How do we know when our approach to solving conflicts is right? All too often, the world’s response to violence is more violence. But we are called to live as peacemakers and to walk on the path of righteousness and justice (Matthew 5:9; Psalm 23:3).

Nigeria is incredibly diverse, with various ethnic and religious groups. This complexity has its challenges, as groups are sometimes pitted against one another. But there is also a strong commitment to co-existence within Nigeria’s pluralistic society.

The U.S. response to Nigeria, as it faces multi-layered violent conflicts and armed actors threatening the nation’s unity, has primarily been to provide military assistance. This approach is counterproductive and has spawned additional violence.

Experience and research show that militarized approaches not only cost more, but they are also less effective than nonviolence. Peacebuilding efforts address root causes, mend relationships and build trust.

As Christians, we hope for a time when nations and armed actors “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Micah 4:3).

This issue of the Washington Memo provides an overview of U.S.-Nigeria policy and suggests strategies to overcome violent conflicts through nonviolent peacebuilding and trauma initiatives. These kinds of programs will help lead to a healthy and peaceful Nigeria.
Historically, Nigeria has been a vital partner to the United States. The western African country is 356,000 square miles—about twice the size of California—and is bordered by Chad, Niger, Benin and Cameroon. It became a British colony in the early 19th century and its protectorates were joined together in 1914.

After declaring independence on October 1, 1960, Nigeria experienced a civil war between 1967 and 1970. The strife resulted from parts of the country being excluded from governance and services. Nigeria is currently divided into six geopolitical zones: North East, North West, North Central, South East, South West, and South South (see map on opposite page). Nigeria’s diplomatic relations with the U.S were established after independence in 1960.

Nigeria is Africa’s largest economy and most populous country, with its 173.6 million people evenly divided between Christianity and Islam. According to the United Nations, its population ranks it among the ten largest countries globally. By 2050 it is expected to surpass the population of the United States and become the third most populous country in the world. Nigeria is richly endowed with natural resources but most of its revenue is generated by just one resource: oil.

Nigeria’s conflict dynamics are characterized by widespread regional, ethnic and religious tensions. At times, religious stereotyping and biases have been fueled by competition for religious superiority. Disrespect for each other’s religious principles has sometimes led to desecration of places of worship, creating a pretext for religious restrictions. Instead of celebrating Nigeria’s unique rich diversity, some politicians and religious leaders have instead used it as a tool to foment conflict.

These tensions, along with poor governance and corruption, have led to a lack of trust and low citizen participation in government structures. Add to this the effects of climate change, a struggle over control of resources, economic inequality and high unemployment and Nigeria’s fragile state has frequently experienced violence. This includes violence between ethnic and religious groups and between farmers and herders.

The most well-known militia group is Boko Haram, which took on its current form in 2009 and broke into Western news when it kidnapped hundreds of teenage girls from their schools in northeast Nigeria. In November 2013, the U.S. designated Boko Haram a “foreign terrorist organization.”

Boko Haram’s actions against civilians are terrible, but the Nigerian government’s response has escalated the violence. Thousands have died as a result. Both the military and Boko Haram have been accused of gross human rights abuses including gender-based violence, torture, unlawful detention and the recruitment of children for suicide bombings.

Peace clubs help defuse tensions

Communal conflicts for control of land and resources, often along ethnic and religious lines, continue to ravage Nigeria’s northcentral state of Plateau. The response to this violence has almost always been retaliatory and militarized, resulting in catastrophic consequences. This past June, more than 180 people were killed in a reprisal attack between farmers and herders.

To promote a different response, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) helped support the development of Emergency Preparedness Response Teams (EPRT). The teams, comprised of both Christians and Muslims, were formed to prevent and proactively respond to conflict. EPRT monitors early warning signs related to electoral violence. EPRT has also established peace clubs to work with both Christian and Muslim youths. The clubs seek to transform antagonistic and hateful narratives through peace education in communities across northcentral and northeastern states. Such alternative addresses animosity and stereotypes, enabling people to overcome mistrust and suspicion.

In the Kanam local government area of Plateau State, Abdul Adamu, a teacher in a secondary school, says, “Before, I was called Mallam Soldier (“teacher who behaves like a soldier”) by teachers and pupils in our school.” Now, he says, “the name ‘Mallam Soldier’ transformed into ‘Mr. Peace’ with the establishment of [the] Peace Club.” Adamu received an award from the state government for his efforts in peace clubs.

In its work with Adamu and others, EPRT is building the foundation for a more peaceful and stable Nigeria.

Kitshwe William is MCC’s evaluation and monitoring officer in Nigeria.
Fighting between Boko Haram and the military has displaced farming communities, leading to increased malnutrition and potential famine. It has also led to a health crisis in the northeastern part of the country, with restricted access to basic services, and has traumatized the civilian population, with women and children most at risk. These challenges present a considerable test to Nigeria’s century of unity and it is unclear whether elections will be held as scheduled in 2019.

U.S. policy: Humanitarian assistance

To date, 7.7 million people in Nigeria are in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance, including 3.3 million who do not have enough to eat. Pregnant women and children are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. Many also lack access to health care. As many as 2.2 million people are internally displaced within the country, and their needs are increasing. Another 224,000 Nigerians are refugees in other countries; many people fear they could be forced to return to an insecure situation.

In 2017, the U.S. government gave $500 million in humanitarian assistance to Nigeria. Much of it went toward health care, as well as assistance for refugees and displaced people. But even though the humanitarian crisis continues, in the current fiscal year the U.S. government has obligated only $230 million for Nigeria.

U.S. policy: Arms and militarism

Despite Nigeria’s budgetary challenges as it faces a humanitarian crisis, President Muhammadu Buhari signed a $593 million arms deal in 2017 with the U.S. government. Nigeria is expected to receive 12 Super Tucano warplanes, along with military hardware, maintenance and training, despite its track record of human rights violations.

The country remains a key focus of U.S. military counter-terrorism activity. But this assistance often blurs the lines between development and military activities. During fiscal years 2015–2018, the U.S. Department of Defense spent $954 million in combat operations, military aircraft, logistics, and command and control to support regional military operations in Africa. In addition, the U.S. military’s Africa Command (AFRICOM) participates in the Multinational Joint Task Force, formed by Nigeria and other countries to combat Boko Haram.

Unfortunately, Nigeria’s militaristic approach to “counter violent extremism” has hindered the possibility of a legitimate peace process because it has undermined peacebuilding, conflict mitigation and prevention work.

Looking ahead

The U.S. government’s support for Nigeria in addressing Boko Haram should go beyond arms transactions and transfers. In addition to continuing to provide significant humanitarian assistance, the U.S. should support efforts to tackle the root causes of inequality and conflict. This will require holistic and inclusive solutions in which all stakeholders have a voice.

The U.S. Congress will also need to provide meaningful oversight to U.S. arms sales, a role given to Congress by the Arms Export Control Act (1976). This includes enforcement of “the Leahy law,” which prohibits sending U.S. military assistance to a foreign military unit that has committed a gross human rights violation. Robust congressional oversight is especially critical now, in light of the “Conventional Arms Transfer” policy announced earlier this year by the Trump administration. The revised policy will make it easier to transfer arms to places of violent conflict.

Though faced with many challenges as a country, Nigerians have shown remarkable resilience as they build their nation. Now the country must build on its strengths and celebrate the richness of its diversity. The U.S. should support these efforts rather than seeking military profit and solutions.
Unity in diversity

Scripture readings
Ephesians 2:14–16
1 Corinthians 13:4–6
John 14:27

Songs
STJ 33 Come, Holy Spirit, descend
STJ 52 Jesus, help us live in peace
STJ 64 Somos el cuerpo de Cristo

Opening prayer
Loving God, Indivisible One and Creator of humankind, we gather to worship as one body that contains unique differences.
In your image and likeness, you made us all. Bless our gathering and anoint us for the purpose of showing love that is marked by your divine Spirit. Receive our desire to live in union with your purpose for us, our society and the universe. Amen.

Psalm reading
(based on Psalms 91, 133, 122; refrain from Psalm 29)
An alternative to the spoken refrain is to sing together the refrain of “May the Lord, mighty God” (HWB 435) after each stanza.

For God will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
his faithfulfulness is a shield and buckler.
May the Lord give strength to his people, may the Lord bless his people with peace!

Closing prayer
With thanksgiving, we ask you to knit us together in our differences. Refresh our human filial bonds with your oil of gladness and unity, that we may live continually in your purpose for our existence. Amen.

Sending song
HWB 421 Bless’d be the tie that binds
Facts about Nigeria

$593 million
Amount Nigeria agreed to pay the U.S. for arms in 2017

$20.6 billion
Nigeria’s federal budget in 2017

$318.7 million
Amount requested by the UN’s World Food Programme for Nigeria in 2018

$125.3 million
Amount received

2.2 million
People displaced within Nigeria

2.9 million
People in Nigeria who are food insecure

224,000
Nigerian refugees in Cameroon, Chad and Niger

Sources: Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme
**POLICY PRINCIPLES**

**U.S.-Nigeria policy should...**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Increase humanitarian support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Tackle root causes of violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Strengthen oversight of military assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Support local reintegration initiatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Congress and the administration should increase foreign assistance** for humanitarian and development programs. This includes investments in food security, clean water, education and health. Poverty-focused development assistance should address the needs of internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as their host communities. Congress should also make clear that development programs must be kept distinct from militarized “counter-terrorism” efforts.

A militarized approach to “counter violent extremism” has produced overwhelmingly negative results in the northeastern part of Nigeria. The U.S. should instead support nonviolent peacebuilding programs. **Conflict-sensitive approaches and psychosocial trauma programs can help tackle the socioeconomic, political and ideological causes of conflicts**, transforming relationships and building trust.

Particularly considering the administration’s effort to loosen restrictions on arms sales, Congress must strengthen its oversight role. It **must ensure strong enforcement of “the Leahy law,”** which prohibits sending U.S. military assistance to a foreign military unit that has committed a gross human rights violation. Congress and the administration should also urge greater transparency and accountability in Nigeria’s security sector.

When neighbors join Boko Haram or vigilante groups, voluntarily or not, the result is broken communal relationships. To help communities move toward reconciliation and stability, **the U.S. government can provide support for locally-owned processes that help ex-combatants reintegrate** back into their communities.

**Learn more**

A Common Place magazine, Winter 2018
mcc.org/stories/acp/winter-2018

“My neighbor, Boko Haram”
Sojourners, March 2017
sojo.net/magazine/march-2017/my-neighbor-boko-haram