

POACHING: FROM CONSERVATION CONCERN TO SECURITY THREAT

By Dr. Ashley Neese Bybee

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Kenyan officials display some of more than 1,600 pieces of illegal ivory found hidden inside bags of sesame seeds in freight traveling from Uganda, in Kenya's major port city of Mombasa. (AP Photo)

RESPONDING TO TERRORISM IN NIGERIA: FANNING THE FLAMES?

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Nigeria President, Goodluck Jonathan, is pictured on a billboard, in Abuja, Nigeria, May 6, 2014. (AP Photo/ Sunday Alamba)

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The Culprits

Ivory is a well-documented source of income for several of Africa's most notorious [insurgent and terrorist groups](#), such as al-Shabaab in Somalia, the Lord's Resistance Army, and Darfur's Janjaweed. Government officials are also [alleged](#) to be involved in some cases. Even some [U.S.-trained African armies](#), such as those of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and newly independent South Sudan, have been implicated in poaching and trafficking ivory. [Poorly paid government soldiers](#) exploit their access to [military-grade weapons and equipment](#), such as AK-47s, grenade launchers, night vision goggles, and helicopters, to slaughter elephants en masse. Although they are sometimes well armed, park rangers cannot compete with the military's superior equipment.

The Consumer

Experts estimate that approximately [70 percent](#) of illegal African ivory is trafficked to China, where a burgeoning middle class can increasingly afford coveted ivory products. The demand is so high that one tusk, with a bush value in the DRC of perhaps \$100, will retail for as much as [\\$3,000 in China](#). This great profit is an incentive for all those involved—the local shooter, the agent who sells the ivory, the organized crime group that traffics it abroad, and the dealer who sells it in Beijing.

China's expanding footprint and increasing economic relationships in Africa have, unfortunately, facilitated some of this activity. Chinese mining and timber operations in places such as the DRC have necessitated the [construction of roads](#), facilitating poachers' access to previously remote areas. Likewise, criminal syndicates are taking advantage of the increased legal trade between Africa and Asia to conceal illegal ivory (among other protected wildlife products) in legitimate cargo.

What Can Be Done?

Stemming the flow of any illicit trade is difficult. An approach that focuses on reducing supply by targeting traffickers and dealers may render the trade even more lucrative for the most effective criminals who are able to evade law enforcement. [Research](#) has already shown that the value of ivory has increased greatly in the last decade due to natural market forces associated with supply and demand. Reducing demand, another approach, is currently being tested in China, where the nongovernmental organization "Save the Elephants" is working with influential celebrities such as basketball player [Yao Ming](#) to highlight the cruelty of the illegal ivory trade and discourage youths from purchasing ivory trinkets.

An approach that targets poachers in Africa while reducing demand in China could be the most effective, yet most difficult. To investigate cases and prosecute criminals, judicial institutions must be strengthened. Some novel approaches,



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such as that of South Africa, which placed anti-poaching under the military's purview instead of law enforcement's, seem to be working well and demonstrate genuine political will on behalf of the government. Namibia's creation of [community-based nature conservatories](#), which has imparted a deeper understanding of the negative consequences of poaching on local communities, has also been an effective approach. Advances in [technology](#), such as testing the amount of carbon-14 found in ivory to determine whether it was harvested before or after the 1989 trade ban, are also helping to identify illegally traded ivory and provide evidence that authorities may use to prosecute perpetrators.

Conclusion

There is broad consensus among experts that African poaching rates are higher than ever and show no signs of abating. It is [estimated](#), for example, that between 35,000 and 50,000 elephants may have been killed in 2013. At this rate, poaching can no longer be considered just an ecological atrocity, but, with profits going to criminal and terrorist enterprises, also a major threat to security in Africa.

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Nigeria President, Goodluck Jonathan, is pictured on a billboard, in Abuja, Nigeria, May 6, 2014. (AP Photo/ Sunday Alamba)

Nigerian Taliban

Initially referred to as the [Nigerian Taliban](#), the group formed after the country transitioned from military to civilian rule in 1999. Led then by Mohammed Yusef, it demanded the overthrow of the Nigerian state, a stricter imposition of sharia law (some variant of which had already been adopted by 12 Northern states), and the cessation of Western-style (read non-Quranic) education. Boko Haram's primary targets were security forces and moderate Islamic clerics who were critical of the group's fundamentalist message. Then-president Umaru Yar'Adua, himself a Northern Muslim, [appealed to the country's Muslim population](#) to help the state fight against extremism.

Escalation of Attacks

In July 2009, Yusuf was [killed in police custody](#). Although the Nigerian government claimed victory against Boko Haram at the time—the group did briefly cease operations—in January 2010 members regrouped and emerged stronger than ever. It is primarily a Northern phenomenon and its operational strengths certainly lie in the North, but it has from time to time engaged in attacks in central Nigeria. Most recently, the group took responsibility for a series of [bombings](#) in the federal capital Abuja in April.

Boko Haram has a long record of violent attacks in Nigeria that predate the recent kidnappings in Chibok of close to 300 schoolgirls. Before the 2011 election, Boko Haram was, as catalogued by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), responsible for a [host of activities, including](#) the deaths of security forces in Yobe, Borno, and Bauchi; a prison attack that led to the release of hundreds of Boko Haram members; the politically salient deaths of the Borno State speaker of the assembly, an opposition party vice chairman, and several other local aspirants; the deaths of prominent clerics; attacks on mosques and churches; and multiple explosions in Jos in December 2010 that killed more than 30 people. After the 2011 election, the group continued its activities, killing 25 in a beer garden in Maiduguri; 23 in a bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja; and at least 63 in a car bombing in Yobe. On Christmas Eve 2011, Boko Haram coordinated an attack on churches in five cities across the country. In early 2012, the group was believed to be responsible for the deaths of at least 185 in a large-scale bombing attack of police stations in Kano. Boko Haram has expanded its targets to markets, newspaper offices, and schools. The situation had become so dire that in May 2013, the government declared a state of emergency in three states—Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. This state of emergency has now been extended twice by the legislature.

In April 2014, almost 300 female students were kidnapped in Chibok from a public boarding school. Their plight has captured international attention. Since their abduction, additional scores have been killed in blasts in Abuja, Kano, and Jos.

Government Response

Unfortunately, the government's response to Boko Haram thus far has been inconsistent, contradictory, and ineffective. The presidency of Goodluck Jonathan until recently seems to have taken an "ignore publicly, engage militarily" approach to combatting Boko Haram, to little effect. In 2011, there were calls for talks to be held and perhaps amnesty offered to some members, but Jonathan chose to take a hard-line approach, [refusing to engage with the group](#), even though the government had previously adopted an [amnesty program for insurgents in the Niger Delta](#) in 2009.

In some cases, the government has given in to the group's demands without explicitly acknowledging doing so. For example, after a series of Boko Haram attacks on schools, the [government responded by closing 85 schools in Borno state](#) in March 2014, which affected 120,000 students. An oppressive state of emergency exists in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe that threatens to become indefinite, with no end in sight to the insurgency. As part of the emergency procedures put in place, [cell phone service was disrupted](#) in much of the region in 2013 and an overnight curfew established.

The northern region was already ripe for extremism before the state of emergency due to its comparative underdevelopment and seeming government neglect. Now, with fewer services and less freedom, it is hard to see how the situation can improve. In addition, there are rumors that the federal government has designs on a [complete takeover](#) of one or more of the Northern state governments, although Goodluck Jonathan has publicly [denied](#) this to be the case.

The Chibok case only magnifies the government's miscues in dealing with Boko Haram. It took [more than 2 weeks](#) for the government to respond to the situation. The day after the abduction, the military stated that it had recovered all the girls and then was forced to retract its statement when this proved to be false. The president's wife, Patience Jonathan, dismissed protesters, suggesting [the kidnapping was a hoax](#) to discredit her husband. Goodluck Jonathan planned and subsequently [canceled a trip to Chibok](#) in mid-May, saying that visiting the city would not help bring the missing girls back. There are rumors that his security could not be guaranteed in the area. His office has vacillated on whether or not it would negotiate for the girls' release.

Making matters worse, Boko Haram has been hitting the same targets multiple times (Abuja, Chibok) in quick succession, demonstrating the government's inability to provide security even after an attack. Amid this deteriorating security situation, internal problems within the military are beginning to manifest themselves. Last week in Borno, [soldiers mutinied](#), reportedly frustrated with the government's ineffective response to Boko Haram.

While the situation may seem intractable, there are a few approaches that President Jonathan has not yet taken that might help the government gain traction in the fight against Boko Haram. First, the federal government [has not coordinated its efforts](#) with those of key Northern politicians such as the governors of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. The government has also not, at least publicly, engaged in a dialog with members of Boko Haram, which [some civil society groups are insisting](#) is the only way to stop the carnage. Finally, the president has thus far been silent on whether he intends to participate in the 2015 elections. Saying nothing has only fanned the current flames of conflict and insecurity in the North. Perhaps it is time for him to make a statement on this critical issue.

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