



SAR Consultancy (Security Analysis and Research)
**Special Bulletin – Evolving Security Situation in
Aftermath of Postponement of Elections, Nigeria**



The security situation in Nigeria has continued to deteriorate since the start of the year, with increased reference to attacks attributed to Boko Haram and the insurgency in the North East. Albeit claims of military responses by the Nigerian authorities and regional counterparts have increased of late, Boko Haram related incidents continued unabated. This has resulted in continued pressure on the incumbent President in the run up to the elections, in conjunction with growing tensions about the drop in oil prices, corruption, increases in piracy, etc. However it was the issue of security that provided enough justification for a postponement to the elections, which were due to take place on the 14th of February. However, given other influences at play, criticism suggest this manoeuvre was as much a political tactic as it was security related, but only time will tell which motivation rings through. The election is now scheduled for the 28th of March. This bulletin will examine events over the last month from the perspective of this postponement, whilst also looking at the ongoing insecurity in the North East over the last month. The bulletin will also attempt to highlight potential threats and risks from both factors.

Postponement of the Elections

As forecasted by many analysts in January, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced the postponement of Nigeria's General Elections from the 14th of February for a period of 6 weeks until the 28th of March, and the state elections from the 28th of February until the 11 April, on the 7th of February. It was claimed that their decision to postpone the elections was based on advice from the military, who were purported to have noted that given the ongoing insurgency in the North East of Nigeria, safety for those voting could not be guaranteed. However, it has been suggested that this was a political maneuver rather than motivated by security challenges. The All Progressive Conference party (APC) under Buhari expressed disappointed with the change, but urged people to remain calm, especially given a perception that such a decision may increase in the risk of further insecurity throughout the country. The role of the military in the decision making process to postpone the elections has also raised eyebrows, given that the primary responsibility for election security lies with the police and civil defense corps. This has strengthened allegations that the postponement was due to politics rather than insecurity, especially given a statement made by the Inspector General of Police, Suleiman Abba made on the 2nd of February, in which he claimed that the police were prepared for the elections. This was reiterated by a number of other security agencies, who also purporting their readiness for the elections on the same day. The Government and military attempted to deflect such criticisms that the postponement was political, claiming that the military were launching a six week major offensive in the North East in February and therefore would not have the troops to provide security and logistical support for the elections.

Even at that, many have questioned what significant change could be achieved within six weeks in the North East. This has led to numerous analysts suggesting that the postponement is a delaying tactic by the incumbent President and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in a last ditch effort to have more time to garner support, given that since the start of 2015, it had been continuously purported that

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President Jonathan has been losing support. This loss in favour has been exacerbated, it is alleged, due to increased attacks by Boko Haram in the North East and allegations that they were increasing their territorial control, significant reductions in oil prices and collapse of the naira resulting in strains on Nigeria's finances, alongside growing allegations of corruption and limited prevention or prosecution.

Despite reports of increased security measures by Nigerian authorities in conjunction with strengthened response by Chadian and Cameroonian forces, Boko Haram have still displayed their prowess. If this continues, and no significant changes occur for the better, which looks increasingly likely, a second postponement may be inevitable. However, if this was to happen, it would be likely to result in widespread dissatisfaction, displaying in increased protests and violence throughout the country. It will be interesting to see what happens over the forthcoming weeks, but sufficed to say, if the elections go ahead without significant improvements in the security situation, many analysts will use that as proof enough that it was a political maneuver by the incumbent President to defer the elections. Should they not go ahead, this is likely to be met with increased insecurity, protests and violence. Either way, Boko Haram are likely to continue their activities.

Communal Violence in the Middle Belt

As in previous years, February witnessed a slight increase in communal clashes throughout the middle belt. Incidents were reported in Benue State, Kaduna State, and in Plateau State. Tensions over land, cattle rustling, grazing rights and ethno-religious disputes appear to continue to drive such violence, but exact triggers are difficult to identify. Given patterns of communal conflict over recent years, such incidents are likely to continue, adding further tensions to this vulnerable area.

Others suggest that the elections were postponed because the INEC were not prepared. Such accusations are likely to have some credibility. According to the International Crisis Group (12 Feb 2015) only 45.1 million out of 68.8 million registered voters (66%) had collected their voters cards by the original cut off point. However, they also quoted Jega, of the INEC who tried to down play this by saying in the press conference on the 7 February "Our level of preparedness, despite a few challenges, is sufficient to conduct free, fair and credible elections as scheduled on February 14 and February 28" and that INEC was "capable of delivering even better elections" than the 2011 polls.

Alleged Political Violence

Historically the period surrounding elections in Nigeria has been fraught with violence throughout the country. This year, would appear no different, and now given the postponement of the elections, many suggest a significant risk of future violence before the elections in March. Interestingly this month saw the National Human Rights Commission state that 58 people had been killed between the 3 December 2014 and the 31 January 2015, in 49 separate incidents in 22 states in incidents of political violence. The states most affected were reportedly Lagos, Kaduna and Rivers. Although these are official figures, many would suggest real figures are far higher. It is likely a more realistic figure will surface after the elections and greater investigations are undertaken.

Continued insurgent activities in the three states of Emergency?

February started in a similar vein to the end of January, with consistent reports of Boko Haram targeting large urban areas with suspected suicide bomb attacks. These attacks occurred concurrently as reports emerged for the North East of Borno State that Boko Haram were increasing their territorial control over towns and villages in the state. Reports of a number of abductions were also made this month, one of which was said to have occurred in Akada-Banga village, Borno State. Throughout the

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month more prominent targets included Maiduguri and Biu, in Borno State, Damaturu, Potiskum and Geidan in Yobe State, and Gombe town, Gombe State, with significant casualty rates in many of these incidents. This clearly illustrated that the group continues to retain resilience and commitment to conducting such attacks. Even given the increased military response half way through the month, such attacks continued. Towards the end of the month Boko Haram also conducted a number of attacks in Kano and Plateau State. The selection of these targets illustrates their continued ability to successfully work outside of the three states of emergency. This may have been an attempt to stretch military responses and draw troops away from their territorial gains, within its self-proclaimed caliphate.

As mentioned above, at the same time as the elections were postponed, the military announced a targeted military offensive against Boko Haram, which they said would take six weeks. Early reports claimed that they had recaptured Baga, Monguno, Marte amongst other towns and villages purported to be under the influence of Boko Hara. If correct, this may indicate a more tactical and coordinated approach by the Nigeria military. However, their successes might appear greater given that they have occurred at the same time as regional nations also increase their response to the group. As this month also witnessed a change in the regional response to Boko Haram, with an apparent increase in response by Chadian, Cameroonian and Niger authorities. This resulted in reports that such forces reclaimed territory from Boko Haram along the border with Nigeria and their respective countries. This regional action appeared to provoke Shekau, or the person purporting to be Shekau, resulting in him releasing a video in which he claimed that Boko Haram would defeat this regional force. Furthermore, cross border attacks were reported in greater numbers, with three attacks reported near Diffa in Niger in one week, alongside an abduction of 20 people in Cameroon, which may have provided credibility to Shekau's threat. Shekau is also reported to have committed to disrupting the elections, a claim dismissed by the Nigeria military. That being said, the first postponement and the subsequent attacks by Boko Haram may be enough for Shekau to believe he has honoured his goal. On a slightly different note, since claims that Shekau had been killed in September 2014, many have questioned the authenticity of videos purporting to be from him, a claim widely supported by the Government. However, the later part of this month saw government officials talk once again of defeating Shekau and bringing him to justice alive. Ironically, little reference has been made, yet again, by these officials to how and when they changed their belief that he was not dead as previously suggested. This provides further credibility to allegations that the Nigerian army wanted it to appear that they were regaining control, while the actual truth seems a lot less positive.

Given the political, security and economic landscape in Nigeria, the following states have been identified as high risk states in advance of the elections. These include the three states of Emergency, Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, and Kaduna, Kano, Rivers, Plateau, Lagos and Delta. This is not to say incidents will not occur in other states but the risk is deemed to be less. Vulnerable states to insurgency such as Gombe and Bauchi may also see a heightened risk at this time. As a result, SAR Consultancy recommends that travel to these areas during the forthcoming few weeks only occur where detailed security management plans are in place. Furthermore, any travel in Nigeria should be reviewed closely prior to departures, as the security situation is likely to be quite dynamic over the next few weeks. Political rallies should be avoided at all times.

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