



## **SPECIAL ADVISORY: Increasing Boko Haram Threat to Faith-Based Workers in Nigeria**

**June 28, 2014**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Following the increased terrorist activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria, CCI was asked to render an opinion as to the increased risk to missionaries and other faith-based workers in the country. We responded via email to that request and have subsequently received a number of requests to forward that email. We have re-drafted the email into the format of this Special Advisory.

### **SUMMARY**

CCI believes that the continuing development of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization is likely to include targeting of “soft” expatriate targets, certainly including faith-based workers and facilities. We believe that any Western, faith-based educational venue or program is at even higher risk.

### **ASSESSMENT**

CCI has been following developments in Nigeria very closely. Boko Haram is probably the most “interesting” terrorist group we have studied from an academic perspective, because they have not followed traditional or normal patterns of growth and activity. This makes the group particularly difficult to assess, and it is especially difficult to forecast future actions. Some of this is a result of the personality of the leader - unstable and unpredictable. But that is also becoming part of the culture of the organization, which is frightening.

Historically, Boko Haram has primarily attacked Nigerian targets. The major exception to that was a car bomb (VBIED) attempt on the UN in Abuja (that was not successful, at least as intended). The later string of VBEID attacks on church services could certainly have resulted in expatriate and missionary casualties, but again, the targeting was primarily against Nigerians. The recent series of kidnappings again targeted Nigerians. This targeting - primarily their countrymen - is one of the few patterns of Boko Haram that has remained fairly consistent.

In another aspect, however, Boko Haram has been very inconsistent. This has been in the method of attack. There is an early history of ambush or drive-by shootings, fire-bombings during hours unlikely to result in casualties, and similar lower-level (for modern terrorism) attacks. Then, there was a huge leap to VBIED attacks on church services. Although these resulted in numbers of casualties, none actually succeeded in placing the VBEID so that the intended mass casualties would result. From the point of view of Boko Haram's constituencies, these church attacks were failures, and lowered the "standing" of Boko Haram, especially in the region.

Then, Boko Haram changed its tactics substantially by conducting a mass kidnapping of Nigerian schoolgirls. This action is far more complex and carries a much higher risk of failure than Boko Haram's previous actions (especially the bombings). This was clearly intended to send a message to the people and government of Nigeria that Boko Haram was indeed a force to be reckoned with; and a message to other terrorist groups and their sponsors that Boko Haram was worthy of peer recognition. The fact that the attack remains uncountered and unresolved this many weeks out is a huge "plus" for Boko Haram. This psychological and media advantage was pressed when, in the face of U.S. and other Western military deployments to Nigeria in response to the first kidnapping set, Boko Haram kidnapped more schoolchildren.

The June 25 mall attack in Abuja was another major "advance" by Boko Haram. Although a bombing is inherently simpler than kidnappings, the targeting and location of this attack generated another big "plus" for Boko Haram (in the eyes of its various constituencies). It was also intended to demonstrate that Boko Haram has the capacity to conduct multiple major attacks simultaneously. Future similar attacks (bombings in crowded urban settings) are very likely. It appears that Boko Haram has both improved its bomb-making capability and also learned from previous less-successful attacks in Abuja that hardened targets should be avoided in favor of soft targets.

So what about the future? CCI was asked if the presence of American military forces in Nigeria to "assist" the government in dealing with Boko Haram will create increased risk to the rest of the American population in the country. Although the "easy" answer to this question is "yes", we think a deeper assessment is necessary. Here's why: For Boko Haram to continue to demonstrate increasing strength (which every terrorist group must do), it needs to expand its target pool in order to continue to draw more and more public and media attention.

CCI believes that Western missionaries are certainly at (or very near to) the top of the list of new targets for Boko Haram. Boko Haram is now enjoying international media attention, and it has drawn the attention and interest of the U.S. government, closely followed by the U.S. media. Attacking Americans is the logical next step for the group. Remember, it needs to increase the shock value of what it does over time to maintain even the same level of media attention, much less to increase the international coverage. So, CCI believes that Boko Haram was going to target Americans in Nigeria regardless. The U.S. military activity will give the group more public issues to discuss when they do attack, but again, we think attacks against civilian Americans was coming regardless.

Because there are not (at least so far) U.S. military bases or facilities that can be targeted, and because Boko Haram is unlikely to try a direct attack against U.S. special forces (and

will certainly fail in any such attempt – something they cannot afford to do), it will likely look for symbolic “soft” targets, which certainly includes the missionary community.

Given Boko Haram’s history (including its inconsistency and unpredictability), it is really hard to forecast potential American targets. However, we believe that the organization’s core public identity remains closely linked to Western education, and that makes any school with Western curriculum and/or students a potential target. High profile facilities, such as high population missionary schools, remain desirable targets for Boko Haram. Only the deterrence value of a sufficiently robust defense and security system would overcome the attractiveness of such a high-profile target. However, facilities or entities such as missionary schools are certainly not the only potential targets. Any high-profile “Western” target will suffice for Boko Haram’s purposes. The group has demonstrated willingness to attack where Christians and Muslims may become victims, and has long ago crossed any “lines” that may have protected children. So, Western schools, clinics, hospitals and churches are all potential targets.

We do think that the most likely Boko Haram actions against any American or expatriate target will be some type of bombing with kidnapping a secondary threat.

Geographically, Boko Haram has been relatively consistent in operating generally in northeast Nigeria, with obvious but limited forays into Kano, Abuja, etc. For the American and expatriate faith-based community, the location of obvious concern is Jos. The profile and numbers of missionaries and agencies there is certainly known by Boko Haram.

#### Things to watch for:

1. Although it hasn’t received much media coverage since the kidnapping of the schoolgirls, the fact is that Boko Haram publicly announced that as a threat more than a year ago. That means that should Boko Haram make public statements targeting churches or mission agencies or missionaries or Americans, those statements should be given very serious consideration.
2. Although Boko Haram has not followed predictable patterns, we do think that it is being motivated - or perhaps ‘inspired’ is the better term - by al Shabaab. In Africa, al Shabaab is one of the two, if not the, dominant terrorist presence. Its Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi may well have inspired yesterday’s mall attack in Abuja. And, al Shabaab recently issued public threats against all foreigners in Kenya. They have not acted on that threat yet, but they will. We think it is likely that Boko Haram may follow that pattern.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Boko Haram threat to missionaries, mission agencies and facilities, and related faith-based targets is most likely to manifest in the form of bombings or kidnappings. These threats should receive priority attention. The closer an asset is geographically to Boko Haram “active areas”, the more urgent preventative and protective measures should be.

Since Boko Haram has demonstrated an affinity for using VBEIDs, protection against that threat is important. The principles of protection, although they can be expensive and disruptive, are relatively simple:

1. Open space must be protected between any place a vehicle can be and the building, facility or place where potential victims may gather. This requires the development of secure perimeter barriers (highway K-rails are the fastest device usually available anywhere in Nigeria).
2. Access control for vehicles entering the perimeter must be strict, strictly enforced, and effective. CCI recommends a “known trusted vehicle” program and that it be used together with inspections and behavior analysis by trained personnel.
3. Facility characteristics should be upgraded to protect against explosions. This primarily involves strengthening and/or shielding glass (a number of commercial products to protect windows in a bombing environment are available). Seating and assembly locations should be as far from potential vehicle access points as possible. Emergency exits and hallways must be clearly marked, unlocked, and clear of obstructions (this has been a major problem at virtually every venue CCI has inspected in Nigeria).

The kidnapping threat is best countered by simple but effective practices:

1. Persons, especially children and women, should always be in groups (never alone in public). The larger the group, the less likely any attack.
2. All personnel (expatriate and national) should be trained (and the training reinforced) to detect and report any suspicious activity, person or circumstance. Kidnappings, more than almost any other attack, are preceded by surveillance and surveillance can be detected through a program of training, awareness and reporting.
3. Every agency should designate one focal point to receive and evaluate all reports of surveillance, suspicious activity, etc. Unless all such events are reported to a single point, trends are almost impossible to detect.
4. Similarly, agencies working in the same city or area should agree on a single focal point to collect and share this type of information between and amongst like-minded agencies. Again, if information is shared trends and threats may be missed.

*CCI stands ready to support Christian agencies in the response to this increased threat, to conduct site-specific assessments, to provide training and to assist agencies in the implementation of these recommendations and additional actions; and to discuss specific issues and situations. We remain the only Christian agency in the world that provides real-time, on-site support and assistance in crises and emergencies without charging fees.*

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