

# A focus on Nigeria



**ALMOST EVERY OTHER WEEKEND** for the past year, we have been seeing news of yet another atrocity, attack or security incident in Nigeria. Scams are no longer newsworthy and the 419 emails have virtually been consigned to obscurity. Instead we see piracy, kidnapped foreigners, attacks on security forces, car bombings or – perhaps worst of all – civilians murdered in villages or places of worship. Often such attacks provoke retaliation on a tribal or religious basis.

Such negative publicity has been present in some degree for decades, stretching back to the numerous military dictatorships and the civil (Biafran) war. But what is the true picture and its significance to those countries, companies and individuals hoping to do business in, and with, Nigeria?

That such publicity is widespread, prolonged and damaging is beyond dispute. This August the global director of SAGE (an international non-profit corporation dedicated to teenage entrepreneurs), Dr Curtis DeBerg, announced that three of the 12 participating countries for the 11th SAGE Competition, to be held in Nigeria, would be withdrawing as a result of the current security situation. A friend and colleague of the author who has been a frequent visitor to Nigeria for over a decade, often spoke of how difficult it was to convince others to come and do business there. “They always say, ‘too much risk. Business risk, personal risk, just not worth it.’”

Even the oil companies which have been successfully operating in the country for many decades have, on occasion, been forced to declare ‘force majeure’ when unable to fulfil some contractual obligations owing to uncontrollable local situations.

Many official governmental websites around the world usually give an ‘Essential Travel Only’ warning for most of Nigeria, with the Delta and Riverine areas considered too dangerous for any travel whatsoever. Without even checking, it is certain that President Goodluck Jonathan’s recent declaration of a state of emergency in three north-eastern states – Adamawa, Borno and Yobe – will have affected the advice for that region.

Security issues in Nigeria can be roughly classified into four categories, although an overlap is not just possible but could be considered usual: Crime and corruption; Intertribal conflict; Oil militancy, including piracy; and religious conflict.

For the purposes of this article we shall ignore fraud and other such scams and will start by discussing crime and corruption.

Once known as the second most corrupt nation, the last ten years have seen a welcome

We have been seeing news of terror attacks in Nigeria on an almost weekly basis for the last year or so, but what is the real picture, especially for organisations wishing to operate in this area? **Patrick Mcilwee** presents an analysis of the situation

improvement as significant as it is visible. The giving and seeking of bribes, ‘Egunge’ in the local parlance, still exist, but at nowhere near the level of a few years ago. It is now possible for some companies to do business with minimal, or sometimes even zero bribery.

General crime is a problem. Despite a phenomenal growth of GDP and Human Development Index (HDI), the bulk of Nigeria’s 120-140 million population survive on about US\$2 (€1.5; £1.28) per day, so the given level of crime should be expected. From this perspective, basic security awareness that would be exercised in any developing world country should usually be sufficient safeguard.

Two ‘special’ crimes should be addressed specifically: Bunkering and kidnapping.

Bunkering is the theft of oil, usually from drilling into a pipeline. This carries many risks for the perpetrators and opportunists who follow, as the pipe rupture is usually not sealed after the theft. Incidents have occurred where one stray spark has resulted in the live cremation of several hundred people.

Kidnapping is big business and for a company or individual intending to have a long-term presence, especially with a regular ‘pattern of operation’, specialist advice should be sought. Fortunately most victims are released unharmed.

Intertribal conflicts, when not linked to wider religious or political issues, are usually both rural and localised and unlikely to be of major concern to visitors.

In the not so recent past most headlines

concerned the ‘militants’ and ‘oil politics’, primarily in the ‘Delta’ states. Many local inhabitants feel aggrieved at the oil companies or the Federal Government in Abuja. The former are perceived as stealing resources rightfully belonging to the local inhabitants, who see little direct benefit in their everyday lives. The Federal Government, in turn, is seen as syphoning off revenue for use in other regions of the country. This has led to many armed groups attacking oil and support facilities and personnel. Kidnapping and bunkering were integral to this.

## Attractive deal

Soon groups such as the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force rose to prominence. In the early to mid 2000s, one group, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), arose as an umbrella organisation. The apparent indifference of government and foreign industry to the severe degradation of the environment engendered much support among the population. This was reinforced by the failure of non-violent means of protest and a perceived overreaction to such activities. The fate of the Ogoni activist

*Churches and Christian worshippers have recently been coming under attack*

EPA

Ken Saro-Wiwa had a major impact on the attitudes of, and towards, the militants.

Eventually, more enlightened government initiatives, which promised more of the revenue to its state of origin, deployment of the Joint Task Force and an attractive amnesty deal, reduced the number of incidents and brought a period of relative stability with several semi-official ceasefires.

Currently there is an upsurge in the number of incidents, especially piracy, attacking shipping and offshore facilities. The attacks are primarily directed at the oil and support companies. Individuals and companies not associated with this field have been known to operate relatively free of incident.

The almost exclusive economic and environmental focus of such groups in the south-east saw a minor shift on April 16 when, unusually, MEND exhibited a religious focus.

threat to the long-term stability of Nigeria is this north-south divide that is manifested through Islamic militancy. The Nigerian authorities seem to concur. The Nigerian army has begun emphasising counter-terrorism/country-insurgency over conventional warfare and the government is said to be working with both American and British counter-terrorism experts.

Military attacks have succeeded in taking out many of the Boko Haram leadership, most recently Momodu Bama (or Abu Saad), this August. The government has demonstrated firm political will and, very significantly, local Muslims have requested either military protection or the provision of weapons to defend themselves. Even the Nigerian media has promoted policies of reporting in a manner to starve the terrorists of sympathy and sensational publicity.

None of this bodes well for the establishment

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A spokesman threatened to: “Bomb mosques, Haji camps and other Islamic institutions,” in response to the bombing of churches in northern Nigeria. The author is, as yet, unaware of any major incidents like this happening so far.

A prominent Nigerian statesman, Awolowo, once said: “Nigeria is two countries forced into one.” A primarily Christian southern half of the country operates a British-style legal system and maintains cultures which, while clearly African, also incorporate many values that most Europeans would recognise and accept. The mainly Muslim north of the country uses Sharia law and has cultures more akin to the Middle East or Arabic countries.

Islamic militancy, under such groups as Boko Haram (meaning ‘Western education is sinful’) and its offshoot, Ansaru, have attacked not only Westerners and Nigerian Christians, but also fellow Muslims perceived as being unsupportive. This religious militancy is confined primarily to the northern part of the country, especially the north-east, but also affects the capital, Abuja. While there have been some high publicity attacks on Western companies and individuals, the majority of violence seems to be directed at local police, army, jails and local civilians, schools and churches.

Most observers agree that the most serious

by force of an Islamic state. The alternative, splitting the country into north and south, is at least equally unlikely to happen. The north-south tensions were much more severe several decades ago during and around the time of the civil war. National unity was maintained then and will continue for the foreseeable future. Nigeria is here to stay.

As is usual with terrorist scenarios, it is the local communities who suffer most. But with Nigeria’s vibrant and growing economy, it is certain that western companies will continue to operate there. With caution and prudence, but they will be there; this author and his colleagues will be happy to join them.

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