Insurgency and Nigeria's Relations with Her Immediate Neighbors in the Twenty-first Century

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Abstract

Terrorist acts metamorphosed into an insurgency in Nigeria when the Boko Haram terrorist group ferociously challenged the territorial integrity of Nigeria and proclaimed authority over 14 local governments. Consequently, Nigeria orchestrates counterinsurgency strategy that incorporates her contiguous neighbors. It is against this background that this article interrogates the rise of insurgency in Nigeria and its influence on Nigeria's relations with her immediate neighbors. The article argues that the insurgent uprising reinvigorates rapprochement between Nigeria and the nearby states. It concludes that cooperation in this context for national security is inexorable for mutual survival.

Keywords

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Introduction

In this contemporary era when transnational terrorism has recorded an exponential increase, sporadic acts of shooting, kidnapping, and suicide bombing are not uncommon in West Africa, especially in Nigeria. Predominantly since 2009, this new generation of human and national security threats has become conspicuous in some parts of the Nigerian society and has also created general uncertainty. Attending churches during Sunday services in those areas, schools during the work day or merely going to markets (in the state of unknown) was capable of generating anxiety attributable to persistent attacks on the places mentioned above. Neither military barracks nor police headquarters which are considered as the nerve centers of internal orderliness were secured with certainty. The security apparatus or agents of state could no longer assure a safe environment for lives and properties in the Northeastern Nigeria, most especially between 2009 and 2015. Suffice to say that the aforementioned calamities and woes on Nigeria and its citizen, which were regarded by some scholars (Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014) as unprecedented in the areas of lethality, brutality, and callousness, are not unconnected with the atrocities perpetrated by 'unknown combatants' under the umbrella of the Boko Haram terrorist group. Apparently, the national security and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria came under threat when the Boko Haram terrorist group in 2014 mounted up its operational lethality and mutated into an insurgent group (Zamfir 2015). Consequently, these unknown combatants declared control over the areas subdued with the fundamental objective of creating a caliphate out of the present Nigeria which would be governed only by sharia. The whole of Sambisa forest, for example, and more than 14 local governments were reportedly under the control of these unknown combatants as at January 2015 (Bappah 2016). Invariably, among others, the act of carving out a caliphate marked the turning point of Boko Haram from being a terrorist group to an insurgent group. Such clear demarcation maintains obscurity in the articles of many scholars (Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014; Oyewole 2015).

Thus, this encroachment on Nigeria's territorial integrity further challenged her raison d'être which is one of the reasons why a rational state may be certainly ready to declare war against either external aggressors or internal rebels. Accordingly, this act of insurgency crystallized the understanding of the trend of the phenomenon and necessitated

further action from the Nigerian government (political elites) with the basic aim of decimating or degrading the insurgents. Since the dominant unilateral approach had not yielded astounding positive outcome for more than five years (Bappah 2016), Nigeria changed tactics the same year and therefore reinvigorated multinational collaboration with her contiguous neighbors as a means of getting rid of the menace (Bappah 2016). It is against this background that this article interrogates the relations between Nigeria and her neighbors within the context of Boko Haram insurgent uprising. In specific terms, the article unravels the dynamics of the rise and mutation of terrorism into insurgency within the territorial confines of Nigerian borders and how the transnational implications of the development propelled rapprochement in the political and security engagement between Nigeria and her immediate neighbors in the face of a collective security peril. It further attends to how such nascent goodwill became inevitable and imperative in spite of the hitherto historical mistrust and suspicion between the anglophone state—Nigeria—and surrounding francophone states.

Principally, the article is prompted by two main factors. First, many scholars (Akindele and Ate 1986; Aluko 1981; Garba 1987; Obi 2008; Omede 2006) documented the change in the relations between Nigeria and her immediate neighbors after the end of the Nigerian Civil War under the policy of good neighborliness. Fawole (2003, 54, 65), for instance, avers that the experience of the Civil War 'sharpened Nigeria's perception of national security and survival [and] the importance of good neighbours … [a]nd Nigerian leaders' recognition of this fact was immediately translated into improved and closer relationship' with adjacent neighbors immediately after the end of the Civil War in the 1970s. Manifested within this Nigeria's recognized friendly policy included the provision of financial assistance to and investment in these neighboring states. Similarly, some scholars (Mayall 1976; Shaw 1987) also recorded the implications of the oil boom on the foreign policy or external relations of Nigeria in the 1970s. According to them, the prosperity recorded by Nigeria during this period offered an opportunity for 'assertive leadership in inter-African Affairs' (Mayall 1976, 237) and an active anti-colonial or Apartheid policy. Omede (2006) also explored Nigeria's relations with her immediate neighbors in the milieu of border disputes and how the consciousness of the preeminence of avoiding border skirmish influenced Nigeria's relations toward these states. In essence, insurgency as a factor in the rapprochement between Nigeria on the one hand and neighboring francophone states of Niger, Benin, Chad,

and Cameroon on the other has not been thoroughly explored. This invariably created avenue for this article to avoid a vacuum in the knowledge industry concerning insurgency–external relations nexus as relating to Nigeria. In the second place, while some scholars (Azumah 2015; Khan and Cheri 2016; Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014, Pieri and Zenn 2016; Suleiman and Karim 2015) have examined and attributed an array of religious, political, and economic mainsprings as remote and immediate causes of the insurgency, others (Asuelime and David 2015) have concentrated on how such political and religious violence could be resolved. However, analysts have paid little or no attention to the critical analysis of the internal dynamics and propelling factors precipitating close engagement and concerted actions between Nigeria and contiguous states in the twenty-first century under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Plausibly, if not attended to, this is capable of generating wrong public insinuations or misconceptions about the nuanced rationales underpinning such international adventure. Hence, the central focus of this article is to meticulously examine why the insurgency inevitably influenced the external relations of the Giant of Africa, Nigeria, vis-à-vis the countries within its innermost layer of the foreign policy concentric circle (Gambari 1989).

Drawing on the above, the article is divided into different segments. First, the article elucidates misconceptions and conceptualizes insurgency as a phenomenon different from terrorism which could only emanate when unconventional prowess of dissident group(s) violently challenge the government forces to unseat the government or alter its territorial configurations. Following this section is the interrogation of the nuances surrounding the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency within few years. It incorporates analysis of the dynamic changes that occurred within the group in the areas of ideology, lethality, and territorial expansion. This involved the transmutation from being a sect to a terrorist and later to an insurgent group; from subnational to transnational status; and from attacking churches to invading military bases. Next to this section, which is the core aspect of the discourse, is the analysis of how the zenith atrocities of these 'unknown combatants' (Boko Haram members) compelled the reaching out to the neighbors by the Nigerian government and the factors that made it inexorable. It finally concludes that in spite of the differences between Nigeria and the neighboring states in many areas, it is a reasonable action on the part of the Nigerian government to orchestrate common solution to complex joint problems.

Conceptualizing Insurgency: Contemporary Advanced Phase of Terrorism

Insurgency, like many other concepts in international relations, has been subjected to not only different interpretations but also misinterpretations by scholars' common usage (Findley and Young 2006). In some cases where the concept is not misused, policymakers (Smith 2008) and academics fail to draw a clear demarcation between insurgency and other forms of political violence such as terrorism or considering terrorism as a form of insurgency (Merari 1993). A plethora of other scholars (Mason 1996; Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014; Oyewole 2015), while engaging in the intellectual overture of the concept, ignore the important responsibility of conceptualizing insurgency within the framework of its usage. Unsurprisingly, a critical perusal of some journal articles (Merari 1993) reveals the utilization of insurgency as synonymous with terrorism which indicates sameness. Underhill (2014, 10–11) attested to this knowledge misplacement in his work *Countering Global Terrorism and Insurgency* when he stated that in the contemporary time, 'insurgency and terrorism have almost become one and the same in terms of our understanding of them'. Failure in this aspect prompted consideration of some terrorist groups as insurgent groups or conversely. This is notwithstanding the earlier studies done regarding the conceptual analysis of insurgency (Ünal 2016; Underhill 2014). Thus, it is highly paramount to conceptualize insurgency within the framework of the uprising to avoid constant abuse and misconception created by some authors and at the same time to generate often abandoned nuanced difference between insurgency and, most notably, terrorism.

As a matter of fact, insurgency is not a new phenomenon in peace and conflict studies; many scholars, government agencies, and organizations have attempted defining the concept in the past. According to the United States Department of Defense (2010, 113), insurgency can be defined as '[t]he organised use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify and challenge political control of a region'. It indicates that the overarching rationale for either destruction or ferocity in an insurgent uprising is to question the political legitimacy of the government or the status quo. Kilcullen (2007) delineates insurgency as 'grassroots uprisings that seek to overthrow established government or social orders'. The above definition is similar to the one given by Underhill (2014, 11) as 'grassroots uprisin[g] that emerge with the aim of overthrowing an established government or a set of societal norms that they feel threatened by'.

In other words, the insurgency is nothing but homegrown movement or rebellion against the existing political or societal configuration through the application of coercion. Gary Bernstern (in Underhill 2014, 12) also avers insurgency as 'a protracted struggle by one or more armed groups that employ violence with the goal of overthrowing an existing political order'. From the perspective of Findley and Young (2006, 2–3), 'insurgency is a protracted political-military conflict over control of the state or some portion thereof using irregular military forces'. By implication, it signifies the acknowledgment that political violence that will be appropriately termed as insurgency must incorporate not only military conflagration but also political one with the use of unconventional warfare to challenge the legitimate authority of a sovereign state nationwide or any portion thereof.

It must be noted that the few identified definitions above are not the same. However, they have some salient relatively standard features. These include the existence of the rebellion, use of force, desire to overthrow the government, and yearning for territorial control. In spite of the vagary nature of contemporary insurgency that is regularly exposed to persistent modification, any robust conceptual elucidation of what insurgency is all about must embrace all of the above-recognized elements. First, the starting point (though not remote) of any movement that is appropriate to consider insurgent struggle is the existence of a revolt by a group of individuals within a state directly against the government fueled or instigated by socioeconomic, religious, or political grievances and displeasures (Osumah 2013) accumulated over time. Such an uprising may be sudden or gradually inclined but is mostly rooted in a deeper demand for justice and manifests with conspicuous disturbances against public order. Also, such a sense of injustice or unfair treatment is usually shared by a notable group of people with common identities. Another unavoidable characteristic of insurgency is the use of violence. It is an attribute that insurgency has in common with other forms of political violence which cannot be taken away. Demand for common objectives in an insurgency never takes the form of diplomacy or a peaceful protest or negotiation between two opposing parties, but insurgents are noted for pugnacious and fierce violence against the forces of government, putting into consideration that their yearnings will not be attended to unless ferocity is employed. In other words, violence is an indispensable instrument of insurgency. Furthermore, two other important hallmarks of an act of insurgency are the desire to overthrow government and yearnings for territorial control (Thomson 2004). Influenced by these two major

attributes, Kilcullen (2006, 112) describes insurgency as a 'struggle to control a contested political space, between a state (or group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers'. Any outbreak of political violence that deploys the use of physical force against the de jure government due to discontentment over issues without aiming at ousting the leadership of a country or carving out a section thereof for jurisdictional administration is inapposite to be termed insurgency. It is appropriate at this juncture, therefore, to define insurgency as a violent insurrection orchestrated by one or more groups of individuals with shared identities against the political authority of a sovereign state. It occurs due to accumulated sociopolitical, economic, or religious resentment through confrontation with conventional forces for the overarching purpose of toppling the government or declaring territorial control over some parts of the state.

Insurgency is not the same as terrorism; they are two different concepts that demand separate definitions. Terrorism has no single unanimously acceptable definition. Yet, it is right to delineate it as an unlawful and premeditated deployment of violence by a small group of unknown fanatics mainly against noncombatants (civilian targets), in order to induce public fear for the purpose of achieving certain political, ideological, or religious objectives (Kiras 2007; Underhill 2014; Weinberg and Eubank 2006). The main characteristic that is common to both terrorists and insurgents is the deployment of violence unlawfully. Probably, this was the underlying factor why Kilcullen (2007, 603, 606) posits terrorism as a 'component in virtually all insurgencies' or 'subset of insurgency'. Aside from the aforementioned shared property, both insurgency and terrorism are different in many areas such as means of confrontation, targets, widespread support, and overarching objectives. While terrorism is a method of utilizing smaller number of clandestine individuals (Merari 1993) to indiscriminately attack civilians with the motive of calling the attention of the government to issues, insurgency is a ferocious movement that attracts relative popular support of a larger number of committed individuals who confront conventional forces through political and military engagement for the motive of deposing national leaders or carving out territory (Ünal 2016). Most importantly, the act of overthrowing the government in power or subduing a region for political domination consciously differentiates insurgency from terrorism (Merari 1993). Terming terrorism as an integral strategy or a tactic of insurgency as espoused by some scholars (Findley and Young 2006; Merari 1993) is subjected to further clarification and debate.

However, due to the dynamics of contemporary political violence, this article argues that insurgency is gradually becoming the advanced phase of modern terrorism. That is, whenever a terrorist group moves away from indirectly attacking noncombatants to invading and looting military bases to the declaration of political control over a geographical area, it is carrying out acts of insurgency.

The Menace, Boko Haram, and the Rise of Insurgency in Nigeria

With the benefit of hindsight, if there is anything the people and government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria will not easily forget in the nearest future, it is the menace popularly called Boko Haram, and its horrendous atrocities. As regards destructiveness of properties, the rate of internally displaced persons, brutality, and fatality, Boko Haram outranks many extremist organizations in the world. Underscored by the inhuman barbarity of this group, Institute for Economic and Peace (2015, 16) rates Boko Haram as the world's deadliest terrorist group and states that Nigeria 'moved from the country with the fifth highest levels of fatalities in 2013 to the second highest in 2014'. Indeed, the perilous signal invoked by the group mentioned above attracted not only the attention of the Nigerian government for a necessary action but also the entire international community. Boko Haram is an assemblage of individuals that began as an Islamic sect. This goes against the assertion that 'Boko Haram started as a national terrorist group' as noted by Nkwi (2015, 85). It further mutated into a terrorist group and later transmuted into an insurgent organization (Comolli 2015). Hence, the three nomenclatures are used for Boko Haram in this article, but with a clear emphasis on the period of metamorphosis.

Boko Haram is a homegrown Salafist organization seeking to correct the degeneration of Islamic practices, thwart perverted Western civilization, and carve out geographical territory out of the present Nigeria that would be administered by sharia under the sovereign authority of a caliph (Onuoha 2014; Walker 2012; Weeraratne 2015). As agreed to by a large number of scholars (Walker 2012; Weeraratne 2015), the company of individuals under the umbrella of Boko Haram started as an Islamic set as far back as 2002 in Borno State, Nigeria. Around the time, under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf, the group focused on the grooming and proselytization of people for more radical adventure while considering

the ordinary Muslims as aberrant and government as corrupt. Members were drawn from mostly uneducated and unemployed Nigerian youths, as well as illegal immigrants from the neighboring states of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon (Agbiboa 2014; Osumah 2013). The arrest and extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf in 2009 (Agbiboa 2014) and the emergence of Abubakar Shekau as the new leader marked the mutation of the Boko Haram from being a sect organization to a terrorist group. From then on, they made the entire Northeastern Nigeria almost desolate and inhabitable for both citizens and foreigners. These terrorists became real unknown combatants by mounting up acts of sporadic attacks, suicide bombing, kidnapping, and persistent invasion of churches, schools, prisons, and police stations (Onuoha 2014) without insur-mountable constraints. Both the United Nations office and national police headquarters in Abuja were successfully attacked. In spite of the government's declaration of a state of emergency in some parts of Borno State which later extended to the entire Borno State and two additional states in Northeastern Nigeria, these cruel barbarities remained unabated. There were cases when government forces reportedly fled from these audacious and well-equipped Boko Haram terrorists due to the sophisti-cated weapons and firepower they possessed. The abduction of more than 270 school girls on April 14, 2014 in Chibok (Weeraratne 2015) further revealed the impotence on the part of the Federal Government of Nigeria in managing the situation which eventually generated international uproar and empathy of bringing our girls back campaigns.

Consequently, the successful military campaigns of the group as a terrorist organization and the inability of the government forces in curtai-ling their operational and geographical expansion, inter alia, prompted the mutation of the group into the insurgent organization by 2014. Like the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS; Paasche and Gunter 2016; Phillips 2014), members of Boko Haram advanced their objectives to the creation of a caliphate by rebranding their name to Islamic State of West African Province (Comolli 2015). Before January 2015, more than 14 local governments were already under the control of Boko Haram insurgents (Bappah 2016; Oyewole 2015; Weeraratne 2015), with Sambisa forest and Gwoza as the hideout and capital city of the caliphate respectively (Weeraratne 2015). Invariably, insurgency undertaking by these unknown combatants got to the pinnacle on January 5, 2015 when they efficaciously overran the military base of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and pillaged the available armory (Bappah 2016). By implication, it signaled not only the threatened nature of the territorial

integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, since the end of the Nigerian Civil War (Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014), but also the humiliation imposed by just few subnational actors on the military integrity of the purported Giant of Africa and Africa's largest troop contributor (as at 2011) to the United Nations (Onuoha 2014). Indeed, no single sufficient reason could account for the rise of ideological ranks of this cruel group from being an Islamic sect to being an insurgent organization (Weeraratne 2015). A reasonable number of factors, as espoused by different scholars from multiple perspectives, could be attributed to the resultant Boko Haram insurgency and the failure of the Government of Nigeria to curb it. These include lack of decisive military and political leadership (Bappah 2016), intelligence failure and dearth of political will (Onuoha 2010), prevalent high level of poverty in Northern Nigeria (Agbiboa 2014), wave of Islamic radicalism, the *Almajiri* (religious practice of handing over male children to Islamic teachers) syndrome, the high rate of unemployed Nigerian youth (Adegbulu 2013), and porous borders (Weeraratne 2015). Irrespective of the divergent nature of the viewpoints recounted above, what is certain is the inability of the Nigerian government and its intelligence agencies to efficiently degrade the Boko Haram menace before the later part of 2015 (Gray and Adeakin 2015).

Insurgency and the Reinvigoration of Nigeria's Relations with Her Neighbors

The eventual rise of insurgency in Nigeria as a result of the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism reinvigorated further rapprochement between Nigeria and her immediate neighbors. It provided another significant opportunity for Nigerian leaders to rethink and attend to critical gaps in the fight against the unscrupulous Boko Haram combatants for the ultimate protection of human and national security. This incidence, similar to the situation in the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War, propels the reinvention of centering contiguous neighbors within Nigeria's national security calculations. Moreover, since the violent attacks of the members of Boko Haram are transnational within the Lake Chad region, the neighboring states in question have also signified great readiness for improved security cooperation with Nigeria.

To understand the dynamic changes in the relations between Nigeria and its neighbors in the twenty-first century, due to the evident Boko Haram insurgency, there is a need for a brief overview of the attributes

of their interactions before the insurrection. Nigeria, an anglophone state, shares land boundaries with four francophone states (Benin Republic, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon) and maritime borders with Equatorial Guinea which is a Portuguese-speaking country. With an emphasis on the francophone states, though Nigeria and these countries maintain geographical propinquity, the level of mutual interaction and collaboration with these countries is to a certain extent, over the years, unpronounced and predicated on subtle rivalries and mistrust (Garba 1987; Omole 2010). This is rooted in the historical antecedents that predated the formal independence of these former colonial territories, whereby their colonial masters, Britain and France, maintained competitive struggle and prevented closer contacts between their colonies. The trend was handed over to these states after independence, most especially through direct modulation of external policies of the francophone states by France, which considered Nigeria as a potential threat to its regional influence (Nwokedi 1985). While Nigeria officially and pragmatically disengaged Britain after independence, the hegemonic powers of France over the foreign policy directions of her formal colonies in West Africa remained unabated (Solomon and Amadi 2014). This scenario has provoked 'suspicion, mistrust, inclusiveness and [at times] outright hostility' between Nigeria and these immediate neighbors (Omole 2010, 4). It was further informed by the seeming potential threats which Nigeria pose to these relatively smaller (and in the case of Chad and Niger, landlocked) states as a result of Nigeria's large population, resources endowment, market size, and military posture. Nigeria's articulated policy of respect for territorial integrity of other sovereign states and noninterference in the internal affairs of other African countries (Omede 2006) was never enough to correct the suspicion and inkling. Unsurprisingly and more importantly, border issues have also played a significant role in the deterioration of the rapport between Nigeria and these contiguous neighbors at different points in time. For instance, for the first time in history, Nigeria recorded a military conflagration with Chad in 1983 when the later killed eight Nigerian soldiers over border matters. After a long time of misunderstanding and occasional skirmishes, Nigeria and Cameroon also engaged in a legal battle for more than eight years over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula (Okoi 2016). Konings (2005, 288) remarks that 'the Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria border has been a regular source of conflict between the Cameroonian and Nigerian states since unification'. In case of Nigeria–Niger relations, though the instance of dangerous frontier dispute was not applicable, it was far from being exemplary (Comolli 2015).

Nigeria's relations with Benin are not without border dispute and misunderstandings due to 'Benin collaboration with the International Committee of Red Cross in airlifting materials to the [Biafran] victims in the Nigerian Civil War' (Nwokedi 1991, 33). By and large, the hitherto interactions between Nigeria and these francophone states lacked momentous cordiality to warrant robust bilateral collaboration on relevant issues.

However, as a result of the external factors of internal security of Nigeria (and by extension, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon), pertinent demand and commitment to further cooperation surfaced. Options available to Nigeria vis-à-vis her neighbors at a point in time on Boko Haram were restricted to either cooperation for mutual security or isolation for shared detriment. Thus, the Nigerian leadership under former President Goodluck Jonathan, which was intensified by President Muhammadu Buhari, extended hands of better friendship to these states and vice versa. In May 2014, the heads of state from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Benin, and Cameroon met in Paris where they agreed on innovative strategic collaboration on security matters. Since then, representatives from these states have continued on further interactions on how to degrade Boko Haram in different places such as London (June 2014), Abuja (September 2015), Naimey (October 2014), and Abuja (May 2015; African Union). Similarly, reflecting the unusual rapprochement, the first two official foreign visits of President Buhari within two weeks in office were directed toward Niger and Chad on June 3 and 4, 2015. The same gesture was also extended to Cameroon and Benin Republic on July 29, 2015 and August 1, 2015 respectively. This was within a very short period of 65 days in office. The implication of these unprecedented trips by the Nigerian president toward a particular group of sovereign actors in international relations cannot be overemphasized in the strategic calculation of relations between and among nations. Albert (2015, 18) posits that 'Buhari's visit[s] shifted Nigeria's relations with Chad [and other immediate neighbors] in a more productive direction'. Corroborating this, the Nigerian president and his counterparts in the immediate states have expressed, in recent times, verbally and in action the paramount exigency in partnership with one another for regional securitization and prevention of potential security threat from any substate actor. While addressing the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Buhari (2015, 3) avers laconically that Nigeria with her immediate neighbors (Chad, Niger, Benin, and Cameroon) is working and collaborating assiduously to defeat the shared threats of Boko Haram menace.

In one of the trips, Albert (2015, 16) narrates the expression of the Nigerian president thus:

While in Chad, Buhari urged the member countries of the Lake Chad Commission to intensify operations of MNJTF. He argued that the security of Nigeria and Chad are intrinsically linked and that the Boko Haram insurgency had taken a huge toll on citizens of the two countries most especially regarding forced movement…. In a particular, he observed, 'Your troops have stood shoulder-to-shoulder and fought gallantly with ours in the fights against the forces of evil. This is a remarkable show of good neighborliness, which we must reinforce in the years ahead'.

The above statement from the incumbent head of state signified both the resounding inextricable acknowledgment of the linkage in the internal security dynamics of both states and the entreaty for future collaboration on issues, most importantly on security matters. Equally, state leaders from these francophone countries have reciprocated the same gesture. From the perspective of Idriss Derby, the President of Chad, when he visited Nigeria on March 11, 2015, he recognized the historical ties between the two states, shared security challenge, and need for closer cooperation (Albert 2015). Thus, the acknowledgment of the necessity for better cooperation between Nigeria on the one hand and neighboring states on the other in the twenty-first century was not Nigeria's sole decision.

Furthermore, another important signal of improvement in the relations between Nigeria and these neighboring francophone states is in the area of the ongoing joint military cooperation through the MNJTF under the auspices of the LCBC. As a matter of fact, it is on record that the LCBC was founded as far back as 1964 originally by Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon for the primary purpose of administering the Lake Chad and other common water resources of the Lake Chad Basin. During this period, there was the absence of apparent security and military designs for concerted actions of member states. In 1994, the Federal Government of Nigeria solely established MNJTF as a broad means of checkmating prevalent transborder incursions and intrusion into Northern Nigeria. Subsequently, in 1998, the usefulness of such a framework in curtailing transnational crimes across borders compelled the eventual expansion of the task force from Nigeria alone to encompass joint military commitment from Chad and Niger. Due to persistent terrorist attacks in many parts of the member states, Nigeria, Niger, and Chad reinvigorated the obsolescent MNJTF in 2012 and extended its mandate to counterterrorism (Adams 2012). However, in spite of the aforementioned progressive

and collective regional securitization under this framework, the arrangement was mere rhetoric until 2014. It was the insuperable rise of insurgency in Nigeria in the middle of 2014 and the ensuing invasion of the military headquarters of MNJTF in Baga on January 5, 2015 that, to a large extent, reinforced the military collaboration and commitment among these states (Albert 2015; Zamfir 2015). Thus, MNJTF becomes the pragmatic channel through which LCBC countries and the Federal Republic of Benin jointly respond to the menace of a new generation of security threats. After the authorization of the task force in early 2015 by the African Union's Peace and Security Council, Nigeria and these francophone contiguous states agreed on the joint deployment of 8,700 troops under the framework to dismantle the common enemy—Boko Haram. The explicit sharing formula of the principal positions operating in the task force, such as commander (Nigeria), deputy commander (Cameroon), and chief of staff (Chad) revealed the transformation that insurgency introduced in the relations between Nigeria on the one hand and these neighboring states on the other.

In the same manner, the Boko Haram uprising has propelled Nigeria to sign assorted bilateral/multilateral agreements with these countries. Nigeria signed a Mutual Defence Treaty with Niger for joint military support and transfer of intelligent information in October 2012 (Pürçek, 2014) and a Trans-Border Security Agreement with Cameroon on 28th February, 2012 (Premium Times, February 28, 2012). Also, on October 7, 2014, Nigeria entered into a cross-border security agreement with Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. In a nutshell, Nigeria and these neighboring states have no alternative than to comprehend each other as partners compelled together by security necessity. This is the first time in history that Nigeria will maintain a robust military arrangement with her immediate neighbors. While this article is not accentuating perfect relations between Nigeria and her neighbors because of insurgency, it posits that the phenomenon has ignited spirited cooperation between her and these states. The surge of violence perpetrated by the Boko Haram members between 2011 and 2014 marked a turning point in which Nigeria cannot delay reaching out to neighbors nor can neighbors remain passive any longer (Comolli 2015).

Nevertheless, this rapprochement between Nigerian and neighboring states are underpinned by some factors that are pertinent to the protection of national security. In the first place, neighboring states were serving not only as sources of new recruits for the hard-hearted members of Boko Haram for years but also as safe havens. This reflects the idea of

Buzan's (1983, 106) security complex, which is defined as 'a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another'. Weeraratne (2015, 16) avows that 'there is substantial evidence that Boko Haram has established rear bases in Cameroon and Niger'. As a result of geographical proximity, porous borders, similar economic realities, and cultural and religious affinities, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon have been serving as both means of membership empowerment for the group and hideouts. It turned out to become a menace that Nigeria alone could not preclude. Furthermore, after more than five years of confronting the threats alone, it became palpable that Nigeria could not majorly change the tide against Boko Haram extremists (Bappah 2016). Ranging from the operation that killed the first leader of the group to the formation of a national military joint task force and the declaration of a state of emergency, Nigeria was not making headways in curtailing these unknown combatants until it culminated into the insurgency. In other words, it portends the necessity of a new approach different from the unproductive ones. More so, the exigency of a collective solution to joint problems as advocated by regional security complex theory (Buzan and Wæver 2003) could not afford Nigeria the opportunity of continuing a counterproductive unilateral approach. The Boko Haram crisis is a regional security predicament that spans across many states of the Lake Chad region. Although it started from Nigeria, the actors, operations, and atrocities were not limited to Nigeria. It was highly pronounced in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger since the year 2013. Cases of kidnapping high-profile personalities and foreigners as well as community raid maintained prominence, most especially in Cameroon and Niger (Weeraratne 2015). Hence, a concerted action among the affected nations became inevitable, which could not happen without cooperation among the actors.

Of course, to a certain extent, this renewal of friendly relations between Nigeria and these states has yielded productive upshot. In the area of mutual understanding, due to the timely provision of a platform for interaction and different agreements, the change in relations has reduced the hitherto mistrust and tension between Nigeria and these francophone states. It creates an enabling environment through which misunderstanding could be easily handled and future cooperation enhanced while directing their attention to the dreaded common adversary—Boko Haram or another related extremist nonstate actor. On the other hand, this multilateral engagement embraced by Nigeria and bordering states

has significantly curtailed the violent campaigns of the Boko Haram members in the Lake Chad region and helped in the recovery of the earlier subdued territory (*Vanguard* 2015). For instance, the Nigerian territory under the dreaded control of these unknown combatants has been liberated, and the rate of suicide bombing and community invasion has been dwindled drastically. Although violent attacks in the region are far away from over, the multilateral military approach and acquisition of sophisticated weapons have tamed the group in lethality, brutality, operation, and geography. Not surprisingly, the hideouts readily available to the members of this fanatic group in places like Sambisa forest and nearby communities in Cameron and Niger have been properly dismantled simultaneously by the troops from affected states (*Premium Times* 2015; *Vanguard* 2016). Unlike never before, the level of transborder information sharing between Nigeria and the bordering states has recorded improvement, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the premeditated plan to rendering Boko Haram combatants benign, even along the borders. On humanitarian issues, the cooperation has aided delivery of humanitarian assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and facilitated repatriation of refugees to their home country. On June 9, 2016, for instance, Nigeria, Cameroon, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initiated a deal for 'voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon (OCHA 2016)'. Notwithstanding this insurgency-conditioned change in the relations between Nigeria and these contiguous states, there is no absolute assurance that the trend will continue or facilitate greater economic and political integration in the aftermath of Boko Haram crisis. As it is often said, there is no permanent friend or enemy in international politics, what are permanent are interests (Gartzke and Weisiger 2013). Currently, these states have a convergent concern in protecting their territorial integrity by degrading the familiar nemesis. It is this shared interest that served as a node that connects or draws Lake Chad states together in the twenty-first century. Whether the current ties would expedite a greater economic, political, security, and health-based relationship down the road or these countries would return to a more inward-facing policy in the post-Boko Haram Lake Chad depends on the (dis)continuing recognition of common concerns at the expense of conflicting issues. However, it must be emphasized that the historical banes of discord or conflict that often severe or neutralize the relations of the Nigerian government with the governments of these states have not vanished but only subsided for security exigency. At the same time, leadership disposition and viewpoint

on transnational issues within the region matter. If the national leaders esteem cooperation over competition, a point will be reached when LCBC would become a pragmatic integration arena for these states.

Conclusion

Boko Haram as a violent organization has transmuted into different phases over the years. While it was acknowledged that the group emanated in 2002 as an Islamic sect basically for religious radicalism and proselytization, it has equally advanced to the stages of terrorism and insurgency. Outrageous undertaking committed by the group has resulted into the extermination of many lives, the annihilation of properties and communities, abduction of many old and young people, and attack and looting of military armory and has attempted carving out of a distinct caliphate out of the present Nigeria. Invariably, the rise of insurgency, which actually challenged the survival and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the first time since the end of the Nigerian Civil War, has prompted the acclaimed Giant of Africa, Nigeria, to redefine its style of response that is capable to bring a stop to the apparent menace that has afflicted both the citizens and international reputation of the country for a very long time. Correspondingly, the snowballing and transmutation of a national peril to transnational security threats with complexities could not permit the bordering states to project a relaxed disposition further. Notable among the resultant approach, as established by this article, is the resurface of more robust cooperation and collaboration on the part of Nigeria with the neighboring states in the form of joint, multinational action for survival and protection in spite of historical differences, mistrust, and rivalry. The rapprochement has become comfortable as the contiguous states are also facing the same security dilemma, though with varying degrees. It, therefore, creates a template for the reinvigoration of Nigeria's relations with her immediate neighbors occasioned by shared security perils as a means to combat common adversary. This is underpinned by the intertwinement of (de) securitization of Lake Chad region, where Nigeria and other neighbors are located, prevention of safe havens for insurgents, and the construction of familiar and formidable front against dreaded unknown combatants. With the benefit of insight, it is an appropriate alternative that rational nations like Nigeria and these states could not afford to neglect. However, the intensification of relations in post-Boko Haram

depends on collective commitment and elevation of shared interests over nationalistic aspirations.

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