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Nigeria Gets Foreign Aid to Fight Boko Haram

By Heather Murdock

ABUJA, Nigeria - While some Nigerian politicians are talking about negotiating with Boko Haram, the military is preparing for battle with the militant group. Seventeen countries have signed on to help Nigeria increase security.

The Nigerian military is acquiring new boats and helicopters and is fixing up fighter jets. In a speech in Abuja, Minister of Defense Bello Haliru Mohammed said training and re-training military personnel is a top priority, considering the security threats in Nigeria.

The minister said Nigeria has signed military deals with 17 countries to help quell attacks blamed on the Islamist extremist group. The group is believed to have killed more than 1,000 people since it began violent operations in 2009, attacking churches, markets, schools, security forces, the local U.N. headquarters and newspaper offices.

Seeking new solutions

Wole Olaoye, a political analyst with Nigeria's Leadership newspapers, said foreign assistance could allow Nigeria to benefit from lessons learned abroad. He said this kind of clandestine insurgency is new to Nigeria and while the government looks at security approaches and the possibility of negotiations, they also should be looking at new solutions and a greater reliance on technology.

Like many Nigerians, he makes a point of saying foreign assistance will not be welcomed if it threatens national sovereignty.

"I think that technology should be deployed there and it will help if those who were already on top of the situation in terms of technology offer advice, offer assistance. But if the cooperation is up to an extent where Nigeria will now play second fiddle to anybody - that I will not accept," said Olaoye.

Sense of urgency

Other analysts also say the longer Boko Haram is able to carry out attacks, the more reason the world outside Nigeria has to be worried. Political columnist Idang Alibi said if the group continues to operate inside Nigeria, it could branch out like al-Qaida.

"If you allow a group like Boko Haram here it will become a base for the training of terrorists, they become more sophisticated and become a threat to other countries," said Alibi.

Alibi said Nigeria also should be wary of military aid because he believes the Boko Haram threat is a result of social problems, like extreme poverty and unemployment in Nigeria's mostly-Muslim north. He said foreign assistance should not bring more weapons into Nigeria, but help the country's economy grow.