Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria and Uganda

A Comparative Case Study

Thomas Dyrenforth

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ABSTRACT

Boko Haram’s rise in Nigeria was a result of social, economic, religious, and political tinder meeting in flammable conditions. These longstanding incompatibilities – religious tensions, rampant poverty, ineffective government, abusive military, and opportunistic clergy – served as the roots of conflict that have burned for nearly a decade, leaving nearly 30,000 dead and millions more displaced. However, this destructive conflict would have been avoidable if the Nigerian government had addressed these underlying causes when they first appeared. Today, Uganda is experiencing many of the same grievances that were present in Nigeria years ago: political repression, mass human rights violations, human insecurity, and economic and social marginalization. By examining Nigeria’s failure to prevent and counter extremism, Uganda can gain the knowledge of how to prevent violent extremism before it becomes embedded within society. The following comparative case study will examine both environments to provide recommendations for implementing an effective strategy. In Nigeria, the government must first defeat Boko Haram militarily through a coherent counterinsurgency strategy before it can implement a sustainable strategy to counter violent extremism. In contrast, Uganda has an opportunity to reverse the momentum of instability by enacting a comprehensive strategy to prevent violent extremism by maximizing various sources of resilience to rebuild trust and address core grievances. Uganda must act now before this tenuous situation can no longer be controlled.
INTRODUCTION

After nine years of violent conflict in Nigeria, due to longstanding religious tensions, rampant poverty, ineffective government, abusive military, and opportunistic clergy, nearly 30,000 are dead and millions more are displaced.¹ This destructive conflict, tearing apart one of Africa’s most economically and strategically important countries, could have been prevented.² Had the Nigerian government addressed the underlying root causes when they first appeared nearly a decade ago, it could have avoided this scourge that has torn its society apart and produced unimaginable suffering.

Fifteen hundred miles to the southeast of Nigeria, Uganda is on the verge of instability and violent conflict. Uganda is experiencing many of the same grievances present in Nigeria years ago: political repression, abusive security forces, mass human rights violations, human insecurity, high unemployment, economic and social marginalization, and the threat of terrorism. Despite these two countries’ contextual similarities, Uganda is still in the pre-conflict phase. While Nigeria must now first defeat Boko Haram’s terrorism with a counterinsurgency (COIN) approach, Uganda can avoid the use of military force and effectively address instability by implementing preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE and CVE, respectively) strategies.

In contrast with COIN’s primary emphasis on hard power, PVE and CVE stress the importance of “smart power”—the deliberate combination of both hard and soft power strategies to design effective public policies.³ Smart power, a term coined by Joseph Nye in 2003, refers to the combination of hard power coercion and soft power persuasion and attraction.⁴ Relying on only hard or soft power is insufficient to resolve conflict situations, especially when addressing insurgencies and the spread of violent extremism.

By employing an approach focused on preventing and countering violent extremism, Ugandan leaders can reduce the likelihood of long-term violent conflict, improve good governance, and grow national development by rebuilding citizens’ trust in their government and developing international partnerships with external actors such as the United States, the United Nations, and the African Union.

METHODOLOGY

This policy analysis examines the environment that enables violent extremism to spread and why preventing extremism is more feasible and necessary than countering it in Nigeria and Uganda. It describes the similarities, differences, and patterns of violent extremism, and reviews the origins of, conflict drivers of, and government responses towards violent extremism in both countries. Lastly, this analysis maps out the contexts behind conflict and terrorism in Nigeria and
Uganda to better understand the following issues: what core citizen grievances lead to violent extremism in each country; Nigeria’s and Uganda’s governance abilities; what lessons learned from Nigeria can be applied to Uganda; what particular conditions necessitate a hard, soft, or smart power approach; what form an effective counterterrorism approach will take in Uganda; and what role outside actors would play in a Ugandan CVE strategy.

This case study proceeds as follows. We begin by defining counterterrorism (CT), COIN, PVE and CVE, and development, and map out the relationship between these concepts on the peacebuilding spectrum. Next, we describe the rise of Boko Haram, its driving factors, and the government’s response in Nigeria. In comparison to Nigeria, we also review the political, economic, and social conditions in Uganda related to the country’s increasing conflict and the Ugandan government’s current policy towards extremism. Then, we examine how Ugandan policymakers might learn from Nigeria to limit the expansion of extremism and successfully implement CVE in Uganda. Finally, we offer some conclusions about Nigeria and propose conditions-based policy recommendations that Uganda could realistically implement in the short, medium, and long-terms.

THE PEACEBUILDING SPECTRUM: WHAT ARE CT, COIN, CVE, PVE, AND DEVELOPMENT?

Although “violent extremism” is present throughout much of the world, it remains a rarely defined term. Neither the United Nations nor the European Union has an official definition for the term. However, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) defined violent extremism in 2011 as “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives.” To effectively curb the scourge of violent extremism and rebuild broken societies, policymakers must choose from a wide array of strategies. In figure 1, the peacebuilding spectrum illustrates the approaches policymakers might take and orders them according to type of power and actors involved in implementation.
Approaches include a spectrum of decreasing kinetic action from a harder approach of direct counterterrorism to softer approaches that prevent extremism and support sustainable development. The left side of the peacebuilding spectrum displays hard power strategies that focus primarily on reducing violent conflict: counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. In 2014, the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff defined CT as “activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.”\(^7\) State authorities use hardline, intel-driven engagement to capture and kill terrorists, protect citizens, and restore political order. In 2013, the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also defined COIN as “comprehensive efforts to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”\(^8\) COIN differs from CT in that state authorities partner with some non-governmental organizations to clear, hold, and build the region where violent conflict is occurring.

The operations designed to protect society are often counterproductive to preventing terrorism.\(^9\) In fact, militarized CT strategies that employ hard power to address the myriad of issues often restrict civil society, marginalize the role of women, securitize aid, erode trust between donors and NGOs, and most importantly, do not address the core grievances that fuel violent extremism.\(^10\) Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan argues that any strategy that compromises human rights in the name of security “facilitates achievement of
the terrorist’s objective by ceding the moral high ground and provoking tension, hatred, and mistrust,” all of which drive extremist recruiting. Terrorism is defeated not through aggressive military force, but through a softer, more nuanced approach that fosters participation in political process and effective, community-centered law enforcement.

The far right side of the peacebuilding spectrum shows soft power approaches (good governance, institution building, and sustainable development initiatives). Policymakers who choose these strategies often concentrate on reducing violent extremism through development policies. The Center for Global Development defines development as the activities that support “capacity of economic, political, and social systems to provide the circumstances for” the long-term and sustainable improvement of individual and societal well-being.

This softer, more nuanced approach is good governance; demonstrated by strong institutions and enduring civil societies. Annan’s successor, Ban Ki-moon, argues that while “missiles may kill terrorists...good governance is what will kill terrorism.” Many of the core grievances driving extremism in both of the above cases can be attributed to poor governance. According to the peacebuilding spectrum discussed earlier, there is a negative correlation between violent extremism and good governance which manifests itself as capable of addressing the core grievances. An effective response would be centered on the peacebuilding spectrum, incorporating elements of both hard and soft power depending on the environmental conditions.

Falling in the middle of the peacebuilding spectrum, between harder CT and COIN strategies and the softer sustainable development initiatives, are the smart power approaches of preventing and countering violent extremism. According to Owen Frazer, and Christian Nünlist, analysts at the Center for Security Studies in Switzerland, CVE and PVE “[refer] to the ‘soft’ side of counterterrorism strategies that tackle the drivers which lead people to engage in politically or ideologically-motivated violence” through non-coercive measures. Peter Nueman, the Founding Director at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization at King’s College, argues that CVE and PVE capture the “potentially unlimited” range of activities governments and others may pursue, typically involving messaging, engagement and outreach, education and training, and capacity-building.

**THE NIGERIAN CASE: THE RISE OF BOKO HARAM**

In 2002, Boko Haram first appeared as a political offshoot of an Islamic youth movement against northern Muslim leaders, who they regarded as morally bankrupt and hopelessly corrupt. Boko Haram operated with a non-violent separatist vision until 2009 when then-leader Mahommed Yusef was executed by Nigerian security forces. After 2009, Boko Haram started evolving into the
security threat it is today under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, although the group’s command relationship is unclear.

Today, Boko Haram’s stated objective is to overthrow the Nigerian political order and replace it with an Islamic state. Boko Haram recruits from across northern Nigeria, attracting mainly disaffected youth, unemployed graduates, and destitute children. Youth volunteerism is driven by ideology, economics, feelings of disenfranchisement, or anger about past abuses committed by Nigerian security forces. Boko Haram’s strength rests in gaining popular support, but the group currently lacks comprehensive grassroots support — although its resentments are shared by many northern Nigerians.

GRIEVANCES DRIVING NIGERIA’S CONFLICT

As Figure 2 shows, Boko Haram’s steady rise can be attributed to four main core grievances: mistrust of government, human insecurity, poverty, and religious differences. These grievances, known as “push” factors, serve as the basis of the extremism. Boko Haram’s rise has been successful because of its ability to mobilize the marginalized population through recruiting, charismatic messaging, and a narrative that preys on desperation. These mobilization tactics, known as “pull” factors, continue to drive Boko Haram recruiting by capitalizing on failures at all levels of the Nigerian government and civil society. Addressing only the symptoms of the problem — kidnappings, suicide bombings, and ambushes — has not been enough to quell the uprising that has embroiled the region for years. For a strategy to be truly effective, it must target the individual “push” factors that fuel the continuation of conflict while mitigating Boko Haram’s mobilization success.

What makes this conflict especially concerning is that core grievances in Nigeria are present throughout much of the region and have the potential to spread and incite violence across West Africa. Boko Haram’s conflict in the Lake Chad Basin is just one of many radical insurgent theaters of operation across the continent. Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar al-Dine (AAD) operate in the Sahel; al-Shabaab continues to terrorize the Horn of Africa; the Islamic State spreads across much of North Africa; and the growing Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) lingers just across the Gulf of Aden. Unless these issues are addressed, there is a real risk that these extremist groups could unite, which would pose devastating consequences to African governments and represent one of the most serious threats to international security worldwide.
Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria and Uganda

FIGURE 2: DYNAMICS OF BOKO HARAM RADICALIZATION IN NIGERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grievances (push factors)</th>
<th>Mobilization (pull factors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mistrust of government</td>
<td>• Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Abuses, Lack of services</td>
<td>• Media, social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human Insecurity</td>
<td>• Targeting undereducated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poverty</td>
<td>• Radical ideology / messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Religious / Ethnic differences</td>
<td>• Charismatic Boko Haram leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NIGERIA’S FAILING COUNTERTERRORISM RESPONSE

Nigeria’s current CT strategy is not only failing, but backfiring. The Nigerian military is rife with corruption and lacks proper equipment, training, and effective intelligence-gathering. The Nigerian government often cannot protect the population, separate the population from combatants, resettle internally displaced persons (IDPs), strengthen civil-military relations, or gain any semblance of popular support from Nigerians themselves. Moreover, President Muhammadu Buhari’s military has also demonstrated little regard for the fate of the civilian population. Nigerians often find themselves in the middle of the conflict between heavy-handed security forces and Boko Haram, resulting in numerous casualties.25 Independent reports have highlighted some of the most brutal abuses committed by the security forces and have declared that the abuses constitute war crimes and possible crimes against humanity.26

These abuses serve as a driving force in Boko Haram recruitment. According to a 2016 study commissioned by the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), and Finn Church Aid, nearly 60% of former Boko Haram fighters identified revenge against the military as the single greatest factor influencing their
decision to join the group.\textsuperscript{27} Worse, a June 2015 Amnesty International report revealed that thousands of Nigerians have become victims of enforced disappearance; and at least “7,000 people have died in military detention as a result of starvation, extreme overcrowding and denial of medical assistance.”\textsuperscript{28}

The Nigerian government is often its own worst enemy, due to its overly-aggressive CT strategy. These policies have sabotaged the government’s own objectives and resulted in unintended consequences which “creates more instability and lends itself to exploitation by terrorist organizations.”\textsuperscript{29} The Nigerian military’s failures have driven Boko Haram’s main pull factor – recruiting through radical messaging – and exacerbated the levels of mistrust between citizens and their government. Any future solution will require a comprehensive change to Nigeria’s military strategy and how its force is employed.

**UGANDA’S LOOMING CONFLICT**

Like many central African countries, Uganda exhibits key indicators that signal increasing instability and potential violent conflict. Jack Goldstone’s global instability forecasting model demonstrates that Uganda is at particularly high risk of future instability due to the presence of three major indicators: neighboring country conflict, state-led discrimination, and partial democracy.\textsuperscript{30} The Fund For Peace argues that nearby conflicts significantly increase the likelihood for instability in Uganda. On its 2016 Fragile State Index, the Fund for Peace classified Uganda’s neighbors, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as two of the world’s most fragile states. These nearby conflicts significantly increase the likelihood for instability in Uganda.\textsuperscript{31} Instability can often create the breeding ground for extremism to take root, and as such, it is imperative that Uganda address these potential drivers of conflict. These drivers include political repression, human insecurity, and economic and social marginalization. Figure 3 lists Uganda’s push factors.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State’s Uganda 2016 Human Rights Report states that the country’s three most serious human rights problems are the lack of respect for individual integrity, restrictions on civil liberties, and violence and discrimination against marginalized groups.\textsuperscript{32} The Ugandan government or its agents have committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, torture, or detention, as well as restricted freedoms of press, expression, assembly, and political participation.

The conditions in Uganda are ripe for instability and extremism. Throughout East Africa, extremists stand ready to recruit and radicalize by exploiting grievances linked to poverty, unemployment, corruption, exclusion, and discrimination.\textsuperscript{33} Rather than allow the situation to spiral out of control, as is the case in Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia, Uganda has an opportunity to reverse
the momentum of instability and prevent violent extremism from gaining a foothold.

FIGURE 3: UGANDA’S CORE GRIEVANCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grievances in Uganda (push factors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Political Repression / Poor Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government abuses and human rights violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Repression of political opposition and media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human Insecurity – threat of terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economic and Social Marginalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overwhelming youth bulge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ex-combatants not yet reintegrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of economic opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Massive refugee crisis (2,800 enter daily)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


UGANDA’S COUNTERTERRORISM APPROACH

The current Ugandan strategy lacks the whole-of-community approach necessary to address core grievances. Like Nigeria, the Ugandan government has employed a heavy-handed response to the threat of extremism. Since ratifying its Anti-Terrorism Act in 2002, Uganda has continued to build up its state security apparatus around counterterrorism (CT). Uganda has become a strategic peace and security partner for the region, with more 6,000 troops deployed in Somalia fighting al-Shabaab. Due to Uganda’s strategic role, the U.S. provides much of the funding for Uganda’s security sector, about $170 million annually in security assistance supporting numerous programs and initiatives. The U.S. views these programs – training and equipping Ugandan peacekeepers, joint military exercises, and capacity-building initiatives – as investments in the region, working to defeat terrorists in East Africa before the threat spreads elsewhere. Uganda, with its competent Uganda People’s
Defense Force (UPDF) and its willingness to take the fight to al-Shabaab, is a stabilizing force in a tumultuous region, making its ties with the U.S. all the more strategic.

However, in Uganda, government forces often directly target civilians in an effort to suppress dissent, silence the political opposition, and maintain power. Often the threat of terrorism is used as the justification to close media outlets and jail the regime’s opponents. President Yoweri Museveni even used CT laws to label his main opposition candidate as a terrorist in the two most recent elections.

Furthermore, the greatest impediment to implementing effective P/CVE policy in Uganda is the government’s hostile relationship with civil society. State officials consider security as purely a state matter and hence limit the participation of NGOs in such initiatives. The civil-military relationship is rapidly deteriorating as the government seeks to further curtail civil society through the recently passed Non-Governmental Organizations Act, which would potentially tighten restrictions over political opposition and any dissenting voices.

**COMPARING THE NIGERIAN AND UGANDAN ENVIRONMENTS**

Key similarities exist between the two cases, particularly concerning the drivers of conflict and recruitment. As seen in Figure 4, these overlapping core grievances include feelings of economic or social marginalization among vast swaths of the population, mistrust in the government due to rampant government-sponsored abuse and repression, numerous human rights violations, the state’s inability to protect the population and at times direct targeting of civilians, and widespread human insecurity.
The factors present in Nigeria in 2010 greatly resemble the current situation in Uganda. All Nigeria needed for conflict to break out was a series of conflict drivers coupled with effective “pull” factors. The analysis above depicts the Ugandan environment on the cusp of major instability. Furthermore, both governments’ heavy-handed responses to the threat of extremism create increased instability. In Nigeria, civilians often find themselves in the middle of the conflict between overly-aggressive security forces and Boko Haram, resulting in numerous casualties at the hands of both belligerents. In Uganda, civilians are themselves often directly targeted by government forces in an effort to suppress dissent and maintain power. The governments fail to be introspective towards their failing strategies and appear to be either unwilling or unable to implement CVE.
Although the two cases are very similar, there are certain areas where they diverge. First, Nigeria is nearly a decade into conflict, while Uganda is still in the pre-conflict stage. Second, the “pull” factors used to drive violent extremism in Nigeria – namely radical messaging and charismatic leadership – are not as visible in Uganda. Third, as demonstrated by the plethora of civil society organizations and groups, Uganda’s civil society is markedly stronger and more robust today than Nigeria’s was when Boko Haram began their rapid ascent. Lastly, and potentially most important, the situation in Nigeria is far beyond the government’s control, and an effective CVE strategy cannot be implemented without first achieving a military victory. On the other hand, since Uganda is still in a pre-conflict stage, the government, its civil society, and international partners have an opportunity now to implement a CVE strategy that both prevents extremism from taking roots and fosters a peacebuilding approach for decades to come. Hence, while the Nigerian government appears to be either unwilling or unable to implement CVE, Uganda has the opportunity to act now before an unstable security situation rapidly deteriorates.

WHAT CAN UGANDA LEARN FROM NIGERIA?

According to development economist Paul Collier, besides the disastrous human toll, a civil conflict typically inflicts $20 billion in costs, lasts an average of seven years, and often spills over across international borders. As noted above, these factors have occurred in Nigeria as its government has not addressed the underlying causes of the conflict. Thus, the situation in Nigeria, with hostilities raging into their eighth year, should serve as a grave warning to Uganda and help generate the necessary political will to prevent extremism before violent conflict erodes the fabric of society. If Uganda allows the situation to further deteriorate into a protracted conflict, then a hard power solution will be the only way to combat the threat. Uganda can move forward if its policymakers study the key variables in Nigeria, shown in Figure 5, and then act preemptively with a mixed approach.
Both Nigeria and Uganda exhibit clear signs of a trust deficit between their governments and their people due to repression and insecurity. This lack of trust complicates both governments’ ability to address grievances and the participation of outside actors. While providing CVE-related assistance, these outside actors – states, international organizations, or NGOs – can easily be perceived as being complicit with corrupt governments, completely undermining CVE efforts. Since this perception is difficult to avoid, all actors must abide by three principles throughout their engagement: maintain transparency in all activities, foster real relationships with the local populace, and empower civil society down to the lowest level.\textsuperscript{45} Underpinning these three principles, actors, especially outside actors, must gain a maximum contextual understanding of the environment and the true causes behind the core grievances. Trust is difficult to gain and harder to maintain in an unstable or conflict-ridden environment. However, a trust deficit must be closed and any strategy going forward will need to look for windows of opportunity and existing resilience to rebuild lost trust within society.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NIGERIAN POLICYMAKERS

As noted above, Nigeria has been unable or unwilling to address Boko Haram’s core grievances and has employed a repressive military campaign to end the conflict, instead of first implementing a peacebuilding CVE strategy.

According to Kofi Annan, “without security almost everything else is impossible: no effective government; no reconstruction; no return of refugees; no return to school.” While security can sometimes be achieved through mediation and agreement, other cases require a military solution to set the conditions for activities further down the peacebuilding spectrum to occur. In Nigeria, no peacebuilding initiative or CVE strategy can be implemented without first securing the environment.

Counterinsurgencies, however difficult, have succeeded in the past, thanks to the deliberate implementation of patient, population-centric strategy. Dr. David Marston, professor at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, argues that support, both domestic and partnered, is crucial to COIN success. “Carrying out a successful counterinsurgency campaign takes a substantial amount of money, and even more importantly, a substantial amount of political will.” Among successful examples, COIN strategies have been effective in countries as diverse as Northern Ireland and Colombia. In both cases, consistent time, will, and resources were dedicated in order to foster trust between security forces and the population through an application of both coercive and non-coercive means.

The Nigerian government should combine multinational and host nation forces including military, police, and all levels of government, as Figure 6 demonstrates. Moreover, as affirmed by the U.S. Counterinsurgency Manual, unity of effort among these actors will enable battlefield victory against insurgents, protect the population, and address the root causes of the conflict, typically city by city. This strategy calls for the security forces to “conduct offensive operations to eliminate guerrillas, transition to securing and defending the area, and finally [focus] on stability operations to facilitate the comprehensive approach to address the prerequisites of insurgency and core grievances.” The key requirements will be a surge of forces under a coherent COIN strategy, a permanent state security presence in liberated areas, increased cooperation with local leaders, and humanitarian assistance with the help of international partners.
FIGURE 6: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NIGERIAN POLICYMAKERS TO INSTALL A CEASEFIRE AND END VIOLENT CONFLICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Tasks / Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian Government</td>
<td>• Develop CVE strategy to implement after ceasefire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initiate reintegration of ex-combatants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initiate reintegration / resettlement of IDPs / refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian Military</td>
<td>• Receive COIN training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Surge Nigerian / MNJTF forces; support from ECOWAS and African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Partner with and protect the population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strengthen civil-military relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Separate population from combatants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US MILITARY (AFRICOM)</td>
<td>• Train Nigerian security forces in COIN doctrine / professionalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase funding, intelligence, enabler support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support targeting operations with US SOF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Dept. of State / USAID</td>
<td>• In conjunction with Nigerian Government, develop CVE strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support / strengthen Nigerian CSOs (funding / training / implementing partners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Union</td>
<td>• Support surge of Nigerian and MNJTF forces (financial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support Nigerian Government reintegration of ex-combatants and IDPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initiate humanitarian support activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Organizations /</td>
<td>• Support humanitarian activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>• Support reintegarion of ex-combatants, victims, IDPs, refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue to strengthen Nigerian CSOs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: AUTHOR'S ANALYSIS.

From a security perspective, the United States is the best international partner to support Nigeria’s COIN strategy. The U.S. has the financial resources needed; can bilaterally conduct security financing, intelligence-sharing, and enabler support (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance); and can train the Nigerian security forces in COIN doctrine. To best address the weakest aspect of the Nigerian security forces – its abusive tactics – the U.S. can implement training programs aimed at professionalizing the force. Due to its capacity to implement security assistance programs in Nigeria, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) should spearhead security efforts throughout the COIN phase. AFRICOM should assist with developing trainings, advise, and assist in planning, while U.S. Special Operations Forces should directly support Nigerian commandos with partnered kinetic operations.

Although the Nigerian military, with the support of the United States and the United Nations, plays a significant role in combating violent dissidents, extremist ideologies cannot be defeated on the battlefield. Nigerian policymakers need to combine COIN with CVE. Thus, it is critical for the Nigerian government and security forces to partner with and protect the population. The government should frame its engagement and security response according to three principles: promoting transparency, constructing relationships with the local populace, and empowering all levels of civil society.
By prioritizing its citizens, the security forces will have more success separating combatants from the population and restoring trust between the people and the government, thus setting the conditions to implement CVE.

If the Nigerian government fails in its transition from COIN to CVE, it could militarize the area previously under Boko Haram’s control. This could compound the cycle of alienation and exclusion, further exacerbating the conflict.\textsuperscript{54}

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UGANDAN POLICYMAKERS**

A secure environment is the fundamental criteria necessary to begin implementing CVE. Although the indicators for increased violent conflict are present in Uganda, it is still in a pre-conflict stage and the conditions are set to implement a strategy to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE). Before unleashing a long-term P/CVE plan, Uganda must focus its immediate efforts in three areas: developing its own national P/CVE strategy, supporting its refugee resettlement program, and taking initial steps to professionalize its security forces and empower its civil society.

**NATIONAL P/CVE STRATEGY**

The P/CVE strategy should adhere to UN Secretary General Ban’s 2015 “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism” report. The report recommends that national strategies encompass a wide range of actors – law enforcement, social service providers, educators, youth and religious leaders, civil society organizations (CSO), and non-governmental actors – to promote equal protection under the law, transparent institutions at all levels, and responsive and representative governments.\textsuperscript{55}

Uganda possesses the support needed to develop a national strategy. First, the U.S., as Uganda’s largest international partner, has both the capacity and interests to support both the development and implementation of this strategy. Second, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East Africa’s regional economic community, recently published their own regional CVE strategy aimed at enhancing the capacity of all regional actors through “empowering local communities, addressing the... push factors, and promoting CVE diplomacy across the Eastern Africa region.”\textsuperscript{56}
Uganda's Immediate Approach: Implement P/CVE (0-2 years)

**IMPLEMENT P/CVE**
**(NEAR-TERM 0-2 YEARS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Tasks / Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ugandan Government** | • Develop and implement national P/CVE strategy; receive support from IGAD, UN, US, other partners  
• Transition militarized security approach to soft-power strategy centered on resilience  
• Support civil society, Repeal NGO Act  
• Expand refugee resettlement program; reintegrate ex-combatants  
• Support SSR in conjunction with international partners  
• Initiate empowerment of civil society, media, local organizations. |
| **Ugandan Security Forces (UPDF)** | • Conduct SSR with support of international partners, professionalize security institutions  
• Balance hard and soft power approach to security matters  
• Strengthen civil-military relations to build trust between military and the people |
| **Ugandan Civil Society** | • Focus efforts on increasing civil society capacity: support community policing program, access to education, gender equality, women’s empowerment, interfaith dialogue |
| **African Union and IGAD** | • Advise Uganda with development of national P/CVE strategy  
• Support Uganda’s implementation of P/CVE strategy |
| **United Nations** | • Reinforce refugee resettlement program in partnership with other agencies  
• Continue to strengthen Ugandan Civil Society Organizations  
• Support reintegration of ex-combatants, victims, IDPs, refugees |
| **US Dept. of State** | • Support development / implementation of Ugandan National P/CVE strategy  
• Influence Uganda to repeal NGO Act  
• Support / strengthen Ugandan CSOs (funding / training / partners)  
• Strengthen educational exchange programs with Uganda  
• Tie security & development assistance to Ugandan NGO / civil society support |
| **US Agency for International Development** | • Support / strengthen Ugandan CSOs (funding / training / implementing partners)  
• Reinforce refugee resettlement program in partnership with UNHCR and Ugandan government  
• Continue US assistance to Ugandan health, education, and CSO sectors  
• Make education sector more accountable |
| **US Military (AFRICOM)** | • Assist with Ugandan Security Sector Reform implementation  
• Continue UPDF training programs, train UPDF peacekeepers ahead of deployments |
| **International Organizations / NGOs** | • Strengthen Ugandan civil society organizations and media; serve as implementing partner for various initiatives (UN, USAID, etc)  
• Support humanitarian activities  
• Support refugee resettlement program and reintegration of ex-combatants, victims, IDPs |

Source: Author’s Analysis.

**STRENGTHEN THE REINTEGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM**

Uganda’s refugee resettlement program is a key source of resilience that addresses a potential conflict trigger. Under Uganda’s current program, refugees are granted full freedom of movement, the right to work and establish businesses, access to land, and social services through a generous asylum policy.
The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) refers to Uganda as “one of the most favorable refugee protection environments in the world,” but its program is buckling under the pressure of nearly a million refugees escaping civil war in South Sudan. By partnering with UNHCR, USAID, and other agencies, Uganda can aid its refugees and thousands of ex-combatants that have yet to reintegrate into society, effectively transitioning desperate masses into human capital. Providing a pathway to economic opportunity will deter radicalization, build trust in the government, and serve as an investment in Uganda’s future.

**PROFESSIONALIZE UGANDA’S SECURITY FORCES**

The best CVE strategy in Uganda would be to replace its trust-eroding, securitized approach with a strategy predicated on soft power. This can be accomplished through two distinct steps: professionalization and empowerment. First, Uganda must professionalize its security forces (both police and military) through a deliberate security sector reform (SSR) program with U.S. assistance, primarily from AFRICOM. Since the Ugandan police are responsible for much of the civilian abuse, this reform initiative should employ law enforcement professionals from the U.S. Department of Justice’s International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) to develop Uganda’s “professional and transparent law enforcement institutions that protect human rights, combat corruption, and reduce the threat of transnational crime and terrorism.”

**CREATE AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT CIVIL SOCIETY**

The most immediate positive change the Ugandan government can make is to repeal the NGO Act to enable grassroots CSOs to flourish. By starting at the national level, encouraging the use of non-coercive measures, and creating an unwelcoming environment for terrorists, Uganda can, according to former Ambassador Daniel Benjamin in a 2010 U.S. Senate hearing, promote “capacity-building, outreach to civil society, education, and… messaging.” Benjamin maintained that this approach would help to dissuade potential extremists from using violence and thus avoid the onset or spread of conflict.

**UGANDA’S MEDIUM-TERM APPROACH: BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES**

Since regional and national P/CVE strategies are only effective if supported at the community level, the local action plan is the key to Uganda’s P/CVE approach. Unlike Uganda’s CT strategy, which relies exclusively on its security
forces, a local P/CVE plan must support current sources of resilience and represent a whole-of-community approach. The Ugandan government should serve as the lead coordinator among numerous actors – civil leaders, CSOs, NGOs, law enforcement, schools, mentors, businesses, religious institutions – to build trust and address local grievances that could drive radicalization. Fortunately for Uganda, a maturing civil society already exists and, if given the space to operate, can serve as a force multiplier for P/CVE. Uganda’s civil society must be strengthened to carry out an effective local action plan that incorporates community policing and strategic communications, and builds human capital with consistent support from international partners.

**EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN UGANDA’S COMMUNITY POLICING PROGRAMS**

One current source of strength at the local level is Uganda’s community policing initiative that trains “tens of thousands of ‘crime preventers’ to guard and prevent against crime in their communities.” Population-centered community policing benefits communities by first improving communication, transparency, collaboration, and respect, and subsequently creating formal and informal mentors that can deter youth radicalization. Although currently small in scale, Uganda’s program has been lauded for preventing crime, reporting suspicious activities, and offering communities a pathway to prevent radicalization. With the clear deficit of trust that exists in Uganda, this program is absolutely necessary to rebuild trust between law enforcement and the people. In terms of CVE, rebuilding trusting partnerships helps address grievances and achieve the appropriate balance between traditional police services and preventing radicalization.

**FIGURE 8 RECOMMENDATIONS: BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Tasks / Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ugandan Government</strong></td>
<td>• Periodically examine “push/pull” factors; revise P/CVE strategy as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support P/CVE Local Action Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expand civil society capacity, support CSOs, open media, foster local-level dialogue, empower communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ugandan Security Forces (UPDF and police)</strong></td>
<td>• Continue and strengthen community policing program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on continued efforts to strengthen civil-military relations and build trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ugandan Civil Society</strong></td>
<td>• Center P/CVE around peacebuilding; focus attention on youth education and employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with local and national government to establish and synchronize messaging and counter-narratives strategy by employing credible messengers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Foster improved relationship among schools, police, religious leaders, mentors, and local media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A key aspect of Uganda’s CVE strategy is its strategic communications plan. Strategic communications activities – those that enable an understanding of target audiences, identify effective conduits, and develop and promote ideas and opinions to promote and sustain particular types of behavior – can take many different forms and be initiated at all levels of society, but work best at the local level. Although currently lacking violent conflict, Uganda needs to maintain credible and consistent messaging with populations vulnerable to radicalization. Messaging rarely works at the national or government level, so Ugandans must carry it out within communities. They can use alternative mediums and credible messengers such as former extremists, Uganda’s Somali communities, influential religious or other individuals, victims of violent extremism, integrated refugees, and local CSOs to counter radical ideology.
In terms of outside donor support, both the United Nations – through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and UN Development Program (UNDP) – and the United States – through Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State (DOS) and Agency for International Development (USAID) – can and must play a major role in Uganda’s P/CVE strategy. The UN must find ways to bolster its own programs, especially its UNDP and UNHCR efforts that directly address core grievances.

As the country’s largest international partner, the United States provides significant development and security assistance to Uganda, with a total assistance budget exceeding $840 million per year. This budget funds much of Uganda’s health, education, and security sectors, providing much-needed support to otherwise overburdened systems. The United States can use both its influence and its aid to support more sustainable and positive outcomes. Aside from assisting in the development and implementation of the national P/CVE strategy, the United States must work side-by-side with Uganda to foster a strong civil society that can serve as the basis of P/CVE efforts. This starts diplomatically by lobbying the Ugandan government to repeal its oppressive NGO Act and respect its citizens’ human rights. To reinforce its diplomatic pressure, the United States should link U.S. security and development assistance to an open Ugandan civil society. In addition to holding the government accountable, this approach will reinforce transparency and help to avoid the perception that the U.S. is supporting a corrupt regime.

One other resilience-building area that the United States must support pertains to human capital, specifically through international educational exchanges. Numerous recent studies support a correlation between foreign education that exposes individuals to democratic systems and their positive actions upon returning home. According to a study exploring the link between return migration and political outcomes in the origin country, after spending significant time in a democratic society, returnees bring back new norms of democratic participation and serve as catalysts for positive change. Another study, conducted by Antonio Spilimbergo, examined the link between foreign-educated individuals and their promotion of democracy upon returning to their home country. Spilimbergo found that students trained abroad are not only more influential later in life, but thanks to new ideas and easier access to external media, these “foreign-educated individuals make it more difficult for dictatorial regimes to maintain repression.”

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) already conducts several exchange programs that should be further bolstered. These programs include the long-running Fulbright Scholar Program and the nascent Mandela Washington Fellowship Program. The latter provides outstanding young leaders from across
Sub-Saharan Africa an opportunity to receive training and education in the United States focused on leadership skills, entrepreneurship, civic leadership, and public management. These programs have produced numerous success stories and offer a low-cost investment in Uganda’s future that yields the highest return: a resilient and prosperous society. DOS should expand these programs or increase participation from countries demonstrating indicators of potential instability, like Uganda.

**TOWARDS UGANDA’S LONG-TERM: ONWARDS TO DEVELOPMENT**

As the situation in Uganda moves further right along the *peacebuilding spectrum* (see Figure 1), efforts will pertain more and more to development and good governance: fully developing a robust civil society, strong and durable institutions, and an environment where economic and democratic liberalization can become fully realized. This free, open, enduring society requires years, and sometimes decades, of consistent support and can only be achieved with continuous political will, significant funding, trust-building initiatives, and cooperation from international partners.

As Uganda continues along this path, international partners, specifically the UN and United States must hold the Ugandan government accountable to preventing violent extremism and building a strong society. Capacity-building partnerships should be maintained and, if necessary, these outside actors must be prepared to use preventative strategies – such as public diplomacy, mediation, or even coercion – to keep Uganda focused on CVE. However, no matter the support from international partners, Uganda must be seen as leading this effort within their own society; having a “Western face” in no way benefits P/CVE.

**CONCLUSION**

Boko Haram grew from mistrust, insecurity, poverty, and religious fundamentalism. The group sparked a conflict that has ruined the economy, killed tens of thousands, and increased hatred among Nigerian citizens. Nigeria must now implement a COIN strategy incorporating both hard and soft power to bring an end to hostilities and help shift focus to CVE. The internal destruction of Nigeria could have been avoided. Had Nigeria effectively addressed grievances when they first appeared, war could have been avoided altogether. Uganda today is experiencing problems similar to those that drove the violent conflict in Nigeria. While the future is undeniably challenging, preventing violent extremism is feasible. Uganda must learn from Nigeria’s mistakes and use these lessons to prevent violent extremism before it becomes embedded within society. The above recommendations, developed from
Nigeria’s hard-learned lessons, will work to curb the threat of violent extremism in Uganda by maximizing the current sources of resilience to rebuild trust and address core grievances. Uganda must act now before this tenuous situation can no longer be controlled.

ENDNOTES


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