISWAP already draw on a well of deep discontent. With the effective withdrawal of Nigerian forces from much of Borno and the economic impacts of the response to coronavirus, the well is about to get much deeper. Borno State is ideal for the growth of insurgent groups. The state and surrounding areas have all the conditions required for an insurgent leader to grow his organization: poverty, complex human and physical terrain, thriving illicit trade networks, and por-

ous borders. Battling insurgents when such conditions are present is incredibly difficult for even the best led and equipped militaries. One need only look at recent U.S. experiences to understand this.

However, the Nigerian government's current strategy of operating from a handful of fortified bases, combined with the economic impact of the coronavirus responses, will supercharge both ISWAP and Boko Haram. Both organizations will take full advantage of these shifts to expand their organizations' reach into communities across Borno while at the same time deepening their links to and within illicit trade networks. Short of a comprehensive overhaul of the Nigerian Army's strategy in Borno, the only check on Boko Haram and ISWAP will be their own flawed tactics and factional fighting between and within these groups.

Michael Horton is a Fellow for Arabian affairs at the Jamestown Foundation.

Notes

[1] Boko Haram refers to itself as: Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād.

[2] The dominant faction of Boko Haram led by Abubakar Shekau considers itself to be a part of Islamic State and its sub-group, Islamic State in West Africa Province. However, Shekau's faction has engaged in periodic battles with ISWAP over territory and resources. Shekau's faction and ISWAP operate as two distinct groups with different organizational structures and different tactics.

[3] Author interview with a former official with the Nigerian government (May 2020).

[4] See: Andrew Walker, *Eating the Heart of the Infidel: The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram*, Hurst: 2016.

[5] See: Scott Mac Eachern: *Searching for Boko Haram: A History of Violence in Central Africa*, Oxford University Press: 2018.