

CONFLICT BRIEFING NOTES

CONFLICT BRIEFING NO. 28, SEPTEMBER 2015

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** All reports are based on anonymous NSRP sources.

Executive Summary

There was relative improvement in security with occasional attacks by Jamaatu Ahlis-Sunna Liddaawati Wal Jihad (JAS) in the North-East. 200 suspected insurgents are reported to have surrendered to the Nigerian forces even as security forces claimed they had recovered communities and territories occupied by JAS insurgents. These counter-insurgency initiatives have reportedly been aided by the interception and arrest of about 50 suspected accomplices who are reported to be responsible for supplying food, drugs and fuel to the insurgent group. However, JAS has continued to refute claims of the military that it had routed the insurgents. Although the military option has dominated counter-insurgency initiatives, the federal government said it remained open to negotiations with JAS for the possible release of the Chibok Girls abducted April 14, 2014.

The Nigerian Army has reinstated 3,032 soldiers dismissed last year for alleged acts of cowardice and indiscipline in the on-going battle with JAS insurgents. This has reportedly boosted the morale of the soldiers who have been redeployed to various formations to fight the insurgents.

The delay in appointment of ministers kept tensions high amongst political interest groups as they jostled for ministerial appointments. Appointments into key state government positions in some states have also heightened political tensions.

The federal government has successfully facilitated access to bailout loans for 19 states across the country with resultant boost in economic activities. Proceeding from the Special Intervention Fund of the Presidential Relieve Package earlier approved by the President, the loans totalling N338 billion are expected to clear out all outstanding workers' salaries and allowances in affected states.

Context Analysis/Conflict Profile

Political

The delay in appointment of ministers dominated political discourse ahead of Nigeria's October 1 Independence Day celebrations. Speculations about candidates for the ministerial appointments created apprehension in various political camps. Appointments of state government officials have also raised tensions. For instance, there has been mixed reactions to the decision of Governor Abdullahi Ganduje of Kano State to appoint 10 women into key offices. While women's rights activists have applauded the appointments, other stakeholders including some influential religious leaders have condemned the appointments. Other political appointments made, particularly those of the Governor's Principal Private Secretary (PPS), have continued to generate tensions as many accuse the Governor of violating the principle of seniority in the Civil Service by reportedly elevating Alhaji Usman Muhammad from a level 9 office to level 16 and appointing him as the PPS.

In Plateau State, political interest groups remain anxious over the continued delay in appointment of Commissioners. The situation has given rise to speculations that the state Governor is deliberately holding off on appointments until the outcome of the on-going trial challenging his victory at the polls. The delay has however served to slow down governance in the state. In neighbouring Kaduna, Governor El-Rufai's decision to retire some permanent secretaries ahead of their tenure expiration date whilst appointing others in their stead has been criticised as a 'witch-hunting' exercise by the opposition PDP. Similarly, the termination of appointments of Executive Secretaries, Directors of Personnel Management (DPM) and Treasurers in the 23 LGAs has been described as a move to undermine key structures of the PDP in the state.

Apprehension and uncertainty over the outcome of Elections Tribunals have persisted in some states with a resultant lull in governance in affected areas. The controversy at the Rivers State gubernatorial election tribunal intensified following the change of the chairman of the tribunal over an alleged bribery scandal. PDP members alleged the change was intended to favour the case of the APC. Similarly, the rejection of key Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) documents in defence of the declaration of Governor Ifeanyi Okowa as the winner of the April 11 governorship polls at the Elections Tribunal in Delta State has generated controversies as PDP supporters allege political interference in the proceedings of the tribunal.

The political landscape in Bayelsa State remained tense as political interest groups commenced mobilizations toward the December 6, 2015 gubernatorial polls. Former President Goodluck Jonathan and his wife, Dame Patience are reported to have publicly endorsed Governor Seriake Dickson as their candidate of choice for the upcoming elections in the state. This has heightened intra-party dissensions following the disqualification of all candidates and the declaration of Governor Dickson as the sole PDP candidate by the party's National leadership. The APC on the other hand, has concluded its primaries to select the party's flagbearer for the elections. Former Governor Timipre Sylva emerged successful at the primaries that were reportedly marred by violence.

Social

The on-going operations against JAS have resulted in the rescue of more women and children held in communities recaptured from the insurgents. The military reportedly recaptured most of the JAS camps in Bolungu, Bula Doye, Cheehi Dare, Banki, Kumshe and Bama and recovered the strategic bridge between Miyanti and Banki towns previously controlled by JAS.

Although the counter-insurgency initiatives made significant gains, local security challenges persisted in several states. For instance, Kano State recorded a rise in cases of armed robbery attacks especially at Falgore forest which is located along the strategic Kano – Jos road. A significant number of commuters, mostly traders from Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states, are reported to have fallen prey to armed bandits on the highway. The rapidly deteriorating situation has been blamed on the dismantling of military checkpoints in line with the Presidential order. The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) responded to the situation by deploying a special combat unit to provide the much-needed security in the area. In Plateau State, communal violence continued unabated in Mahagah, Lugere and Show villages of Barkin Ladi LGA with resultant loss of lives and property. The violence is reported to have extended to Kadunung village in Mangu LGA where unidentified gunmen set houses ablaze killing 36 people and dislodging countless others. The attacks have led to accusations and counter accusations on the identity of the attackers who are presumed to have been of Berom origin, setting off threats by the Piyem and Fulani ethnic groups of reprisal attacks in the near future.

The Niger Delta has continued to experience armed robbery and gang-related violence. Incidence of kidnap were recorded in all the states and some of the victims where public figures notably the Adviser to Bayelsa State Governor on political matters and a paramount ruler of Gbarantoru community in Bayelsa state.

Tensions over non-payment of salaries and allowances persisted in some states despite federal government efforts at facilitating bail-out loans for ailing states. In Kano, a group of casual workers staged a protest over non-payment of their entitlements. About 2,000 casual workers sacked in September on account of the state government's inability to sustain payment of allowances also vowed to persist in their agitation for reinstatement. Plateau State government was unable to clear all outstanding salaries and allowances of relevant workers in the state and workers continued to mobilize to demand for payment of salaries.

The agitation for salaries and allowances were not limited to the states. In Abuja, legislative aides who served in the 7th National Assembly engaged in a protest early this month over non-payment of their severance entitlements by the assembly authorities. The growing trend where workers are unsure of their monthly wage continues to impact negatively on productivity of workforce in affected areas.

Economic

Economic activities in several states improved significantly with the boost from the Federal Government bailout loan which aided the payment of some workers' salaries and allowances. However, business transactions remained low due to poor patronage from workers who seem reluctant to spend given the irregular payment of their monthly wages.

In Kano State, production activities have resumed in earnest following the resolution of the lingering conflict between local Kano tie and dye artisans and their Chinese counterparts. A memorandum of understanding now guides the activities of both groups to prevent imitation of the local dye products.

Devastating floods resulting from heavy rainfall continues to pose a threat to livelihoods and safety in several parts of the state. Several houses have been destroyed while residents of Falali, Huguma and Kachako in Takai Local Government Area have been displaced prompting the urgent constitution of a committee in the State House of Assembly to assess the damage and institute remedial action. The incessant robbery attacks in Falgore forest has also impacted negatively on movement of goods and commodities along the Kano - Jos highway.

In the Niger Delta, oil servicing companies continued to lay off significant numbers of their staff following the persistently low price of oil. Companies like the West African Oil Service (WAOS) and Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) reportedly sacked many of their employees. The Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union (NUPENG) have picketed at the offices of the Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) in Warri. The NUPENG workers are protesting the sack of over 2,000 workers of the company without payment of their basic entitlements.

National Context

Update on Regional Response to JAS

There was marked reduction in JAS attacks across the region as multi-national forces continue to record significant success in counter-insurgency efforts. However, a suicide bomb attack is reported to have occurred near an army camp in Northern Cameroon town of Mora killing 5 people and injuring countless others. Recent occurrences suggest that the insurgents may have stepped up attacks in the area which was previously used as a base for recruiting members for operations in Nigeria.

Humanitarian Situation in the North East

The humanitarian situation in the North East remained precarious. International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has reviewed its estimate of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria from 1.5 million to 2.1 million people, which it attributed to the increase in insurgent attacks and counter-insurgency operations. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has identified other factors such as unrelenting communal strife and the return of displaced Nigerians who had previously fled the country as contributing to the rise in numbers. About 900 displaced Nigerians repatriated from Cameroon were only last week evacuated to Maiduguri, after suspected JAS militants attacked border communities. NEMA and the Borno State Emergency Management Agency (BOSEMA) also facilitated the return of 551 Nigerians of Borno State origin that migrated to Cameroon to escape attacks by insurgents.

A reported outbreak of Cholera at three IDP camps in Maiduguri resulted in the death of 16 persons and the hospitalisation of 172 others. Officials of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) say the situation is critical and have called for immediate and drastic action by government and development partners alike.

Security Operatives Clampdown on Pro-Biafra Group

The escalating violence between security forces and the pro-Biafra group, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) continued. Over 150 members of MASSOB were arrested by security operatives. Two members of the group were killed and several others wounded in the ensuing clash as Joint Security Task Force members attempted to apprehend members of MASSOB during church activities marking the 16th anniversary of the movement. The Security operatives are alleged to have used brute force on the unarmed MASSOB members whilst informing them that they are carrying out a Federal Government directive to clampdown on the group. The latest clash has generated tensions as it follows an incident last month when security operatives opened fire on unarmed members of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB). There are concerns that members of MASSOB may launch retaliatory attacks if this trend persists.

Implications and Recommendations for Programmes in the Northeast

Humanitarian programmes operating or planning to operate in the Northeast may continue to be impacted by the mass migrations related to military attacks on JAS strong holds in the region. Programmes will continue to be challenged by safety and security in view of JAS continued attacks as well as government counter-attacks on JAS positions.

For programmes working on humanitarian assistance, it is important to ensure that adequate medical care is provided for IDPs in order to meet their basic human needs. It is also important to ensure that programme implementation is carried out with a high degree of conflict sensitivity and is based on up-to-date conflict analysis. Implementation plans need to remain flexible in order to respond to constantly changing dynamics in the region.

The Seventh Division of the Nigerian Army in Maiduguri instituted a rule forbidding the use of horses by traditional rulers in view of recent developments where JAS insurgents have taken up horse-riding as a means of transportation. This rule is intended to help the military differentiate between JAS members and innocent community members. This decision may present challenges to programmes focused on social cohesion and peacebuilding, as conflict between traditional rulers and military forces such as the CJTF as they implement restrictions at the community level to assist their counter-assaults on JAS remains a possibility. It is recommended that programmes facilitate community dialogue with CJTF and traditional rulers whilst keeping abreast of current standard operating procedure with the CJTF and JTF and MOD to ensure that their efforts at civilian-armed groups dialogue is not viewed as disruptive to overall military procedures.

Implications and Recommendations for Programmes in Kano

In the spite of the improved security in most parts of the state,, reports of armed robbery attacks in the Falgore forest, located on the Kano-Jos highway in Doguwa Local Government have presented threats to peace and security for commuters, motorists and nearby communities. Business activities in the nearby communities have been affected due to inherent fear of attacks by the bandits. For all programmes working in economic growth, incidents of violence on major thoroughfares can have a negative impact on the overall impact of such programmes. It is recommended for economic growth programmes to remain in close contact with governance and security sector reform programmes to ensure that all safety and security dimensions of the activities in Kano are accounted for. Relevant adjustments to logframes may need to be effected if security along the Kano-Jos road does not improve over the next three to six months.

The month of September witnessed protests over non-payment of worker's salaries and allowances in some states. It is unclear when the state governments will complete all outstanding payments hence, continued protests is likely. For programmes working on reforming the public financial management system, it is essential to focus efforts on government counterparts to stress the importance of addressing grievances related to delay in wages in order to mitigate protests and maintain peace and security at the community level.

Implications and Recommendations for Programmes in the Middle Belt

The month of September witnessed the State government task force continuing their attempts to clear the city centre of street trader operations. In the past two months of the deployment of the task force, the expedition has not been able to achieve its desired result of removing the traders from the streets due to the lack of alternative markets for the traders to relocate to. It is recommended that programmes working with economic growth and governance support the provision of alternative markets, or the rebuilding of the burned main market, as a lasting solution to addressing the street trader presence in the city centre.

Communal violence continued unabated in some villages this month. Continued crime and communal violence across both Kaduna and Plateau States remain challenging to overall peace and security improvements in the state. Therefore, it is recommended that programmes working on security sector reform, governance, and peacebuilding in the Middle Belt region continue to closely monitor the political, economic and social indicators to track the recent increases in incidents of inter-communal and inter-personal violence, as these can impact levels of community trust and economic viability of businesses in the region.

Implications and Recommendations for Programmes in the Niger Delta

In the Niger Delta, armed robbery, kidnapping and violent attacks by well-organised criminal gangs continued unabated in the month of September as did protests against the sack of oil workers without payment of their basic entitlements. Programmes working on community restoration and social cohesion between natural resource management companies and local communities should consider the potential negative consequences of non-payment for workers in communities where tensions are already high between oil and gas companies and communities. It is recommended that programmes prepare for potential adjustments to the programming efforts to provide for these changing dynamics in relevant communities.

The upcoming December 5, 2015 election in Bayelsa state presents opportunities for programmes working on elections and security sector reform to increase the early warning and electoral violence monitoring with additional support for government officials and community members.