

Boko Haram bombs civilians while Nigerian military is criticized for abuses

by [Paula Rogo](#) in the [November 11, 2015](#) issue

*(The Christian Science Monitor)* Boko Haram attacks in recent months, including at a mosque as evening prayer began, are increasingly using suicide bombers to target civilians, a new strategy that the Nigerian military says shows the group's weakness.

Addressing the nation October 1 to mark 55 years of independence, President Muhammadu Buhari said Boko Haram's bombing tactics were "indicative of their cowardice and desperation."

The insurgents have kidnapped an estimated 2,000 females since 2009, according to Human Rights Watch, including more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014.

In his inauguration speech in May, Buhari vowed to rescue the Chibok girls. Since then, hundreds of women and children have been freed, but the Chibok girls remain in captivity.

"They should set up mechanisms that people can use to report," said Aisha Yesufu, leader of the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. "Even if it is a simple line that people can call into and report suspicious activities before they actually happen."

More than 1,000 people have been killed since Buhari was elected in March to lead Africa's most populous country and largest economy. He pledged to wipe out Boko Haram, which is believed responsible for the deaths of about 20,000 people since 2009. At least 2.1 million people have been displaced by the fighting.

For Nigeria and its allies, Buhari is key to Nigeria's ability to turn the corner on a range of issues, especially its efforts against Boko Haram.

But despite the goodwill, Buhari quickly ran into a challenge over human rights and the conduct of the Nigerian forces tasked with combatting the insurgency. This summer, Amnesty International released a detailed report accusing the Nigerian army of killing about 8,000 civilians during its campaign against Boko Haram and accusing several senior officers of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Amnesty report alleged that the military had detained more than 20,000 people in brutal conditions that led to numerous deaths. "Former detainees and senior military sources described how detainees were regularly tortured," it said.

The Ministry of Defense denounced the Amnesty report and claimed the organization was trying to "blackmail" the military elite.

Buhari's spokesman Garbu Shehu said the president had received the report, according to Nigerian media.

"Respect for human rights and adherence to the rule of law are the life and soul of the democratic system," Buhari said, according to Shehu. "We will not tolerate or condone . . . reckless disregard for human rights."

A point of contention between Nigeria and the U.S. in the past was America's refusal to supply weapons to Nigeria's army because of the latter's poor human rights record.

The *New York Times* reported that in the summer of 2014, "the United States blocked the sale of American-made Cobra attack helicopters to Nigeria from Israel, amid concerns in Washington about Nigeria's ability to use and maintain that type of helicopter in its effort against Boko Haram, and continuing worries about Nigeria's protection of civilians when conducting military operations."