

# **BUHARI'S POST ELECTIONS CHALLENGES ON TACKLING BOKO HARAM**

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Nigerians celebrated the electrifying victory returned one of its harshest former dictators to power, sobering challenges confront Muhammadu Buhari. Buhari warned the country's brutal Boko Haram insurgents that he would be coming after them. The victory of Muhammadu Buhari, in the March presidential poll, was viewed as a landmark - the first time a sitting president had been voted out of office. Equally important was incumbent Goodluck Jonathan's acceptance of defeat - not a given on a continent in which rulers have often gone to great lengths to retain power. He won 52.4 percent of ballots cast in a March 28-29 vote to unseat President Goodluck Jonathan and his People's Democratic Party, the first lawful transition of power since British colonial rule ended in 1960. Buhari's inauguration is scheduled for May 29 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Boko Haram, whose barbarous campaign to establish an Islamic "caliphate" has driven 1.5 million from their homes, kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls and left large swathes of northern Nigeria burned to ashes. Buhari has felt the violence first hand. In July 2014, he escaped unharmed from attacks on his convoy in the northern city of Kaduna that the government described as an assassination attempt and analysts said was probably carried out by Boko Haram.

Some of outgoing President Jonathan's supporters alleged that Buhari and other northern Muslims aided Boko Haram for the purpose of tarnishing Jonathan's image. They also countered arguments about Jonathan's military

ineffectiveness by pointing to the off for the purpose of tarnishing Jonathan's image.<sup>2</sup> They also countered arguments about Jonathan's military ineffectiveness by pointing to the offensive the government launched against Boko Haram (after the original election date was postponed) on February 14 as evidence that Jonathan was able to defeat Boko Haram. This offensive, which benefited from Chadian, Nigerien and Cameroonian troop deployments in Nigeria's borderlands, drove Boko Haram from most of the towns it occupied in northeastern Nigeria, including its 'capital' of Gwoza, which Boko Haram renamed 'Dar al-Hikma' ('House of Wisdom' in Arabic).

However, it's reminiscent of the situation when Chadian troops occupied parts of northern Nigeria in the 1980s, Nigerian Major-General Muhammadu Buhari chased them back across the border in a show of strength months before he seized power in a military coup. Thirty years later, the 72-year-old former strongman has returned as head of state, defeating incumbent Goodluck Jonathan at the ballot box this week and once again seems determined to end Chad's presence on Nigerian soil. Chad's battle-hardened troops have been a driving force behind a regional offensive against Boko Haram that has expelled the Islamist group from the major towns of northeast Nigeria in a matter of weeks.

One of Buhari's main campaign promises was to root out corruption and restore prestige to Nigeria's once-proud military, cooperation with neighboring countries may return to the previous pattern of joint border patrols, rather than a multinational mission on Nigerian soil, analysts said. In addition by naming poverty and ignorance as the causes of Boko Haram, Buhari is far more direct than his predecessor. "If you are starving and young and in search of answers as to why your life is so difficult, fundamentalism can be alluring...."<sup>3</sup> The solution, Buhari says, is to offer an alternative, especially by boosting education, in particular for girls.

Moreover, Buhari's commitment on defeating the Islamists – coupled with his reputation for toughness and northern credentials – could play an important role in winning the collaboration of the northern population, estranged from Abuja by years of indifference and army abuses. His military experience is an additional asset as he knows the ins-and-outs of the military. Furthermore, people in the battleground state of Borno - which voted massively for Buhari - could prove his most effective weapon in the war against Boko Haram.

Nevertheless, things are so smooth and simple as Buhari's plan to combat corruption in Nigeria's armed forces, improve the pay and equipment of soldiers, and impose a clear chain of command from political leaders in Abuja, will take time. Boko Haram has been expanding in territories of Nigeria's French-speaking neighbours, such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Islamic State also renamed and re-branded Boko Haram as the 'Islamic State in West Africa.'<sup>4</sup> This means that the battle against Boko Haram needs multinational forces and cooperation which is not African Union's strong asset. While, other West African nations have long complained about the absence of Nigerian leadership, sometimes African leaders are keen on the need to take the full credits on any success, which could cause tensions between them. However, having won the presidential election and returned to a position of national leadership, Buhari's first statements against Boko Haram may be an indication of his leadership style: enunciation of clear principles and direction without micro-management, which of course are good omens

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#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> David Smith, Nigerian election winner vows to crush Boko Haram insurgency, The Guardian, 2 April 2015

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Zenn, From One Campaign to the Next: Buhari and the Battle against Boko Haram, African Arguments, 7 April 2015, <http://africanarguments.org/2015/04/07/from-one-campaign-to-the-next-buhari-and-the-battle-against-boko-haram-by-jacob-zenn/>

<sup>3</sup> John Campbell, New Nigerian President Buhari Has a New Plan for Taking on Boko Haram, Council on Foreign Relations, 16 April 2015, <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/04/new-nigerian-president-buhari-has-new-plan-taking-boko-haram/110395/>

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Flynn, Buhari win means Nigeria, not Chad, to lead Boko Haram fight, Reuters, 2 April 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/02/us-nigeria-violence-boko-haram-analysis-idUSKBN0MT1G320150402>

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