



Religious Strife in Nigeria Grows Worse

Jonathan Goodluck was elected president of Nigeria last year in an election by a strong majority of the Nigerian people. This was the first truly free election the nation had held for years. Outside observers found that the elections were smooth, free, and devoid of serious violence. The Christian Goodluck captured about sixty percent of the vote against his Muslim opponent. But Muslim extremists in the nation are not satisfied with that result.



Nigeria is huge and diverse. It has more people than any other nation in Africa and Nigeria has the seventh largest population in the world. The nation has a wide variety of peoples who live there, but the religious divide is pretty even: 50 percent of Nigerians profess to be Muslim and 48 percent profess to be Christian. So President Goodluck got a big chunk of the notional Muslim population to vote for him in 2011.

Nigeria is also a nation with huge oil reserves and an economy that includes electronics, satellites and other advanced technologies. It has long been a nation which ought to be happy but which has been plagued with violence. More than forty years ago, the Christian Ibo population in the southeast of Nigeria declared its independence. What followed was a long and bloody war in which Ibo children suffered horribly from protein deficiency and their protruding bellies made the cover of many newspapers and magazines.

Radical Islam, which is spreading everywhere in the world, has largely destroyed the once thriving Maronite Christian population of Lebanon (a land long called the “Switzerland of the Middle East” because of its high income, small government, and educated population). Nigeria has not escaped this onslaught.

Boko Haram is Muslim terrorist group which has been responsible for violence throughout the nation. It has recently demanded that President Goodluck covert to Islam or resign his office, or as its online video put it, Goodluck must “repent and forsake Christianity.” The president’s spokesman, Reuben Abati, responded: “When Nigerians voted for President Jonathon [Goodluck] in the 2011 general election, they knew they were voting for a Christian. He has the mandate of Nigerians to serve his fatherland. Nobody should imagine he will succumb to blackmail.”

The president is not alone in facing threats from Boko Haram. The organization has bragged about bombings which target Christians and it has vowed to cleanse northern Nigeria (the historical homeland of Nigerian Muslims) by violence. The stated goals of the organization for the 12 northern Nigerian states are to ban western education and to extend Sharia law.

The Obama administration has resisted calls by members of Congress and other international opponents of radical Islam to call Boko Haram a terrorist organization. His state department noted that “Boko Haram is at the moment a loosely constructed group attached to trying to address grievances in



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on August 9, 2012

the north. There are different views within the group, and we're continuing to look at that."

Is there an answer to the problem of Nigeria? What the Ibo leaders fighting 44 years ago suggested at the time may be the best prospect: independence, or "Balkanization," as those who fear small nations called it in the 1960s. What Balkanization referred to was the disintegration of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, which allowed Greek, Bulgarian, Croatian, Serbian, Hungarian, Albanian and other people to have their own nation. As the Ibo Christians pointed out to western journalists at the time, the Balkans did not become peaceful until it was "Balkanized." In fact, after the Warsaw Pact fell apart, old Yugoslavia did not become peaceful until it fragmented into smaller and more natural nations with languages and religious confessions given their own place to be safe and self-governed.

British imperialists loved to claim that Nigeria was an example of an independent colony that "worked." But as far back as the Nigerian Kano riots of 1953, it was clear that peoples who had no wish to be clumped together by London into a single polity were not going to be happy. The Nigerian Civil War began in 1967 with the attempted secession of southeastern region of Nigeria to form a newly declared, largely Christian, nation called Biafra. The secession was stopped with the assistance of foreign (primarily British) intervention after three years of fighting. More than three million Nigerians had died, and the Nigerian "people" — the various tribes and religions declared by Britain to be a nation — learned that nothing had really been solved.

Has anything changed? Has anything gotten better? On August 8, 2012, Muslim extremists entered a church building and slaughtered 19 Christians studying the Bible. Violent attacks on Nigerian Christian churches have occurred about once a week this year, which means that the tempo of terrorism against Christians has increased. There appears, after a bloody sixty year experiment, no answer other than ending the huge and profoundly artificial state called "Nigeria" and replacing it with people who want to be in the same smaller state with each other. This, though, is the one option seldom discussed.

Photo of crowd gathering around site of bombing due to religious/sectarian strife in Nigeria: AP Images



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