

NIGERIA



ABDUCTED: Rachel Daniel holds a picture of her 17-year-old daughter, Rose, who was seized in Chibok, northeastern Nigeria, by Boko Haram militants on April 14. REUTERS/JOE PENNEY

Divisions between Nigeria's federal government and states in the northeast undermine efforts to counter Boko Haram, the militant group that kidnapped of more than 200 schoolgirls last month

# The rifts behind Nigeria's torment

BY ISAAC ABRAK AND JOE BROCK

## NIGERIA BOKO HARAM

CHIBOK/ABUJA, MAY 29, 2014

**W**hen local people warned that hundreds of Islamist militants were heading towards his remote town of Chibok in northeastern Nigeria, Danuma Mphur hurried to summon help.

As chairman of the Parent Teachers Association at the town's school, Mphur feared for the safety of children who were staying there to take exams. The 15 Nigerian soldiers in Chibok were no match for the forces of Boko Haram, a militant group waging a campaign to create an Islamic state in the region. Reinforcements were needed, fast. Mphur says he called the police and the local government chairman.

In turn the local government chairman also called the police and contacted the military commander in Chibok between between 9:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. on that evening, according to Kashim Shettima, the governor of Borno state, which includes Chibok.

"Can we go further than that?" said Shettima, suggesting there was little more local people could have done than ask for help.

Backup never arrived. The military said in a statement that it received no warning about the attack. It added that when reinforcements were sent, they were ambushed on the "120km rugged and tortuous road" from Maiduguri, the state capital, and delayed. Chibok's local government chairman could not be contacted for comment.

Either way, about three hours after Mphur rang for help, Boko Haram militants swept into Chibok and abducted 276 girls from the school. While 57 escaped, according to the state government, most are still missing, and Boko Haram has threatened to sell them "in the market."

Though Nigeria's military said on Monday that it now knows where the girls are, it has ruled out using force to try to rescue them.

The mass kidnap on the night of April



DEADLY: The aftermath of a bomb attack near Maiduguri in March that killed at least 10 people. Boko Haram's campaign to create an Islamic state has killed an estimated 1,800 this year. **REUTERS/STRINGER**

“What happened ... could have been avoided if the government had taken the necessary steps.

**Danuma Mphur**

Chairman of the Parent Teachers Association of  
Chibok Government Secondary School

14 sparked headlines worldwide – but it was far from the first misstep in Nigeria's war against Boko Haram. Interviews with witnesses to the kidnapping, Nigerian military and security officials, Western diplomats and counter-terrorism experts, highlight a series of failings by politicians and the military in the struggle against the group, not just in the hours leading up to the raid on the school, but over several years.

Divisions, low morale and corruption within the military have allowed the Islamist militants to take over large swathes of Nigeria's northeast. Since an initial uprising in 2009, Boko Haram's campaign to create a breakaway Islamic state has accelerated. It has now killed more than 5,000 people, including an estimated 1,800 this

year alone.

A bitter struggle between the federal government in Abuja and at least two state governors in the northeast has made it harder to coordinate a response to the group, say analysts and security sources.

Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan, who came to power in 2010 and is expected to run for a second term next year, is a Christian from the south of the country. Many people in the mostly-Muslim north, which is less developed and poorer than the south, feel neglected by his government.

In Chibok, where the charred remains of dormitory bunk beds sit amid the rubble of the school, Mphur believes the mass kidnapping could have been prevented. He told Reuters: "What happened ... could have been avoided if the government had taken the necessary steps."

### FROSTY RELATIONS

In the Hausa language of northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram roughly translates as "Western education is forbidden," and in 2012 the militant group announced it would specifically target schools.



DIVISIONS: The government of President Goodluck Jonathan, left, pays too little attention to northeastern states, say locals in the north. In Borno state, where Kashim Shettima, right, is governor, more than 200 schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram last month. **REUTERS/AFOLABI SOTUNDE**

Since then, Boko Haram militants have torched numerous schools and abducted or killed hundreds of children, according to a senior Nigerian military source.

Three Western intelligence sources in Nigeria estimate Boko Haram was holding between 200 and 300 girls as slaves even before the raid on Chibok. Dozens have escaped - but Nigeria's security forces have failed to interview many survivors even though their information could help combat Boko Haram or assist in finding girls still held captive, kidnap victims and security sources said.

One escapee was a girl abducted by Boko Haram in a mountainous region near Cameroon last year. "No one ever came to ask me questions after I escaped. I could help them find others," she told Reuters.

Political differences between regions and poor organisation of the security forces are two of the problems.

Borno has some of the lowest economic indicators in the country, and investors shun the state because of poor security. Despite such problems, the president has visited the state only once during his four years in power.

Jonathan and Shettima, the governor of Borno, have a frosty relationship. Shettima

“They started burning the school, and surrounding us. They grabbed me and my sister and ... loaded us into trucks.

**Lydia Powu**

16, who escaped after being seized from her school in Chibok by Boko Haram militants

is a leading figure in the main opposition All Progressives Congress party and has been openly critical of Jonathan's administration. According to sources close to the president, Shettima angered Jonathan in February by saying that Boko Haram was stronger and better equipped than the military.

Though Nigeria allocates around 1 trillion naira (\$6.5 billion) to security every year, soldiers in the northeast are stretched, several security sources said.

Widespread corruption means a lack of investment in training and failure to maintain equipment. Money is often wasted. Nigeria bought Israeli surveillance drones in 2006 that might have been used to hunt for the girls, but poor maintenance has left them grounded, the aircrafts' manufacturer said.

Boko Haram fighters, in contrast, are well-armed and determined. In dozens of attacks by militants in the past year, soldiers

were swept aside by militants arriving in trucks, motorbikes and sometimes even stolen armoured vehicles, firing rocket-propelled grenades looted in raids on military facilities.

In pure numbers, Boko Haram is unmatched. It has an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 members, three security sources said, whereas a Nigerian task force in Borno state numbers around 12,000, including soldiers and police.

But soldiers told Reuters that morale is low. Their commanders pocket some of their salaries, they often don't have enough to eat, and they live in fear of Boko Haram attacks, some said.

"They (Boko Haram) are better equipped," one soldier told Reuters by telephone, adding that he couldn't stand up to a Boko Haram attack at his security post. "I'm taking a knife to a gunfight," he said.

### SCHOOL CLOSURE

In December, Boko Haram mounted a large-scale assault on the Maiduguri air force base, putting two helicopters and three military aircraft out of action, the military said at the time. The remaining helicopter gunships were subsequently moved

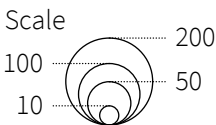
*Text continues on page 5*

# Boko Haram attacks

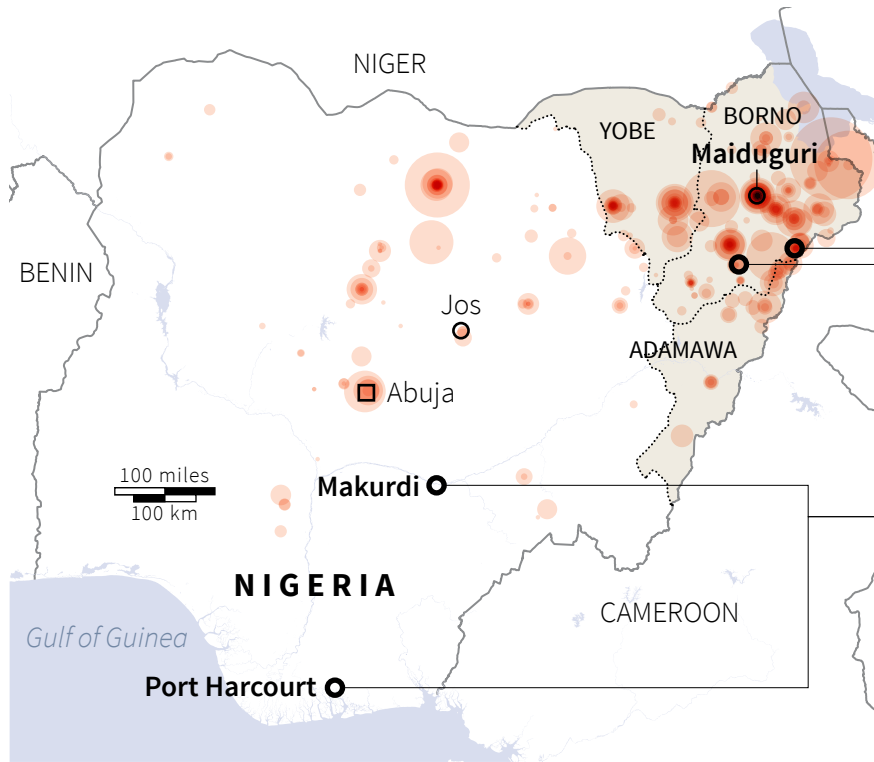
Boko Haram's struggle for an Islamic state in northern Nigeria has killed thousands and made the Islamist sect the biggest threat to security in Africa's top oil producer.

## LOCATION OF ATTACKS

January 1, 2011 to May 17, 2014. Each dot on the map represents an attack with fatalities. Darker colour represents multiple attacks in the same area.



State of emergency imposed since May 2013

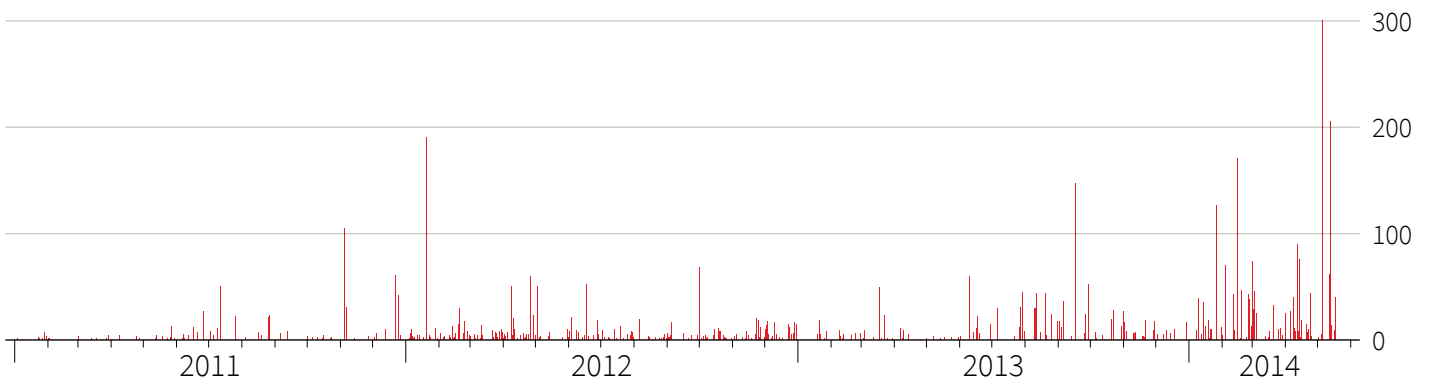


**Gwoza Hills**  
In February militants seized mortar bombs, rocket-propelled grenades and ammunition from a military outpost.

**Chibok**  
Boko Haram insurgents abduct more than 200 school girls in April.

The military moved helicopters to Makurdi and Port Harcourt from Maiduguri after Boko Haram attacked the air force base there in December.

## DAILY FATALITIES — JANUARY 2011 THROUGH MAY 2014\*



Sources: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data), Raleigh, Clionadh, Andrew Linke, Havard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen; Reuters.

\* As of May 17, 2014

to Makurdi and Port Harcourt airports, at least three hours flight from Chibok, limiting the army's ability to carry out surveillance and transport forces, two security sources said.

The military's weakness was evident again in February when dozens of fighters loyal to Boko Haram descended on a remote military outpost in the Gwoza hills, about 100 km (60 miles) east of Chibok.

The fighters attacked using Hilux trucks mounted with machine guns over ground that offered little cover, a security source said. In a battle lasting hours, 50 insurgents and nine Nigerian troops were killed, the source said. Despite those losses, the militants succeeded in looting the base of its stockpile of 200 mortar bombs, 50 rocket-propelled grenades and hundreds of rounds of ammunition.

Two weeks later, Boko Haram fighters attacked a college in Buni Yadi in Yobe state, which borders Borno. They killed 59 teenage boys, and two security sources said they also kidnapped 11 schoolgirls.

After that, the Borno state government closed all its schools. Simeon Nwakaudu, spokesman for the Federal Ministry of Education, which falls under Jonathan's jurisdiction, told Reuters the ministry had sent a written warning to the state governor advising that exams be moved to a safer location.

Nwakaudu, who did not show Reuters a copy of the letter, said the Chibok attack "would have been averted" if Shettima had heeded the warning.

Shettima denies he ever received such a warning. Instead, he decided to reopen the school at Chibok to hold exams.

"We were completely at ease with the security situation in Chibok at the time we took that decision," Shettima told Reuters. He said responsibility for security lay with the federal government, which controls security forces. "We have security forces in every local government across the state. They could have advised us."



SECURITY WEAKNESS: Police, seen here patrolling at a demonstration in Abuja about the kidnapped schoolgirls, struggle to provide security in the northeast against Boko Haram's well-armed and determined fighters. **REUTERS/AFOLABI SOTUNDE**

**\$6.5 billion**  
Annual amount Nigeria allocates for security spending

Source: Nigerian federal budget

At the same time the Education Ministry was without clear leadership. Jonathan had sacked education minister Ruqayyatu Rufai along with eight other ministers in a cabinet reshuffle in September last year, and has not filled the position since.

The deputy education minister, Nyesom Wike, had other matters on his mind: He has spent the past six months unofficially campaigning to be governor of a southern state. Jonathan is keen that one of his political allies wins the governorship against an incumbent who is one of the president's rivals.

To the parents of kidnapped children, both the federal and local authorities failed to do enough in Chibok. Esther Kabu,

whose daughter Dorcas is one of those still missing, said there was never any discussion of holding exams other than in Chibok.

"What annoys me most is that they did not consult us, the parents of the school, when they decided that the girls should come back to school for their exams," she said. "I had this fear in me about her safety in the hostel. They should have provided more security to the school."

## THE ATTACK

On April 14, the Boko Haram fighters arrived in Chibok at 11:30 p.m., according to Mphur, the chairman of the school PTA. Residents fled into the scrublands surrounding the town.

The gunmen, dressed in military uniforms and carrying AK47s and rocket-propelled grenades, made their way to the school about a mile outside the town, where they tricked the schoolgirls, saying they were soldiers protecting them from Boko Haram.

Lydia Powu, 16, recalled the moment she realised the men who coaxed her out of

bed were not soldiers: “They started burning the school, and surrounding us. They grabbed me and my sister and walked us out of the school to another village, where they loaded us into trucks.

“So I asked my elder sister, ‘What are we going to do now?’ We looked at each other and we knew. We jumped out of the truck. I hit my back as I fell but I forgot the pain and we ran and ran.”

In the hours after the attack, no government or military officials arrived to carry out an investigation, residents of Chibok said. “Government security people only came to ask us questions three days later, that is how much they care for us and our children,” Mphur said.

That may partly be because the federal government had another incident to handle, closer to home. On the morning of the Chibok attack, Boko Haram detonated a large bomb at a bus station on the outskirts of Abuja, the country’s capital. The blast killed 75 people.

## “ALL-OUT WAR”

The president took more than two weeks to speak publicly about the mass kidnapping. Only when international pressure mounted, driven by a social media campaign known as #BringBackOurGirls, did Jonathan finally accept intelligence and surveillance assistance from the United States, Britain, France and China.

His understanding of the situation has been shaky. As recently as April, he said Boko Haram’s threat was only “temporary.” At an international meeting to discuss the issue in Paris on May 18, he appeared to change tack, describing Boko Haram as an “integral part of the al Qaeda.” Security experts believe the sect remains a largely homegrown insurgency.

At the Paris meeting, West African countries promised to wage “all-out war” against Boko Haram, while foreign nations



STILL HOPING: A protester holds a placard at a demonstration in Lagos on May 14 calling for the release of the kidnapped schoolgirls. **REUTERS/AKINTUNDE AKINLEYE**

pledged technical expertise and training for a new regional African effort against Islamist militants. Some 80 U.S. troops have deployed to Chad to help in operations against Boko Haram.

But the Nigerian military remains distrustful of Western involvement. And the education ministry, as one Western official who works with the Nigerian government put it, remains disengaged.

“The ministry should be mapping out a plan of how to avoid Chibok being repeated,” the source said. “But it is rudderless.”

In Chibok, the reasons for the abductions take second place to the loss. At her parents’ house in the town, 13-year-old Happy Yakub still hopes her sister, one of those abducted, may return.

“I will never go back to school until my sister comes back home,” said Yakub. “I miss her. She used to plait my hair and we played together. Now there is nobody to play with.”

*With reporting by Joe Penney in Maiduguri, Pascal Fletcher in Johannesburg, Tim Cocks in Lagos, Bate Felix in Dakar, David Rohde in Washington and Andrew Osborn in London. Editing by Richard Woods and Simon Robinson.*

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