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# State Department Officials, Open Doors CEO, CSIS Expert Highlight Security Progress Under President Tinubu, Call for Strengthened U.S.-Nigeria Security Partnership



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Last week, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa held a hearing on Nigeria's efforts to improve security and protect Christians.

Chairman Chris Smith opened his remarks by repeating claims that have been continuously debunked: that Christians make up the vast majority of victims, that Fulani militias are a single organized force operating with impunity, and that the Nigerian government is turning a blind eye and failing to protect Christians. Four of the five witnesses pushed back.

While acknowledging that more progress is needed, a view the Nigerian government shares, Assistant Secretary of State Frank Garcia, Assistant Secretary of State Riley Barnes, CSIS Africa Director Oge Onubogu, and even Open Doors US CEO Ryan Brown detailed significant gains under the Tinubu administration. They cited stronger security, better protection for vulnerable Nigerians, and counterterrorism wins achieved in partnership with U.S. forces.

Rep. Riley Moore, a frequent Twitter critic of the Nigerian government, who is not a committee member yet, was invited to join the dais, also commended Nigeria's security actions in the North Central states. He singled out the arrest of Mahmoud Adam, a Fulani militant he described as responsible for much of the violence against Christians.



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One witness, Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute, doubled down on the "Christian Genocide" narrative. She cited methodologically dubious statistics from the advocacy group Truth Nigeria, downplayed the real progress of the U.S.-Nigeria counterterrorism partnership under President Trump, and spent her time attacking Secure Nigeria instead of engaging seriously with the security steps taken under President Tinubu.

Given Shea's track record, this was hardly surprising. But with even the skeptics of the Nigerian government on the panel declining to follow her, her insistence on repeating debunked and dangerous propaganda was disappointing.

So, while it seems Nigeria Derangement Syndrome remains alive and well in some Washington advocacy circles, it appears the collective fever is finally breaking.

**State Department Officials Tout U.S.-Nigeria Counterterrorism Partnership and Security Reforms**

In their testimony, Assistant Secretaries Garcia and Barnes offered a clear-eyed assessment of the progress under President Tinubu's security surge. They credited close U.S.-Nigerian collaboration for sweeping security reforms.

Garcia described the progress since President Trump designated Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern: *"The department has treated this issue as a top priority, working intensively with our Nigerian counterparts to confront the persecution of Christian communities and to hold perpetrators for this violence accountable*."

Garcia then outlined the partnership in practice: *"We have expanded biometric information sharing with the Nigerian government so that perpetrators can be identified, prosecuted, and, where appropriate, sanctioned, rather than merged back into the population, and State and Treasury finalized an action plan with Nigeria's financial institutions to disrupt the terrorist financing networks that fund attacks on churches*."

Assistant Secretary Barnes added further details on the Nigerian government's commitment to enhancing security, saying: "*I believe the president's designation has resulted in Nigeria taking these issues more seriously. At the August session of the Joint Working Group, Nigeria sent cabinet-level officials accountable for changes that we need to see. The government has reported leadership changes, strategically deployed military forces, and increased arrests and prosecutions. They've agreed to report more transparently on spending for displaced people and to develop a plan and timeline for returning internally displaced persons safely and securely to their ancestral lands.*"

And Congressman Moore commended recent security action in the North Central States, saying, "*Acting on American warnings, Nigerian forces engaged Fulani militants in September, and Nigeria's security services detained Mahmud Adam, a radical Islamic Fulani. Chairs leader. leader responsible for the killings of countless*



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*Christians. These steps followed sustained American engagement, and they are welcome*."

Garcia also rejected Chairman Smith's claim that Nigeria is not taking the situation seriously: "*I have seen a very serious-minded approach from the Nigerians in our CPC working groups, and they have reorganized, they have fired a lot of the leadership that had not been responsive, and the folks that are in charge right now on their defense forces are serious-minded. My meetings with Ribadu have been good and productive*."

Garcia closed by stressing the U.S. commitment to security and prosperity for all Nigerians: "*Our position is that you know all lives are precious, and that the rising tide of improved security really benefits all groups.*"

President Tinubu shares that goal and is committed to working with U.S. counterparts to sustain the past year's security momentum.

**The Alternative Reality of Nina Shea**

Maybe Shea wasn't listening during Garcia and Barnes's testimony. That would explain her apparent confusion about President Tinubu's efforts to protect vulnerable Nigerians, Christians included.

Shea opened by claiming that "*Nigeria's government routinely fails to protect the Middle Belt Christians from Fulani terror*," and later added that "*the government generally tolerates these attacks*." Yet she also admitted that "*Abuja began to act*" after President Trump's CPC designation, and that the arrested suspects "*do include notable Fulani leaders*."

Still, she kept casting doubt on President Tinubu's commitment to security. She also brushed aside the complex drivers of violence outlined by CSIS's Oge Onubogu and cast the conflict in solely religious terms.

As Onubogu explained, that framing is not just wrong but dangerous: "*Christians are not the sole victims, and religion alone cannot explain the wider crisis. Muslim communities have also suffered devastating attacks. Religious identity can intersect with ethnicity, land disputes, political competition, livelihoods, criminality, governance failures, and longstanding grievances. Recognizing this complexity does not diminish Christian suffering. It helps us understand the problem accurately and respond effectively.*"

She added: *"victims' religious identity tells us who suffered; it does not, by itself, establish why they were attacked*."

Shea's own proposals include supplementing security forces with "*private security agencies and investigators, as well as equipping local volunteer defense or vigilante groups."*

Really, vigilante groups? That is not a serious policy proposal. Anyone who understands the causes of violence in Nigeria can see why arming vigilantes is as



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dangerous as it is dumb. As Onubogu noted, Christians are victims, but they are also, at times, perpetrators. Lasting stability depends on grasping that.

Thankfully, the U.S. and Nigeria partners understand that strengthening their counterterrorism partnership is critical to sustaining security gains.

But Shea wasn't done. She also cited Secure Nigeria's newsletter repeatedly.

We appreciate her loyal readership and attention to our coverage of Tinubu's security surge. But she may not have read one edition closely. Responding to Chairman Smith's claims about a 007 Spectre-like "Fulani Ethnic Militia," we wrote:

"*Congress has found a new villain — an organization so secretive, so elusive, so deeply embedded in the shadows that not a single U.S. intelligence agency has ever confirmed its existence or even uttered its name.*

*Meet the "Fulani Ethnic Militia" (FEM), the star of Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. Riley Moore's (R-WV) Nigeria Religious Freedom and Accountability Act of 2026 (H.R. 7457). The bill would require the Secretary of State to compile a sweeping report on religious persecution in Nigeria and calls for sanctions against this supposed militia. There's just one small hiccup: the State Department, CIA, DNI, NSC, and the Department of War have all been clear that such an organization does not exist.*

*But it gets worse: Rep. Moore and Rep. Smith's own sources undercut the bill. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, whose research the legislation leans on, released a report in May stating flatly that militant Fulani do "not share a centralized leadership" and operate in scattered groups ranging from 10 to 1,000 members. That's not a militia; it's a disorganized smattering of criminal gangs. Which is a real problem, and one President Tinubu is actively addressing, but fundamentally different than the unified paramilitary bogeyman the bill describes."*

Nuance matters, and it was missing from Nina's testimony. We hope she will keep reading our newsletter and reread her fellow witnesses' testimony.

Together, they offer an accurate picture and a concrete proposal: strengthen the U.S.-Nigeria security partnership so the gains under Tinubu bring lasting peace and prosperity for all Nigerians.

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