BORDER REGIONS, EXTREMISM, AND DEVELOPMENT

By Dr. Janette Yarwood

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In this Wednesday, June, 25, 2014, file photo, a Nigerian soldier, center, walks at the scene of an explosion suspected to be set by Boko Haram extremist in Abuja, Nigeria. An "alarming spike" in suicide bombings by girls and women abused by Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria has children in danger of being seen as potential threats, the U.N. children's agency said Tuesday, May 26, 2015. (Source: AP Photo/Olamikan Gbemiga, File.)

WHITHER TOGO'S OPPOSITION?

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Border Regions and Insecurity

"Border regions in Africa keep me up at night," is what one official in the African Union Border Program (AUBP) told the author in a recent interview. According to Professor Anthony Asiwaju, border regions, or borderlands, are areas along or across state lines inhabited by "the same people, culture, land, flora and fauna." Border regions can be vibrant communities, but in many sub-Saharan African countries, rural areas are often underserved in terms of physical, financial, social, and economic infrastructure, and they may have minimal levels of government representation or political power. These conditions can result in marginalization of the population and make them vulnerable to extremism. Compounding this, the difficult terrain in some border regions makes them hard to police and contributes to the proliferation of small arms, light weapons, and other illicit activities.

Security threats linked to violent extremist organizations have emerged in border regions as various groups exploit these marginalized spaces. In the Cameroon-Chad-Niger-Nigeria border region——the Boko Haram stronghold——the response of governments has been to create the regional Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which comprises military units from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Across the continent, the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU), an armed rebel group, operates along the Eastern Congo-Western Uganda borderland. Regional governments, along with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (MONUSCO), have conducted operations against the ADF-NALU.

Exploiting Border Regions—Boko Haram and ADF-NALU

Despite their rhetorical commitment to rural development, the central governments of the countries facing these insurgencies have neglected their borderlands, and insurgent groups have taken advantage. The Boko Haram insurgency can be directly linked to chronic poor governance by Nigeria's federal and state governments, the political marginalization of northeastern Nigeria, and the region's accelerating impoverishment. Boko Haram has also recruited herdsmen and farmers from Chad and Niger who were displaced by drought and food shortages. Reportedly, Boko Haram has paid hiring bonuses in the region. Boko Haram also made use of existing cross border trade networks in the north to traffic arms and weapons. People living in the border areas in which Boko Haram operates share ethnic ties (members of the Hausa, Mandara, Kanuri, Fulani, and Kotoko ethnic groups are found in Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria). They also engage in cross-border farming, fishing, cattle rearing, small-scale businesses, and trade. This translates into strong regional ties that transcend borders. There are also historic border market areas in the region. Thus, the inhabitants of the border regions are economically, socially, and politically integrated. Boko Haram became a major regional security threat because of its increased selection of targets in neighboring countries.

The ADF emerged in Uganda during mid-1990s. The group merged forces with rebels from a formerly active western Ugandan group known as the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), guerrillas who had previously fought for the reinstatement of the "Rwenzururu Kingdom," in addition to former Idi Amin fighters and other disgruntled soldiers from previous Ugandan regimes. These groups fled a Ugandan army offensive and established rear bases in the eastern DRC in the northwestern Rwenzori Mountain region, along the border with Uganda. In the Great Lakes region, ADF-NALU was able to integrate with the local community. They took part in coffee cultivation, engaged in agricultural smuggling to Uganda, and shopped in the local markets. The group reportedly recruits disenfranchised youth in an impoverished border region whose residents feel neglected by Kinshasa with gifts such as new bicycles and cash. The Ugandan government claims that the group has connections to al-Qaeda and the Somali militant group al-Shabaab. According to an IRIN report, "ADF-NALU are the product of about 20 years of cross-border living, operating as guerrillas and often blurring the lines between the criminal, the rebel, the citizen, the soldier and the state." According to Dr. Lindsay Scorgie-Porter, both western Uganda and eastern Congo have remained underdeveloped, conflict-ridden, and relatively ignored areas by their central governments. Communities on both sides of the border have high levels of unemployment, little access to education, and minimal levels of government representation.

Worsening Conditions and Countering Violent Extremism

Initially, Boko Haram and ADF-NALU appeared to advocate or provide resources for some of the most marginalized areas of the country. As each group changed strategies and became more violent, they eventually turned on the communities that supported them. Communities in the Cameroon-Chad-Niger-Nigeria border area are the worst affected by Boko Haram's stepped-up violence. Members of local communities suffer regular kidnappings, rapes, bombings, murders, and expulsions. Similarly, the ADF-NALU has increased its violence in the DRC's North Kivu province; the group is accused of killing more than 400 civilians since 2014. The attacks have been brutal, including beheadings, mutilations, and rape. Women and young children have been killed as well. Ultimately, the most disenfranchised and historically marginalized communities in these areas become further victimized. Moreover, because of the increased violence, those affected flee their homes, and neighboring border regions already facing difficult conditions experience an influx of refugees. Refugee camps then become spaces of recruitment for extremist groups, thereby creating a vicious cycle.

Beyond programs that seek to curb Islamist networks or create dialogue with local communities, governments that seek to counter violent extremism need to include economic and social development for border regions in their strategies. Military operations and policing are likely to be unsuccessful unless the root causes of lack of development are addressed.

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History of Divided Opposition

Together, Faure Gnassingbé and his father, Eyadéma Gnassingbé, have ruled Togo since 1967. After his father's death in 2005, Faure Gnassingbé was installed in office with backing from the military. He subsequently stepped down but later that year won a poll in which as many as 500 people died in election-related violence. Due to international and regional pressure, Gnassingbé signed a power-sharing agreement with the opposition in 2006, which at the time was led by the Union of Forces for Change (UFC). Although the UFC signed the Global Political Accord (APG), it refused to join the government of national unity after the position of prime minister was awarded to Yawovi Agboyibo of a smaller opposition party, the Action Committee for Renewal (CAR).

According to interviews with political and civil society stakeholders conducted during a recent research trip to Togo, the UFC's refusal to join the unity government in 2006 highlighted the deep divides in the opposition during this period, which only widened in the aftermath of subsequent elections. Despite some progress on reforms after the UFC signed the APG, the opposition's lack of cohesion, along with lack of political will on the part of the ruling party, played a large role in preventing some of the key elements of the APG from being implemented. After peaceful legislative elections were held in 2007, in which the UFC made historic gains, winning 27 out of 81 seats of parliament, the presidential elections of 2010 created new rifts in the opposition.

Opposition Splits Further

After UFC lost the 2010 elections, Gilchrist Olympio, its longtime leader, agreed to a coalition with Gnassingbé and the latter's party (the UFC was given seven ministerial positions). A large proportion of UFC members disagreed with this decision to join the government. In protest, Jean-Pierre Fabre, secretary general of the UFC at the time, formed a breakaway party, the ANC, further splintering an already divided opposition. In the run-up to the 2013 legislative elections, the opposition again failed to unify behind a single party, but did loosely coalesce into two broader coalitions of political parties and civil society organizations—the Let's Save Togo Collective (CST, Collectif Sauvons le Togo), headed by ANC, and the Rainbow Coalition (CAEC, Coalition Arc-en-Ciel), anchored by CAR. Capitalizing on the fractured opposition, Gnassingbé and UNIR consolidated their position in the polls, winning 62 out of 91 seats (the number of seats increased by 10 since the 2007 elections). Altering decades of opposition dynamics, the CST and the ANC emerged as the main opposition, winning 19 seats. The CAEC won six, while the remnants of the UFC were punished for joining the government, winning only three seats (down from 27 in 2007). Olympio defended his decision to reach accommodation with the ruling party as "the right choice" for the country.

Reasons for Continuing Divides

Personal issues and historical rivalries within the opposition appear to have frustrated attempts to unite the CST and CAEC camps behind one candidate in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Fabre was able to cobble together a coalition of eight opposition groups to support his candidacy under the banner of the Combat for Political Change (CAP 2015) platform. He was unable to go beyond that and secure the support of all the major opposition parties because CAR boycotted the elections, four other opposition parties ran their own candidates, and three other parties aligned with Gnassingbé.

According to interviewees, some within the opposition questioned Fabre's genuine commitment to political reforms, such as term limits, saying that his desire to remain the main opposition leader often took precedence over delivering on political reforms. Others noted that his uncompromising stance often backfired in talks with the government and other opposition groups. His inflexible leadership style also appears to have led to disagreements within the CST coalition. The Alliance of Democrats for Integral Development (ADDI)—which won the second-most seats for the CST coalition in 2013—reportedly felt sidelined in the alliance and decided against backing Fabre, running its own presidential candidate in 2015.

Conclusion: Opposition Unity Key to Democratization

Academic research on opposition unity in semi-authoritarian regimes suggests that the political experience of Togo may represent broader trends in Africa and beyond. In a 2006 study published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, political scientists Marc Morje Howard and Philip G. Roessler argue that, in competitive authoritarian regimes, the opposition's "decision to create a coalition or to jointly support a single candidate, despite significant regional, ethnic, or ideological differences and divisions, can have a tremendous effect on the electoral process and its results." Based on global data from 1990 to 2002, their main finding is that the "impact of such coalitions on political liberalization can be rapid and dramatic." The study by Howard and Roessler built on previous Africa-focused research by Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle that also found that "opposition cohesion" played an important role in democratic transitions on the continent in the early 1990s.

The recent case of electoral turnover in Nigeria in 2015 lends further support to the theory on opposition unity: it appears that a broad-based opposition coalition was key to opposition success in Nigeria. As argued by political scientist Nic Cheeseman, "the most obvious lesson from the Nigerian election is that opposition unity is critical if an established incumbent is to be defeated." In light of these broader findings, Togo's opposition parties might be well advised to strengthen cohesion among their leaders, especially as elections approach.

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