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Reported Government–Boko Haram Ceasefire: Assessing the Implications for Nigeria's Counter-terrorism Strategy and Legislative Oversight

By

Timothy Sunday Joshua, Ph.D. & Hakeem Onapajo, PhD

Legislative Centre for Security Analysis (LeCeSA)

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS)

Introduction

Reports of a secret ceasefire arrangement between the Federal Government of Nigeria and a faction of Boko Haram have generated significant security, legal and governance questions. The New Humanitarian reported in September 2026 that a three month ceasefire had allegedly been reached between the Nigerian government and the Jama'at Ahl al Sunna li Da'wa wal Jihad (JAS) faction associated with Ibrahim Bakura Doro, following negotiations surrounding the release of 360 civilians abducted from Ngoshe in Borno State.[1] According to the report, the arrangement had allegedly reduced attacks around some communities in the Ngoshe area and was expected to be extended, although the Nigerian government had not publicly confirmed the existence of the ceasefire.

The allegation has become particularly sensitive because Nigeria has publicly maintained a strong counterterrorism posture against Boko Haram and other jihadist organisations operating in the North-East. The reported arrangement also comes against the background of nearly two decades of insurgency, during which Boko Haram and its splinter organisations have caused extensive civilian deaths, displacement, destruction of livelihoods and disruption of local economies. A United Nations Development Programme assessment estimated that the conflict in north-east Nigeria had resulted in nearly 350,000 deaths by the end of 2020, including approximately 35,000 direct deaths from battle and one-sided violence, with the larger figure reflecting the indirect consequences of the conflict.[2]

The purported ceasefire requires caution, because the existence, terms and legal status of the reported ceasefire remain uncertain. The Defence Headquarters declined to comment when approached about the reported arrangement, while the Federal Government denied the separate allegation that ₦5 billion was paid as ransom for the release of the abducted civilians.[3] More significantly, on 15 September 2026, a representative claiming to speak for the Bakura Doro faction publicly denied that the group had entered into a ceasefire or negotiated reconciliation with the Federal

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[1] Anyadike, O. (2026, September 7). *Exclusive: Nigerian government and Boko Haram strike secret ceasefire deal*. The New Humanitarian. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2026/09/07/exclusive-nigerian-government-and-boko-haram-strike-secret-ceasefire-deal

[2] Premium Times. (2021, June 24). *Insurgency has killed almost 350,000 in North-east – UNDP*. Premium Times. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/470476-insurgency-has-killed-almost-350000-in-north-east-undp.html?tztc=1

[3] Omolaoye, S. (2026, September 9). *Military silent on alleged secret ceasefire with Boko Haram. The Guardian Nigeria*. https://guardian.ng/news/military-silent-on-fgs-alleged-secret-ceasefire-deal-with-boko-haram/

Government.[4] Consequently, the reported alleged ceasefire should not be treated as an established agreement at this stage, but as a significant security development requiring verification, intelligence assessment and appropriate institutional oversight.

The central policy question is not simply whether the government should negotiate with terrorists, but whether any form of engagement, communication, hostage negotiation or temporary cessation of hostilities is taking place and, if so, under what legal authority, strategic objectives, safeguards and accountability mechanisms. This distinction is important because a temporary reduction in attacks does not necessarily indicate a strategic weakening of an insurgent organisation. A ceasefire may create humanitarian space and facilitate hostage releases, but it could also provide an armed group with an opportunity to rest, recruit, reorganise, acquire supplies, consolidate territorial influence or redirect its resources towards rival factions.[5] This truce therefore warrants scrutiny within the broader trajectory of Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy rather than being assessed solely as an isolated security development.

EMERGING TRENDS/NATURE OF THE REPORTED DEVELOPMENT

The reported ceasefire appears to have emerged from the March 2026 abduction of approximately 360 civilians from Ngoshe in Borno State and their subsequent release in June. The New Humanitarian reported that three sources with contacts among Boko Haram members independently indicated that a truce had been operating since June, while communities in the affected area reportedly experienced a reduction in attacks during the period. The same investigation reported that the arrangement was associated with negotiations involving intermediaries and that an extension of approximately 40 days was being considered. However, the report also emphasised that the government had not publicly acknowledged the ceasefire and that its longer term significance remained uncertain.[6]

A particularly important feature of the reported negotiation is its apparently limited scope. The alleged truce concerns a Boko Haram/JAS faction associated with Bakura Doro and does not reportedly include the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which remains a major armed actor in the Lake Chad Basin. The distinction is strategically important because Boko Haram and ISWAP are not a single homogeneous organisation and have engaged in violent competition for territory, fighters, resources and influence. The existence of a ceasefire with one faction, if confirmed, would therefore not amount to a general cessation of jihadist violence in north-east Nigeria. Recent reporting has continued to document serious militant activity involving Boko Haram and ISWAP, including attacks against military positions and communities in the wider Lake Chad region.

The alleged agreement must also be assessed against the continuing evolution of the regional security environment. In May 2026, an attack attributed to Boko Haram killed 23 Chadian soldiers and injured 26 others at a military post in the Lake Chad region, demonstrating that the organisation and its affiliates continue to possess the capacity to conduct significant cross border operations.[7] The Lake Chad Basin remains a complex operational environment involving Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, with terrorist organisations, criminal networks and competing armed

[4] HumAngle. (2026, September 14). *Boko Haram rejects ceasefire, ransom deal with Nigerian government in new video*. HumAngle Media. https://www.humanglemedia.com/boko-haram-rejects-ceasefire-ransom-deal-with-nigerian-government-in-new-video

[6] Mohammed, Y. (2026, September 8). *Nigerian government reportedly enters secret ceasefire agreement with Boko Haram*. *AllAfrica*. https://allafrica.com/stories/202609080472.html

[7] Al Jazeera. (2026, May 5). *Boko Haram attack kills 23 soldiers in Chad's Lake Chad region*. *Al Jazeera*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/5/5/boko-haram-attack-kills-23-soldiers-in-chads-lake-chad-region

groups operating across porous borders. The regional dimension means that any unilateral or faction specific ceasefire in Nigeria may have consequences beyond the immediate communities covered by the alleged arrangement.[8]

The development also exposes a potential contradiction between operational practice and public counterterrorism policy. The New Humanitarian's analysis notes that Nigeria has a long, though often discreet and unsuccessful, history of exploring channels of communication with jihadist actors, including earlier efforts that reportedly failed to produce sustainable ceasefires. At the same time, the government's public position has emphasised opposition to negotiations with groups legally designated as terrorist organisations.[9] The reported 2026 arrangement therefore raises questions about whether the government is developing a formal policy for conditional engagement with insurgents or whether any contact is being undertaken on an ad hoc and operational basis.

Another important trend concerns the relationship between hostage negotiations, ransom allegations and terrorism financing. The New Humanitarian reported an alleged ₦5 billion payment connected to the release of the 360 civilians, while the Federal Government denied that it paid a ransom. The existence of the reported payment has therefore not been established and should not be presented as fact without documentary or forensic verification. Nevertheless, the allegation is sufficiently serious to warrant institutional scrutiny because the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 criminalises the provision or making available of funds or other property where the person knows or has reasonable grounds to believe that the resources will be used to finance a terrorist or terrorist group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY

The first implication concerns the possibility of a tactical rather than strategic ceasefire. If the reported arrangement is genuine, a reduction in violence around Ngoshe could provide immediate humanitarian benefits by allowing civilians to return to farming, trading, schooling and other livelihood activities without the same level of immediate threat. However, the absence of disarmament, demobilisation, verifiable monitoring or a wider political settlement would mean that the underlying insurgent capacity remains intact. A temporary cessation of attacks could therefore alter the pattern of violence without fundamentally changing the conflict itself. This distinction is important because the objective of counterterrorism policy should be measured not merely by short term reductions in attacks but also by whether terrorist organisations lose their capacity to recruit, finance, mobilise, govern territory and conduct violence.

Second, a ceasefire limited to one Boko Haram faction could unintentionally alter the balance of power among jihadist organisations. Since Boko Haram and ISWAP have fought one another as well as Nigerian and regional security forces, a reduction in pressure on one faction could enable it to redirect personnel and resources towards its rivalry with another faction. Conversely, the Nigerian military could use a localised cessation of hostilities to concentrate resources against a more capable or strategically important adversary. The strategic value of any such arrangement would therefore depend heavily on reliable intelligence concerning troop movements, recruitment, weapons stockpiles, financial flows and territorial control. Without such monitoring, an apparent reduction in violence could be mistaken for genuine degradation of terrorist capability.

[8] Fatokun, O. S., & Ibitoye, P. O. (2019). Transnational insurgency and border security challenges in Lake Chad Basin: The Nigerian perspective. *African Journal of Stability & Development, 12*(1)

[9] GlobalPost. (2026, September 11). *Nigerian government and Boko Haram reportedly reach ceasefire*. https://globalpost.com/stories/nigerian-government-and-boko-haram-reportedly-reach-ceasefire/

Third, the reported development raises serious questions about the coherence of Nigeria's counterterrorism architecture. The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 assigns the National Security Adviser responsibility for formulating and implementing a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, while the National Counter-Terrorism Centre serves as the coordinating body for counterterrorism policies, strategies and plans. The same legal framework gives relevant security and law enforcement agencies responsibilities for intelligence gathering, investigation, counterterrorism enforcement and the identification and seizure of terrorist funds and property. Any formal or informal arrangement that materially affects counterterrorism operations should therefore be capable of being assessed within this institutional framework rather than existing entirely outside established strategic and accountability mechanisms.

Fourth, the alleged ransom component raises a particularly important accountability issue. The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 provides extensive prohibitions against financing terrorism and against making funds or other property available for the benefit of a proscribed entity. The Act also empowers relevant agencies to identify, trace, freeze and seize terrorist property and funds. While the law must not be interpreted simplistically to mean that every payment associated with a hostage recovery automatically constitutes terrorism financing, an alleged government payment to an organisation designated as terrorist would warrant careful legal, financial and operational examination. The National Assembly therefore has a legitimate interest in determining whether any public resources were transferred, through whom, under what authority, for what purpose and with what safeguards against diversion to terrorist activities.

Fifth, the alleged ceasefire has implications for civilian protection and public trust. Communities that have endured years of attacks may welcome even a temporary reduction in violence, particularly if it enables displaced persons to return and livelihoods to resume. However, if communities interpret a temporary lull as permanent security and subsequently become exposed to renewed attacks, the consequences could be severe. Government communication must therefore avoid presenting an unverified or temporary arrangement as evidence that the insurgency has been defeated. Any confidence building measure should be accompanied by contingency planning, early warning mechanisms and continued protection for vulnerable communities.

Key Areas of Legislative Interventions

1. Establish Legislative Inquiry into the Reported Ceasefire

It is recommended that the Senate Committee on National Security and Intelligence and the House Committee on National Security and Intelligence conduct a closed door or appropriately classified inquiry into the reported ceasefire. The inquiry should seek clarification from the National Security Adviser, National Counter-Terrorism Centre, Defence Headquarters, Nigerian Army, Department of State Services, relevant intelligence agencies and the Office of the Attorney-General of the Federation on whether any direct or indirect engagement with Boko Haram occurred. The inquiry should distinguish between hostage negotiation, humanitarian contact, intelligence operations, tactical deconfliction and an actual ceasefire agreement. The objective should not be to criminalise legitimate intelligence or hostage recovery operations, but to establish whether a policy decision with significant national security implications has been made outside appropriate institutional oversight.

2. Require a Formal Government Framework for Engagement with Terrorist Groups

The Senate Committee on National Security and Intelligence and the House Committee on National Security should consider requiring the executive to develop a classified framework governing any exceptional engagement with terrorist organisations. Such a framework should define the circumstances under which contact may be authorised, the officials or institutions permitted to engage, the objectives of engagement, prohibited concessions, intelligence requirements and termination conditions. It should

also establish procedures for documenting agreements and reporting their strategic implications to designated legislative committees. This would provide institutional clarity while preserving the confidentiality required for sensitive counterterrorism operations.

3. Strengthen Oversight of Terrorist Financing and Alleged Ransom Payments

The Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters, National Security and Intelligence, House Committee on Justice, and its Committee on National Security should scrutinise the legal and financial dimensions of any alleged payment associated with the release of hostages. Where public funds are alleged to have been used, the Senate Committee on Public Accounts and House Committee on Public Accounts should require appropriate documentation subject to national security restrictions. The objective should be to determine whether any payment occurred, its source, authorisation, recipient, intermediary arrangements and ultimate destination. This is particularly important because section 21 of the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 contains extensive prohibitions relating to the provision or availability of funds for terrorist purposes.

4. Develop Legislative Safeguards for Hostage Recovery Operations

The Senate Committee on National Security and Intelligence and the House Committee on National Security should examine the need for a formal national hostage recovery protocol that clearly distinguishes military rescue operations, intelligence led recovery, mediated release and negotiated release. Such a framework should establish command responsibility, documentation requirements, financial controls, civilian protection measures and post recovery intelligence procedures. The objective should be to ensure that the understandable imperative to save civilian lives does not inadvertently strengthen terrorist financing or incentivise future mass abductions. The framework should also require systematic assessment of whether concessions made in one hostage crisis are likely to increase the probability of future kidnappings.

Conclusion

The reported Government–Boko Haram ceasefire remains unverified and contested, but the allegations raise significant questions about Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy, the management of hostage situations, terrorism financing and executive accountability. If any form of ceasefire or engagement has occurred, its security implications should be assessed beyond the immediate reduction in violence, particularly in relation to terrorist regrouping, recruitment, financing and operational repositioning. The National Assembly should therefore exercise appropriate oversight by establishing the facts surrounding the reported arrangement, examining its legal and strategic basis, and ensuring that any engagement with terrorist groups is subject to clear safeguards, financial accountability and periodic security assessment. Such legislative intervention should seek to preserve the government's flexibility to protect civilian lives while ensuring that temporary humanitarian or operational arrangements do not inadvertently strengthen terrorist organisations or undermine Nigeria's broader counterterrorism objectives.



CONTACT

Legislative Centre for Security Analysis (LeCeSA)
#4, Linda Chalker Street, Asokoro Extension, Abuja
E-mail: lecesa.info@nils.gov.ng

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS)
National Assembly
Plot 307, Cadastral Zone, Umaru Musa Yar' Adua Expressway
Airport Road, Abuja, Nigeria
E-mail: info@nils.gov.ng
Website: http://nils.gov.ng

NILDS Liaison Office
Suite 214 Senate Wing
National Assembly Complex
Mobile: +234 806 694 5075

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