

NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM TERRORIST GROUP

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Border security has come to assume heightened importance in the world today as the rate of criminal activities have also increased in scale especially since the end of Cold War and in the wake of globalization. It has become easy for transitional crimes to be conducted such as the moving of money, people and goods across the world because of advancement in telecommunications, transportation and technology in general. The world has turned into a 'global village' with its own peculiarities as well as problems.

The porous borders of Nigeria/West Africa continue to engender cross-border crime and instability in the sub-region. Owing to the lack of an appropriate mechanism for monitoring movements and illegal activities across these borders, several criminal activities across transnational borders becomes the order of the day. Terrorist acts perpetrated by Boko Haram* have damaged the liberty in

Nigeria, caused the death of thousand people, and harmed the national infrastructure¹.

TRANS-BOUNDARY ACTIVITIES THAT STIMULATES THE GROWTH OF BOKO HARAM

Nowadays terrorism is a global phenomenon that has an influence on everyone's life, as it threatens stability and public safety worldwide. Terrorist acts perpetrated by Boko Haram have damaged the liberty in Nigeria, caused the death of thousand people, and harmed the national infrastructure².

In West Africa alone, there are a total of 35 international boundaries characterized by high levels of porosity. This makes them highly vulnerable to threats such as trafficking of people, drugs, small arms and light weapons as well as recent instances of terrorism. Nonetheless, border security issues are not always integrated into national security or economic strategies, and border agencies are usually ill-equipped, ill-trained and poorly resourced³. Some of these activities involve the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons/ammunitions and human beings, especially women and children. Mercenarism and the recruitment and use of child soldiers in armed conflict, transnational syndicates involved in

crimes such as peddling of narcotics, armed robbery and the smuggling of goods are other cross-border related crimes. These cross-border crimes are mostly symptomatic rather than as causes of instability in the sub-region⁴.

While members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have committed not to import, export or manufacture Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), weapons continue to enter the sub-region due to poor border controls. Studies conducted have shown that between 4 and 5 million ECOWAS citizens ply the highways and frontiers of the Community's territory every month⁵.

In fact, the threats and challenges posed by organized criminal activities in West Africa have become so pronounced that experts in the field now characterize such groups as representing particular "African criminal networks" (ACN)⁶. Such criminal activities across the porous transnational boundaries of West African sub region that has becomes the veritable fan that inflames the ember of Boko Haram insurgency and security threat to Africa includes.

ILLICIT GOODS AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Organized crime in West Africa became an international

* Boko Haram is an insurgency/terrorist group that officially began in 2002. In 2009 it became a deadly jihadist armed rebel group rebelling against the government of Nigeria. The group has killed, maim, kidnapped thousands and ultimately leading to instability in the region. The insurgency has spread to neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger thus becoming a major regional terrorist organization.

security concern in the mid-2000s, due to the detection of large cocaine shipments transiting the region on their way to Europe. Assessments conducted by UNODC revealed that a number of transnational organized crime problems pose a threat to stability and development in the region, including oil bunkering, arms trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, toxic waste dumping, fraudulent medicine, cigarette smuggling, and the looting of natural resources⁷. Trans-border criminal activities in the region straddle weak borders into specific geographic locations in affected countries where state capacity to respond to the threat and challenges posed by these illegal activities is equally weak.

The smuggling of goods, especially cocoa, timber, ivory and petroleum products across national borders is most prevalent along the Côte d'Ivoire-Ghana-Togo-Benin-Nigeria and Burkina Faso corridors of the sub-region. Ordinary business men and women, and sometimes rebels and criminal gangs involved in civil wars in the sub-region engage in the smuggling of these and other products. These goods are smuggled in vehicles or on foot, using secret and illegal routes across the borders to evade special regulations, levies or taxes, thereby making more income through the transaction of these products⁸.

The growth of drug trafficking poses new challenges to the region and facilitates the emergence of new types of threats to international security. The danger lies, especially, in the nexus among drug-trafficking cartels, corrupt government officials, and suspected terrorist elements in West Africa. The revenues from global illicit markets for drugs, sex, counterfeited pharmaceuticals and music, cyber fraud, stolen oil, and hostages offer political and military leaders a fast, easy, and relatively cost-free source of funds for their electoral and

military campaigns and patronage systems⁹.

Territories with a history of state neglect and different sources of tensions in particular represent havens for drug traffickers, facilitating these kinds of transnational activities across national and international borders and at times, providing havens for radical groups¹⁰. The scope of the human trafficking problem is widespread in West Africa. Child trafficking in particular spreads across eleven of the fifteen Member States of the ECOWAS including Ghana, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and Mali¹¹.

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

It is also important to point here that West Africa is a showcase of arms proliferation, notably Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW). Vast quantities of arms have flooded the region despite their rampant misuse by state and non-state actors alike. The widespread availability of small arms, especially to abusive actors, poses a major threat to West Africa. There are several reasons why SALW are extreme tools of violence in West Africa. These weapons are cheap and widely available; they are also lightweight, and so can be used by child soldiers, who have played a significant role in major conflicts in West Africa¹².

The illicit trade in weapons between Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo is fuelled by more demand by the people for self-protection, as a result of the feeling of insecurity throughout the region. This regional demand is being met by forgers principally in Ghana but also in Togo, whose local revolvers, shot guns and rifle type weapons flood the arms markets of the sub-region¹³.

The uncontrollable circulation of weapons has a great

destabilizing effect for those countries where it is observed. Civil conflicts, organized crime and terrorist activities are enabled by the illegal access to firepower that they would otherwise not be able to acquire. Destabilization has a bi-directional connection with illegal arms trade. In countries that have recently suffered major political unrest or the collapse of the state's supervisory mechanisms, SALW depots of the military are exposed to theft by criminals or corrupted military officials¹⁴.

The inflow and circulation of arms, particularly small arms and light weapons, in the region has clearly contributed to the increased conflict and abuses against civilians by governments and armed groups. It also has facilitated the formation of new armed groups and the use of ill-disciplined fighters, including mercenaries¹⁵. Given ineffectual national security systems, porous borders, and growing demand for arms by criminals and militants, cartels specializing in arms trafficking have devised methods for concealing and conveniently trafficking arms across borders in West Africa.

The audacity of militants operating in West Africa grew with the proliferation of weapons in the Sahara-Sahel region following the destabilization of Libya. Libyan arms first obtained by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other mercenaries have been transferred to groups such as Ansar Dine, Boko Haram and Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), emboldening and enabling them to mount more deadly attacks¹⁶.

Security is very paramount at the border. If the borders are insecure, the social and economic development of such country will be a herculean task. The rationale for this paper is the reoccurring security challenges at the borders that spread to the internal insecurity of lives and property. It

is on this basis that security issues will be questioned in spite of the huge money and human resources expended on security, people still remain unprotected and apprehensive of the activities of the emerging terrorist group known as Boko Haram group. These call to question the security at our borders especially with the involvement of security agencies in our national borders.

It has been observed that certain factors pose serious security challenge in Nigeria and other West African countries with regard to trans-boundary criminal activities¹⁷.

UNSECURED DEMARCATION OF BORDERS

The porous borders contributed and continue to encourage the cross border crimes and instability in the region. The porous borders could also be explained in the use of dried tree, oil drums as well as rims of tyres to demarcate the national borders, this makes the border to be disorganized, poorly managed and insecure¹⁸. This promotes the unrestrained influx of illegal migrants and cross border activities. However, there are indefinable corridors or regions that served as a route to these illegal migrants, thereby posing a serious threat to the country and the national borders. For instance, it has been discovered that Nigeria has over 1400 irregular and 144 regular routes¹⁹ as movements were done through the illegal routes. There are so many outlets for smuggling of various goods across the border²⁰.

INADEQUATE MANPOWER AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT

Martin Kure Abeshi the former Comptroller-General of Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) highlighted the challenges facing the NIS to include inadequate funding and personnel, noting that the current number of

immigration officers were grossly inadequate to carry out the Service's mandate. He stressed that "the NIS presently has a total of less than 23,000 staff. The enormous statutory obligations of the NIS coupled with emerging migration trends and trajectories make this number of personnel obviously grossly inadequate"²¹, it does not allow for adequate patrolling of these illegal routes as criminals use the illegal routes as a means of entry into the country, which has a negative impact on the security of our national borders. It makes it difficult for the security operatives to adequately man the national boundaries and effectively patrol these several corridors that lead to the country²².

ARTIFICIAL BORDER CREATION

The artificial border creation in Africa as a result of colonialism without consideration to the ethnic and cultural ties of the people involve, this continue to pose serious threat to Nigeria.

However, the delimitation of the boundaries affects the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the border communities to the extent that one cannot differentiate a Nigerian from Nigerien due to culture and linguistics in which communities with homogenous culture and language are found at different sides of the borderline hence makes it difficult to put in place immigration laws and it also impede the effectiveness of the security personal when members can just change their identity when they feel like²³.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTABILITY IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of People, Goods and Services was established by the ECOWAS Member States in 1979²⁴. The main aim of this Protocol is to facilitate the free

movement of people, goods and services within the West Africa without Visa; this simply means that any ECOWAS citizen who possesses valid travelling document and International Health Certificate can transverse the entire region without a visa. Thereby, compelling all member states to abolish the use of visa in order to ease the movement of people in the region.

However, in spite of the positive pronouncement of this protocol, it has its own negative effects. This protocol allows the movement of criminals to move across the border and also engage in cross border activities under the pretext of this protocol.

The following factors pose a serious threat to the internal security of lives and property in the country, as the infractions at the border calls for enforcement of reforms of the border control system. While terrorists move from in and out of the country, smugglers of all kinds of contraband continue with their business. For instance, the recent security challenges in Nigeria, there are speculations that these groups are also from neighboring countries, this would not have been possible if there were adequate security, logistics and manpower at our national borders. The borders are seen as means of smuggling of illegal weapons and all contraband goods, even armed robbers usually escape through the boundaries after committing crimes in the country. All these tend to endanger the socio-economic development of the country as well as the political stability. Also, the integrity and the image of the country is now put to question as Nigerians face a lot of harassment and subject to all kinds of humiliation outside the country²⁵.

However, it is paramount to note, that Nigeria is the most populous as well as the richest in West Africa, in terms of economic, population preponderant, military capability, Nigeria dwarfs all these

countries. This explains the more reason why instability and crisis in neighboring countries such as political instability, famine and diseases split over to Nigeria as her proximate neighbors depend solely on Nigeria. This simply means that the national security of Nigeria is the security of its immediate neighbors as this is demonstrated in both scope and intensity of cross border smuggling activities which obtain in their daily interaction.

CONCLUSION

From the aforementioned, as a result of so many factors from the trans-boundary activities leading to the increase of insurgency and

criminality in Nigeria. The Nigerian government and the security agencies need to increase on their already commenced effort to curb and curtail the activities of Boko Haram in the region.

The introduction of Machine Readable Electronic Passports in 2007 was a landmark achievement by the Service as Nigeria became the first country in Africa to introduce the e-passport and among the first 40 countries in the world to do so. The embrace of the e-passport has become a major tool in the fight against "trans-border criminality as the e-passport contains the biometric details of holders thus making it easy for detection of persons traveling under false identities or

compromised travel documents²⁶. The Nigeria Immigration Service equally seems to have established a well-equipped forensic laboratory for the examination of travel documents and monetary instruments. As the advent of e-passport has made it impossible for an individual to have multiple passports bearing different names, as it was easy for non-Nigerians to get the country's green passport before the advent of e-passport. It is noteworthy that the e-passport has significantly reduced these fraudulent practices.

However, it is the increase of manpower and training of a special border patrol corps to help fight terrorism and other crimes at the nation's borders.

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² Ibidem.

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