

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

“Boko Haram: The Growing Threat to Schoolgirls, Nigeria, and Beyond”

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Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, thank you for calling us together to address the deeply disturbing abductions of over 270 school girls in northern Nigeria by the terrorist organization Boko Haram some five weeks ago. The global community has been horrified by this barbarous act. Within the context of the U.S. government response, the Department of Defense is taking action to help the Nigerian authorities’ efforts to recover the girls safely and address the growing threat from Boko Haram.

On Friday, May 9th, the DoD directed sixteen personnel from multiple locations to our embassy in Abuja to join a multi-disciplinary team of experts led by our Department of State. Their specialties include medical, intelligence, counter-terrorism and communications expertise and their mission is to support U.S. Ambassador Jim Entwistle and the State-Department’s team led by Mike Hoza. The DoD team members’ initial efforts have been to work with Nigerian security personnel to analyze Nigerian operations, identify gaps and shortfalls, and otherwise provide requested expertise and information to the Nigerian authorities, including through the use of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support. We are also working closely with the UK, France, and other international partners in Abuja to coordinate multilateral actions in order to maximize our collective assistance efforts.

Our intent is to support Nigerian-led efforts to safely recover the girls and help catalyze greater efforts to secure the population of northern Nigeria from the menace of Boko Haram. To be clear, immediate and long-term solutions to the current threat that Boko Haram poses to the

people of Nigeria must be developed and implemented by the sovereign government of Nigeria if sustained security is to be achieved.

Extant in its current form since 2009, the threat to Nigeria from Boko Haram has grown over the past several years, extending its geographic reach and increasing the sophistication and lethality of its attacks. Multiple dramatic recent attacks – including its extremely damaging strike on a Nigerian air base, as well as the coordinated, methodical and highly successful attack at the Giwa barracks in Maiduguri – have demonstrated that Boko Haram is now capable of directly and successfully engaging Nigeria’s armed forces. Its expanded geographic reach within Nigeria was also tragically demonstrated in an attack on the UN headquarters in August of 2011, and when over 70 innocent Nigerian citizens were killed in a vehicle-borne IED attack just outside the national capital of Abuja on the same day as the kidnapping of the girls in Chibok.

In fact, the kidnapping in Chibok was only the most recent outrage in a growing portfolio of Boko Haram assaults on education, the civilian population, and the government of Nigeria. Other attacks directed against students and teachers in the last year include one on June 16-17, 2013, when nine people were killed in a Boko Haram attack on the Government Secondary School in Damaturu, Yobe state. This was followed on July 6, 2013 by an attack on the secondary school in Mamudo village, in which 29 students were killed, including reports that some were burned alive when their dormitory was deliberately set on fire. On September 28-29, 2013, more than 40 students were slaughtered in a nighttime attack by Boko Haram on the Yobe State College of Agriculture. And in yet another nighttime attack, this time at the Buni Yadi Federal Government College on February 18, 2014, at least 59 people, including boys ranging in age from 11 to 18, were killed.

Along with other U.S. departments and agencies, DoD has been engaging for some time with the government of Nigeria to help it build its own capacity to respond to Boko Haram's growing capabilities. Beginning in January 2011, and most recently in August 2013, we have used the State Department-led U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission's Regional Security Working Group as our principal forum to tackle the challenge of enhancing counterinsurgency efforts while developing a civilian-centered approach to security. In addition, Nigeria is a member of the 11 country Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership – TSCTP – along with Cameroon, Chad and Niger. U.S. assistance either bilaterally with Nigeria or in partnership with other TSCTP members is comprehensive and includes engaging law enforcement and border security personnel, as well as addressing the underlying contributors to Nigeria's instability such as governance, education, health, and economic development. For its part, DoD has undertaken a number of initiatives. For example, we are supporting the establishment of counter-IED and civil-military operations capacity within the Nigerian army in order to make C-IED and CMO an integral part of Nigeria's security doctrine. The concept is to develop Nigerian institutions with organic C-IED and CMO skills that can be maintained and passed along by the Nigerians themselves. We have also supported the establishment of a national-level intelligence fusion center in an effort to promote information sharing among various national security entities and, overall, to enable more effective and responsible intelligence-driven CT operations. Most recently, in late April 2014 we began working with Nigeria's newly-created counterterrorism-focused Ranger Battalion to impart the skills and disciplines needed to mount effective operations against Boko Haram. The Nigerian Navy's Special Boat Service (SBS) has been a committed, professional, and enthusiastic partner with which DoD and UK trainers have engaged

for several years to build Nigeria's maritime and riverine security capacity thus addressing a different but also-serious threat to Nigeria's security.

As has been demonstrated during recent Boko Haram movements and attacks, Boko Haram uses the relatively lightly controlled borders between Nigeria and its neighbors for cross-border operations in the region. On May 17th, French President Holland hosted a timely Summit in Paris at which heads of state from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Benin, and Niger, along with the U.S., UK and, of course, France, discussed how to achieve a more effective response, including promoting regional collaboration. For our part, DoD and the Department of State are working closely together to develop under the Global Security Contingency Fund – GSCF – authority a proposal to enhance border security along Nigeria's common borders with TSCTP partners Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, in support of a regional response to counter the threat posed by Boko Haram and other illegal actors. The concept is to build border security capacity with, and promote better cooperation and communication among, the security forces of each country. In some cases, assistance would go to the military, in others the gendarmerie, and in still other border security forces, to most effectively detect and respond to the movement of Boko Haram members back and forth among safe havens in Nigeria and neighboring countries. If we can build these basic but critical capacities, progress can be made toward reducing Boko Haram's operational reach from safe havens, halting its spread, and reversing some of the gains it has made.

As committed as the U.S. is to supporting Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram and in returning these girls safely to their families, Nigeria's fight against this barbaric group is a challenging case. In the face of a new and more sophisticated threat than it has dealt with before, Nigeria's security forces have been greatly challenged by Boko Haram's tactics. Also troubling

have been the heavy-handed approaches by Nigerian forces during operations against Boko Haram – approaches that risk further harming and alienating local populations. Consistent with U.S. law and policy, we review all security force units nominated for assistance, and we do not provide assistance when we have credible information that they have committed gross violations of human rights. With this important consideration in mind, we have worked to engage where we are able including, by providing training on human rights and law of armed conflict in our engagements. We have also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive counterinsurgency approach that includes civil-military operations, protection of civilians, and provision of basic services, and more broadly, working to convey lessons that we ourselves have spent so much blood and treasure as a nation developing over the past decade engaging terrorists and insurgents.

No discussion of how to address the Boko Haram threat would be complete without addressing some of the political dynamics in Nigeria and the underlying security environment. In spite of its vast oil wealth, Nigeria continues to face enormous development challenges. When these factors are combined with pervasive corruption and Boko Haram's brutal terrorization of the population, northern Nigerians are left without a reliable source of security. The long-term solution to Boko Haram cannot come solely from Nigeria's military or security forces, but rather also requires Nigeria's political leaders to give serious and sustained attention to addressing the systemic problems of corruption, the lack of effective and equitable governance, and the country's uneven social and economic development.

While we work to address these broader factors, we will also remain sharply focused on the heart wrenching event that has brought us here today. The tragic situation of these girls and

the families who hope for their safe return has captured the attention of the world. As I have highlighted already, DoD is committed to supporting Nigeria's efforts to locate and recover these girls. This will not be an easy task, as hostage recovery is a high-risk undertaking in the best of circumstances. We are still seeking information on whether and how the girls may have been dispersed. Indeed, if this terrible episode is to resolve with the girls' safe return, the government of Nigeria must continue to match its public statements with a serious and focused response that draws on all elements of its government, the influence of key social and religious figures, and the resources international partners are making available to assist.