Transnational Insurgency: Boko Haram and Regional Insecurity in Africa

By

Dimas Garba

Abstract

Huge studies exist on threats to Africa’s regional security, but less attention has been placed on the impact of transnational insurgency even though the continent hosts some of the world’s deadliest transnational insurgency groups such as the Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) etc. This paper used transnational theory to explain the transnationalization of Boko Haram insurgency and its impacts on regional security in Africa. Boko Haram insurgency started in 2009 with an initial objective to displace the Nigerian government and replace it with an Islamic Caliphate but gradually transformed into transnational insurgency by establishing foreign networks and sanctuaries; and declaring its mission to conquer the entire West Africa. The group extended its violent activities into Nigeria’s neighbouring countries, namely Cameroon, Chad and Niger since 2013, and it overtook al-Shabaab and ISIS to become the World’s deadliest group by 2015. The paper used secondary sources of data and content analysis method. It argued that Boko Haram poses threats to Africa’s regional security in terms of conflict escalation, threat to security of lives and trans-border insecurity in the West and Central African sub-regions. Boko Haram allegedly killed about 100,000 people, displaced 2.6million others and caused destructions worth $9billion in the affected sub-regions. The paper recommended that Nigeria and its neighbours should tighten border security, while Nigeria should consolidate on the counterinsurgency successes recorded by implementing short and long term economic and political measures to address the root causes of the insurgency, which is basically economic.

Key Words: Africa, Boko Haram, Regional Security, Transnational Insurgency.

Introduction

Transnational insurgency has been one of the major threats to regional security across the globe. Unlike traditional insurgency, modern ones have increasingly extended their violent activities beyond national boundaries, using their foreign networks to secure funding, rebel recruitment, weapons and safe haven which make them difficult to contain or defeat (Onuoha 2014; Salehyan, 2007; 2010). A study on transnational insurgency by Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau and Brannan (2001) reveals that since after the Cold War, 59% of insurgency have benefited from sanctuaries and foreign support from neighbouring countries. Boko Haram started active rebellion, purely as a national insurgency in 2009 but gradually transformed into transnational insurgency by establishing networks with insurgency/terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Shabbab, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria etc.; and spreading into Nigeria’s neighbouring countries, namely Cameroon, Chad and Niger since 2013. In 2015, Boko Haram was ranked one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world...
Global Terrorism Index 2015). Boko Haram is alleged to be responsible for the killing of about 100,000 people and displacing over 2.6 million others as well as the destruction of property at an estimated value of $9 billion within the West and Central African regions (Onuoha and Oyewole 2018:2).

Boko Haram is a serious security threat, not only to the affected states but the region at large; yet, studies on regional security in Africa have placed less attention on the impacts of transnational insurgency on regional security in Africa. Expansion of insurgency activities across national boundaries is not a new practice in Africa but contemporary insurgency groups are more transnational than traditional ones. Presently, almost every part of the African continent is directly or indirectly affected by Transnational Insurgency activities. For example, the Barakat Al-shabaab insurgency poses a serious threat to the Horn of Africa particularly Somalia and its neighbours such as Kenya (Bruton and Williams 2014); the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar Dine, Ansar Sharia, and Jama’atul Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (JAMS - Ansaru) and Boko Haram (one of the current leading global insurgency/terrorist groups) constitute serious security challenges to the West and Central African regions, especially Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Salihu 2015), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) threatens the security of the Sahel, North and West Africa sub-regions, especially in Algeria, Mali, Niger, Mauritania etc. (Adeyemi and Musa 2014). These call for an urgent research and solutions to avoid deterioration of regional security in Africa.

Huge studies exist on regional security in Africa, but they focused more on various other forms of security threats like interstate, unconstitutional change in governments (military coups/counter coups), civil wars, election related violence etc. However, those forms of threats have drastically declined with the demise of the Cold War in the early 1990s, giving way to the ascendance of asymmetric warfare like insurgency and terrorism as the dominant threats to regional security. Fewer studies have paid attention on the transnational aspects of insurgencies in Africa despite their obvious impacts on the region’s security. In this paper, the main questions to be answered include: why did Boko Haram become a transnational insurgency, what are the effects of Boko Haran transnational insurgency on regional security in Africa and what might be the lasting solution to ending the insurgency? The objective of the paper is to explain why insurgency groups become transnational insurgency and show how they threaten regional security. The outcome of the study is expected to contribute to the existing body of literature on the link between transnational insurgency and regional security in general. This will provide policy input to all stakeholders in the area of counterinsurgency and how best to counter transnational insurgencies on the continent. Using qualitative approach, the study utilized secondary sources of literature like journals, published books, reports, newspapers etc.; and content analysis method, taking Boko Haram as a case study. The study specifically focused on Boko Haram Insurgency because it is the deadliest contemporary insurgency in Africa since 2014, with greater impact on the continent’s regional security than any other insurgency groups.

Conceptual Clarifications

Transnational Insurgency: Insurgency belongs to asymmetric warfare and intra/extra-state conflicts. Kilcullen (2006:2) defined insurgency as a "struggle for control over a contested political space, between a state (or group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers. For
the US Government (2012:1), insurgency is:

a protracted political-military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations.

Sometimes insurgency is used synonymously with terrorism, but they are not entirely the same. Terrorism is a strategy of insurgency. Terrorism refers to the use of violence or threat of violence to create fear or seek to forcefully achieve certain political motives. Terrorist strategies include attrition, intimidation, provocation, spoiling, and outbidding to achieve its political goals (Merari 1993; Kydd and Walter 2006).

The idea of transnational insurgency is derived from the concept of transnationalism. Risse-Kappen (1995:3) defined transnationalism as ‘regular interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental organization’. Thus, transnational insurgency means the expansion of insurgency activities across national boundaries such as violent attacks across national boundaries, establishing extraterritorial bases (safe haven/sanctuary); foreign networks for external funding, rebel recruitment and training and collaborations with relevant organizations (Salehyan 2009; Onuoha 2014). These activities significantly distinguish between transnational insurgencies and strictly domestic insurgencies.

Regional Security: First, what is a region? Some studies literally defined region as an organized group of states located in same geographical location (Nye 1968; Jervis 1999). For example, Nye (1968: vii) defined international region as ‘a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence’. However, defining regional on the basis of physical and geographical factors alone narrows the meaning because it ignores other important factors. Hence, region broadly refers to a deliberate interaction among group of states that share common economic, political, cultural or historical background or interest, which may or not occupy same physical geographic locations (Katzenstein 2000; Adner and Crawford 2002; Hettne and Söderbaum 2002). Regional security may therefore be conceptualized as the extent to which a group of states that recognize themselves as a region whether defined by geographic proximities, historical antecedents, common cultural beliefs or bonds feel stable and free from various forms of security threats and how they collectively perceive and respond to such threats (Snyder 2012).

Regional Security Threats in Africa: A Brief Historical Background

Hettene (1998:54) identified three types of threats to regional security, namely traditional balance of power, ‘grass-fire’ conflicts, and intra-state conflicts. The first relates to great power or regional power contests, the second to primitive security complexes. The first and second types are triggered by contentious issues between neighbouring countries i.e. disputes over territory, politics, ethnicity or religion, geophysical resources etc. The third type arises from ethno-nationalism or ethno-regionalism, which includes quest to create semi-autonomous entity, political entity or sub-national groups within states. Insurgency falls within the last category of threats to regional security.
Studies reported that since the independent of African states from colonialism in the 1950s, the African continent has been confronted with numerous regional security threats like inter-state and intra-state conflicts such as military coups and counter coups, civil wars, political violence, insurgency, terrorism etc. The immediate post-independent Africa was accompanied by interstate conflicts, largely as a result of territorial and boundary disputes arising from arbitrary territorial demarcations by the formal colonial masters. Examples of the interstate conflicts include the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia 1962 to 1979, Somalia and Ethiopia over Ogaden from 1964 to 1978, Somalia and Kenya from 1963 to 1967, Algeria and Morocco over Atlas Mountains in 1963, Nigeria and Cameroon over Bakassi Peninsula in the 1970s, Libya and Chad from 1980 to 1982, Burkina Faso and Mali in 1985, Mauritania and Senegal in 1989 etc. (Aremu 2010). Another major security threat to the regional security in Africa was unconstitutional change of government, especially military coup and coup d’état. For example, Nigeria alone experienced several coups between 1966 and 1993, Central African Republic (2003), Guinea Bissau (2003), Sao Tome and Principe (2003), Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Madagascar (2009) and Niger (2010) (Williams 2011:4). Some of the civil conflicts that threatened regional security in Africa are the Nigeria Biafra civil war (1967-1970) and those in Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Darfur, Burundi, Congo, etc. (Muyangwa and Vogt 2000:11), Sudan (1995-1990), Chad (1965-1985), Angola (1974), Sierra Leon, Rwanda etc. (Aremu 2010). Skard (2003:21) reports that 18 civil conflicts occurred in the Sub-Saharan African in the 1990s only.

The post-Cold War Africa witnessed widespread acceptance of democracy, accompanied by significant decline of inter-state conflicts, military coups and civil wars in African because democracy is a political system of government that encourages popular participation of citizens in governance, competitive politics, multiparty system, periodic elections and constitutional change of government. However, the practice of democracy has also caused internal struggles for political power, internal division, political conflicts, violence and killings among citizens in different parts of Africa, especially in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Togo, Sierra Leon, and Cote d’Ivoire. Electoral violence has caused the loss of 10 people in 1995, 500 in 2000, and 3,000 in 2010 in Cote d’Ivoire; in Nigeria, the number raised from 100 in 1993 to 300 in 2007 and 800 in 2011 national elections; in Guinea 70 people were killed in 1993 and 50 in 2013 during legislative runner-up elections; in Togo 500 people were killed in 2005 due to elections violence (Marc, Varjee, and Mogaka 2015:100). However, politically related conflicts are also on the decline due to increasing democratization in the continent and interventions by the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

With the significant decline of inter-state conflicts, military coups and civil wars in Africa since after the Cold War, transnational insurgency and terrorism have become the most prominent threats to Africa’s regional security, but as noted earlier, terrorism is one of the strategies of insurgency. Presently, almost every part of Africa is directly or indirectly affected by activities of transnational insurgency groups, which makes it a major contemporary threat to regional security in Africa. For example, the Barakat Al-shabaab insurgency poses a serious threat to the Horn of Africa particularly Somalia and its neighbours such as Kenya (Bruton and Williams 2014); Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar Dine, Ansar Sharia, and Jama’atul Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (JAMS - Ansaru) and Boko Haram (one of the
current global leading insurgency/terrorist groups) constitute serious security challenges to the West and Central African regions, especially Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Salihu 2015), Al-Qaeda in the Magreb (AQIM) causing havoc in the Sahel and North Africa regions, especially in Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Algeria, etc. (Adeyemi and Musa 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Transnational Theory of Transnational Insurgency

Transnational insurgency is not new, but a transnational theory is not specifically developed to explain why and how insurgencies choose to go transnational. This paper extends the transnational theory to explain Boko Haram transnational insurgency and its implications for regional security in Africa. Transnational theory is derived from the idea of transnationalism, in the writings of scholars like Randolph Bourne (1911), Keohane and Nye (1971), Risse-Kappen (1995:3), among others. Theses scholars examined how non-state actors like individuals, non-governmental organizations etc. increasingly became involved in transnational relations.

Risse-Kappen (1995:3) defined transnationalism as ‘regular interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental organization’. In a similar vein, Keohane and Nye (1971) defined transnationalism as ‘contacts, coalitions and interactions, across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of government’. Theses definitions placed emphasis on interactions across national boundaries, involving at least an actor that is not a nation state, which captures the nature and operations of transnational insurgency. The Oxford Reference summarized the transnational theory as:

A field of study focusing on cross-boundary political space, arguing that states are not the only significant actors. The theory emphasizes the direct linkages across national boundaries, where at least one actor is a non-state actor; for example, a non-governmental organization or transnational corporation. Transnationalism describes activities that cross state boundaries, such as the flow of ideas, information, money and credit, and people.

The transnational theory is a departure from state-centric theories of international relations like realism on the causes of international insecurity. Realist theory views states as the principal actors in international relations and the major sources of threat to international security. Realism believes that the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no supranational authority that can regulate the behaviour of states. Hence, as rational actors, states resort to self-help by competing for economic, political and military power to protect themselves and ensure their survival against aggressions or become regional hegemon to dominate others (Morgenthau 1948; Mearsheimer 1990, 1994-5; Waltz 1979). The competition for power leads to security dilemma, a notion that the same processes which states take to acquire power and promote their security threaten the security of other states. Thus, states are the major causes of regional insecurity (Jervis 1978). Contrary to realism, transnational theory assumes that besides nation states, non-state actors like multinational corporations, international non-governmental organizations, individuals, groups etc. also play very significant role in cross border interaction and they have implications for domestic and international security.
The transnational theory initially focused on economic transnationalism to explain the expansion of processes of capitalist production, flow of ideas, capital, people/labour, goods and services across national boundaries. However, transformations in the global economic and social structure as a result of expansion of globalization, driven by modern internet, transportation and communication technologies, has widened the areas of transnational transactions, to include transnational migration, transnational activism etc. (Robinson 1998; 2005; Vertovec 2004).

Transnational theory has significant implication for understanding why and how insurgencies transcend national boundaries and how they can threaten regional security (Salehyan 2009). As non-state actors, transnational insurgencies are not subject to state or institutional regulations; they take advantage or porous borders and state and weak states, especially among developing countries to establish extraterritorial bases and foreign networks with relevant organizations; and they also extend violent activities across national boundaries. Transnational insurgencies use international networks for recruitment and movement of foreign fighters as well as smuggling of illegal weapons from neighbouring countries. Recruitment of foreign fighters mostly come voluntarily among individuals or groups that share same ideology with the rebel groups or from poorly developed countries, marked by high poverty, unemployment, lack of education etc. However, at times rebel groups force innocent civilians to join them (Salehyan, 2007; 2010).

Unlike inter-state conflicts which are conventional warfare, transnational insurgencies are mainly asymmetric. They use guerrilla strategy and foreign sanctuaries to hide and avoid direct clashes with government forces; or as a strategy of expanding their spheres of influence. At times, insurgencies may settle at boundaries between states or inside the territories of weak neighbouring countries. Salehyan (2009) noted that insurgents groups have higher likelihood of taking extra-territorial bases where conditions in neighbouring are favours them. Sometimes neighbouring states willingly offer sanctuaries to shield the rebels and support them to fight against their rival government; but in some cases, rebel groups forcefully take advantage of weak neighbouring states, invade and take control over parts of their territories (Byman et al. 2001; Salehyan 2007; 2010). A study by Byman et. al. (2001) shows that since after the Cold War, 59% of insurgency organizations have benefited from sanctuaries and foreign support from neighbouring countries. For example, the Palestinian rebels had in the 1970s established presence in Jordan and Lebanon; the Nicaraguan Contras did same in Costa Rica and Hundura in the 1980s; and Hutus of Rwanda in Zaire in the 1990s (Martinez 2016). Also, the ISIS expanded its mission from establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Iraq, Syria and the Levant to a global Caliphate and maintained huge control over territories, beyond the size of Great Britain in Iraq, Syria and other countries (Pontallier 2015).

Transnational insurgencies also seek to establish networks with like-mind organizations in foreign countries for the purpose of securing supports like funding, rebel recruiting and training, supply of weapons and collaboration (Salehyan, 2007; 2010). For example, ISIS is believed to have networks of support with different groups in countries like Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Pakistan, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Afghanistan etc. and it has between 30, 000 to 200, 000 fighters, most of which were recruited from the Arab countries and smaller proportion from the West (Pontallier, 2015).
Transnational insurgencies may threaten regional insecurity by using sanctuaries and networks carry out coordinated attacks and killing civilians and security forces within a region. Sanctuaries reduce the cost of insurgency and probability of being defeated, which makes the conflict longer. Other activities that may threaten security of lives include kidnapping, rapping, looting, forceful recruitment and displacement of innocent civilians across countries. Transnational insurgency may also threaten regional security by escalating regional conflicts in different dimensions. When insurgencies extend their activities into foreign countries, the foreign country may join the conflict by protecting the security of its own citizens and its sovereignty; or assistance to the counterinsurgent government to defeat the insurgency. Secondly, the insurgency may escalate into inter-state conflicts between the counterinsurgent government and affected countries. Foreign countries may decide to engage the counterinsurgent government if they feel the encroachments into their own territories undermining their sovereignty or if uncomfortable with counterinsurgent’s approach in fighting the insurgency; or where there is existing conflict/rivalry between the former and the latter (Salehyan 2009; 2010). Transnational insurgency may also cause regional insecurity by threatening border security. Trans-borders are important routes for trade, personal travelling, business and social activities but when taken over by insurgencies, they become no go areas due to fear of terror or closure by governments.

The transnational theory has relevant implication for explaining Boko Haram transnational insurgency and its implication for regional security in Africa for a couple of reasons. Firstly, Boko Haram a non-state actor with foreign linkages/networks, from which it draws various forms of support like foreign recruitment, training, funding and weapons. Secondly, Boko Haram has operated foreign sanctuaries, and it has expanded its violent activities cross Nigeria’s national boundaries into Chad, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Thirdly, Boko haram insurgency has dragged its neighbouring countries into the conflict. Fourthly, Boko Haram has been responsible for killing thousands of people, displacement of millions of people, and destruction of property in the Western and Central African Sub-regions.

Origin of Boko Haram and its Transnationalization

Boko Haram is a transnational insurgency group with an initial base predominantly located in the North Eastern Nigeria but later spread to southern Niger, northern Cameroon and southern Chad (Onuoha 2014). The group’s famous name, ‘Boko Haram’ is translated in English to mean ‘Western education is forbidden’ (BBC 2016). Its Arabic name is ‘Jama’atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad’, meaning people committed to the propagation of the prophet’s teachings and jihad (Onuoha 2104:3; BBC 2016). The main objective of Boko Haram is to displace the Nigerian government and replace it with an Islamic Caliphate (Onuoha 2014). In 2015, the declared its loyalty to ISIL and announced the extension of its mission to establishing Islamic Caliphate in the West Africa, under the name ‘Islamic State in West Africa’ (Bodansky 2015; BBC 2016).

There are debates about the causes of Boko Haram. Some attribute it to frustration with the poor level of economic development in the Northeast which is regarded as the poorest geopolitical zone in Nigeria. However, others argue that the insurgency has less to do with poverty because it was not the only region that was poor; rather it’s a resurgence of Islamic Miatatsine, an extremist movement that took place in the 1980s (Adesoji 2011). This paper believes that there is no claim to single claim to the causes of Boko Haram and that the two arguments are relevant among many other factors yet
unknown. This is because even the insurgency group itself does not make claim to a single reason for its emergence. Boko Haram is popularly believed to have started in 1995, in Maiduguri, Borno State capital with the name Ahlul sunna wal’jama’ah hijra or Shabab group. The group operated as a non-violent Islamic movement until Mohammed Yusuf, who became the leader in 2002, embarked on public radical preaching against the Nigerian state.

Sporadic clashes started between the group and security forces as from 24 December 2003 at Kanama town in Yunusari, Local Government Area of Yobe State, where Yusuf led the group to form the Nigerian Taliban (Kyari 2014). The group dispersed and quietly reassembled in Maiduguri but maintained a low profile until in July 2009, after the group clashed again with Nigerian security men over non-compliance with a government policy on the use of helmet, in which about 13 of the group’s members were killed (Onuoha 2014: Mantzikos 2014). The group staged a retaliatory attack on the Nigeria police station, which triggered serious clashes between security forces and the sect, leading to the killing of about 800 sect members (Onuoha 2014: 4). The group’s leader was also captured and was reported dead in the custody of security personnel in controversial circumstances, a video of which went viral in the social media. Yusuf’s deputy, Abubakar Shekau, who took over the leadership of the sect after the death of Yusuf and since then, Boko Haram declared and embarked on violent campaign and attacks against the Nigerian government, western education, democracy, security personnel, Christianity, traditional rulers, politicians etc. in states like Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe, Taraba, Bauchi, Kano among others, including the Nigerian capital city, Abuja (Kyari 2014; Onuoha 2014). Strategies used by Boko Haram include guerrilla attacks, terrorism strategies i.e. suicide bombing, detonation of improvised explosives, kidnapping propaganda etc. (Kyari2014). The group became deadlier under the Shekau since 2009 in terms of violent attacks and fatalities (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Patterns of Boko Haram Violence and Associated Fatalities, 2009-2017

Source: Onouha and Oyewole (2018:5), adapted from ACLED.

In June 2012, the United States Department of State designated Abubakar Shekau, the group’s key leader and two others namely, Adam Kambar and Khalid al-barnawi as specially designated Global Terrorists (Mantzikos 2014). On 14 April 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped about 276 Chibok school girls and took them to Sambisa, which attracted global attention and condemnation (Onuoha 2014). By August 2014, it had captured 70% of Borno state, having 20 out of 27 of its
Local Government Areas (LGAs), one third of Adamawa State and two LGAs in Yobe State under its control. On 23 August 2014, the group declared an Islamic caliphate in the North East Nigeria, with its Headquarters located in Gwoza Local Government Area (Daily Trust 2016).

The Transformation of Boko Haram into a Transnational Insurgency

Initially, Boko Haram was purely a domestic insurgency confronting the Nigerian government but since 2013, it gradually transformed to transnational insurgency by establishing foreign bases, foreign networks/linkages and by expanding its violent activities across Nigeria’s boundaries, especially into its neighbouring countries namely Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Key factor that informed the transnationalization of Boko Haram is include the following reasons:

Military Repression: Since Boko Haram started rebellion in 2009; the Nigerian government depended mainly on military approach believing that the insurgency was an internal problem that could be cracked down militarily without soft gloves. For example, in the first clash between the Nigerian security forces in Maiduguri over the compulsory use of helmet which the group resisted, the security forces applied military power and killed a number of them. When the group resurfaced, the government declared a state of emergency on 15 Local Government Areas in Borno, Adamawa, Plateau and Niger on 31 December 2011 to enable security forces deal with Boko Haram and other security challenges (Kyari 2014). On 14 May 2013, the government declared complete state of emergency on Adamawa, Borno and Yobe for full military operation manned by Join Task Force (JTF) comprising of the Nigeria Military, Police, Security Services etc. to crack down the group and end the insurgency, though the political structure was left in place (Onuoha 2014). To create enabling environment for the military operation, the government imposed curfews, road blocks and check points, ban on the use of motor circles, shutting down of mobile phone networks etc (Jacob and Akpan 2015) in the affected areas. However, instead of suppressing or defeating the insurgency, these measures rather forced the group to seek for safe haven in Sambisa forest bordering Nigeria and Cameroon, some local communities in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, which offered then safety from the repressive attacks of the Nigerian Military and aided their hit and run tactics (Onuoha 2014).

Foreign Support: Foreign support is a crucial factor in reinforcing and sustaining insurgency. Hence, Boko Haram as a rational actor, coupled with the heavy military offensive by the Nigerian government against it, it also had to seek for foreign sources of support where it could obtain funding, rebel recruitment, training and weapons to reinforce and sustain the war (Martinez 2016). Boko Haram is strongly believed to have established international networks/linkages with related insurgency and terrorist groups like AQIM, Al Shabab, Al-Qaida, ISIL among others (Bodansky 2010; Onuoha 2014; Bazoum 2011). Suspicion of Boko Haram having foreign networks started in 2011, when it claimed responsibility for bombing a UN building in Nigeria’s capital city Abuja on 26 August 2011, killing 23 persons and leaving around 76 injured (Reuters 2011). Analysis of the tactics used shows a strong similarity with the bombing of UN building in Algeria four years back by AQIM, which suggests a possible link between the groups or other international insurgency/terrorist groups. Mohammed Bazoum, a Foreign Minister of Niger had stated on 25 January 2011 at the Security Summit at Mouakchoh, the capital of Mauritania, that Boko Haram may have been receiving weapons and training from AQIM (Bazoum 2011:12). The Deputy
Foreign Minister of Algeria had also on 3 November 2011 disclosed an intelligence report that Boko Haram had links with AQIM. On 24 of November 2011, Abu Qaqa, the group’s spokesman confirmed links between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda (Mantziko 2014); and in June 2011, the group claimed that it had been receiving training in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen (International Crises Group 2011).

Boko Haram enjoyed significant rebel recruitments from its neighbouring countries. The northern Cameroon, southern Chad and Niger share common poor socio-economic conditions with the north-eastern part of Nigeria such as high unemployment, poverty, and malnutrition etc. which make them vulnerable to various forms of criminalities, such as robbery, smuggling of weapons, trafficking etc. Boko Haram exploited these conditions to recruit foreign fighters (International Crises Group 2011).

Foreign Influence: Although foreign influence may not be a strong reason why Boko Haram became transnational, the group appears to use its international linkages to demonstrate influence. For example, in one of its videos in March 2015, Boko Haram declared allegiance to the terrorist group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which the ISIL acknowledged (BBC 2016; BBC Monitoring 2018). On 19 April 2015 already acting as a caliphate, Boko Haram ordered the South African government in a communiqué to stop the xenophobic attacks on Nigerians within 24 hours or else halve all its citizens in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and neighbouring countries killed and all its embassies within Africa attacked. Later same month, a Zimbabwean Central Intelligence agency reported the movement of suspected Nigeria jihadists to South Africa, at the same time the South Africa security intercepted many local jihadists awaiting to collaborate with Boko haram to attack South Africa (Bodansky 2015).

Boko Haram took advantage of the porous borders between Nigeria and its neighbours to facilitate its transnational activities. Daily Trust (2016) reported that over 10,000 entry points exist between Nigeria and its neighbours that have no single immigration, custom or police officer, and that there are about 300 of such entry points between Nigeria and Cameroon that trucks can pass through without checks (Daily Trust 2016). Through its transnational networks and bases, Boko Haram has attacked and killed thousands of people, caused huge casualties and humanitarian crises in the West and Central African sub-regions. In fact, the group has overtaken Al - Shabab in Africa (see Figure 2); and the ISIS to become the global deadliest terrorist group by recording 6,644 fatalities compared to the 6,073 recorded by ISIL in 2014 (Global Terrorist Index 2015).

Impacts of Boko Haram Transnational Insurgency on Regional Security in Africa

a. Escalation of Regional Conflicts

At the onset, the main target of Boko Haram was the Nigerian government but when the insurgency became transnational, it gradually dragged Nigeria’s neighbouring countries Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and later Benin into the conflict. Two prominent reasons for the escalations are: firstly, Boko Haram’s nefarious activities at the borders and inside the territories of the Nigerian neighbours threaten the region’s security. For instance, the bases it maintained in those countries, violence and killings perpetrated by the group greatly undermine the sovereignty of those countries. Secondly, Boko Haram’s declaration that it had gathered sufficient weapons to take over the entire West Africa and turn into an Islamic Caliphate generated huge tensions in the region (Odunsi 2015). Knowing fully well that Boko Haram had the international
networks from where it received, Nigeria’s neighbours did not take the threat for granted but compelled to fight the group.

The neighbouring countries were dragged into the conflict at different points in time, but they agreed to a coordinated effort to intervene and curtail Boko Haram under the MNJTF in 2015. The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorized the deployment of 7,500 troops for a combined military operation under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), on 29 January 2015 with the mandate to intensify coordinated efforts to checkmate the trans-border movement of movements of Boko Haram, destroy its safe havens, protect civilians, ensure the final crushing of the group and restore stability in recaptured areas in 12 months, which was renewed for another 12 months in January 2016 (Sawadogo 2017). The troops were later increased to 8,700 after Nigeria added 1,200 more troops (PSC Report 2015); and rounded up to 10,000 in March 2015 by the Peace and Security Council (African Union 2015). The MNJTF is an extension of the Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF) formed in 1994 by the Lake Chad Basin countries, namely Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon to check common security threats at the borders of the Lake Chad region. The MNJSF was broadened in 2012 to cover counterinsurgency and counterterrorism against Boko Haram threat; and replaced with Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2014 (Sawadogo 2017). The MNJTF situated its headquarters in Baga, Nigeria but was relocated to N’Djamena, Chad after it was attacked and displaced in January 2015 by a heavy surprise attack by Boko Haram. The MNJTF established four sectors Headquarters for the operation and located them in Baga, Nigeria; Diffa, Niger; Baga-Sola, Chad and Mora Cameroon (Sawadogo 2017).

Nigeria’s general elections initially slated for February 2015 was shifted by 6 weeks to avoid disruption by Boko Haram (Bodansky 2015). The MNJTF launched military onslaught against Boko Haram at the borders between Nigeria and its neighbouring countries since 2015. The operation contributed significantly to curtailing the lethality and further spread of Boko Haram into Nigeria’s neighbouring countries. By March 2015, the MNJTF had already displacing Boko Haram from Gwoza, the Headquarter of its self-acclaimed caliphate. It also liberated about 50,000 captives held by the group (Daily Trust 2016). Key trade routes like the Maduguri-Mafa-Dikwa, linking Nigeria and countries Sudan, Libya, Central Africa Republic, Chad and Cameroon through were re-opened. Prominent Boko Haram soldiers like Mal. Hisna, Mal. Gana Shattle and Mal. Lawal Abu were arrested at the border between Nigeria and Cameroon in April 2015 (Daily Trust 2016). Dikkwa in Niger, Baga and Mungono in Nigeria have been recovered (PSC Report 2015). Boko Haram retracted to Sambisa forest again, while the general elections went smoothly without significant disruption by the insurgent group despite its vow to do so (Bodansky 2015). These are just few of the achievements of the MNJTF. On 24 December 2015, the Nigerian military and the President celebrated the military victory and even described Boko Haram as ‘technically defeated’ (BBC, 2015). However, despite the successes recorded by the MNJTF, Boko Haram still maintained a threat to the region’s security. A comparative analysis of Boko Haram activities between 2016 and 2017 shows an increase of 150 Boko Haram attacks over 127 attacks recorded in 2016, though the coverage of the attacks largely remains the same (BBC Monitoring 2018). This implies that Boko Haram persists despite the counterinsurgency successes.

b. Threat to Security of Lives

Since Boko Haram spilled over into Nigeria’s neighbouring countries, namely Cameroon, Chad and Niger in the West and Central African regions, it posed a
serious threat to the security of lives in the sub-regions. Reports show that insurgent group is responsible for the killing of about 100,000 people and displacing over 2.6 million others, and destruction of property with estimated value of $9 billion (Onouha and Oyewole 2018:2). Some of the people were also victims of kidnapping, rape, forceful recruitments etc. (Onuoha 2014). A comparative analysis between al-Shabaab and Boko Haram in terms of fatalities shows that the latter is the deadliest insurgent group in Africa in terms of violent activities against civilians (See figure 2).

Figure 2: Al Shabaab and Boko Haram Proportions of Conflict Activity, August 2006 – September 2017

![Graph showing proportions of conflict activity with Al Shabaab and Boko Haram from August 2006 to September 2017.](source)

In February 2013, Boko Haram took responsibility for kidnapping a French family of seven members from Cameroon and moved them to Nigeria. In November, the group kidnapped a French Catholic Priest in Nguetchehe town in Cameroon (Mantzikos 2014). In July 2014, Boko Haram attacked and killed two Cameroon soldiers, kidnapped the wife of the Cameroonian vice Prime Minister and killed three other citizens (Mantzikos 2014). Boko Haram also attacked and seized five villages in Cameroon, including a Cameroon military base in Achigachia in 2014. These provoked the launching of the first air strike by the Cameroon against Boko Haram (BBC 2014). Examples in Chad include the killing of 38 people in June 2015, and 15 the following month after detonating explosive in a market near a mosque at N’djamena (Vanguard 2015); killing of 27 people in the December 2015 (Dearden 2015). Examples in Niger include the attack at a military based in Bosso, bordering Nigeria and Niger which resulted to the killing of 30 Nigerians soldiers and 70 others injured in June 2015 (Daily Trust 2016). In November 2015 the group also killed 25 people in a village (Reuter 2015). These are just few examples.

In terms of humanitarian crisis, Boko Haram has displaced millions of people in the West and Central Africa, which remains a threat to human security in the region. As at 2017, the Amnesty International (2017) reported that 2.3 million people have been displaced across the affected region, out of which 1.6 million were internally displaced in Nigeria, 303,000 in Cameroon and 374,000 in Chad and Niger. The Amnesty International (2017) also that ‘More than 7 million people across the region face serious food shortages, including 5 million in Nigeria and 1.5 million in Cameroon. There are 515,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, more than 85%
of them in Nigeria. Besides, Boko Haram has also caused serious damages to public infrastructure like schools and homes in the affected region with estimated value of $9billion (Onuoha and Oyewole2018:2).

c. Trans-Border Insecurity
Since Boko Haram became a transnational phenomenon, the borders between Nigeria Chad and Cameroon became very insecure for travelers, traders and cross border business transactions. Some of the borders had served as routes for trans-border trade in local agricultural and finished products but due to the insurgency, most of the borders were either made inaccessible to users because of the fear of terror from the insurgents or blocked by the government to prevent flow of insurgents (Daily Trust 2016). For example, the Maiduguri-Mafa-Dikwa trade route, which had been linking traders from Nigeria and Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Libya for decades, was shut down (Daily Trust 2016). Also, Cameroon closed its border with Nigeria in July 2015 when Boko Haram killed about hundred people in its territories (VOA (2016). Though reopened before the end of the year, the border was closed down again in January 2016 after Boko Haram attacked and killed 35 people and injured 70 others in Bosso Town (Daily Trust 2016).

The insecurity at the borders created by the insurgency has huge implication for the movement of people and economic growth and livelihood for people in the affected region, especially those who depend on trans-border trade for income. Though, most of the borders have been re-opened but insecurity at the borders has only declined; Boko Haram remains a threat to the border as it still launches sporadic attacks at the border, coupled with different other transnational criminal activities.

Conclusion
This study examined the transnationalization of impact of Boko Haram insurgency and its impacts on regional security in Africa. The study shows that military repression, need for foreign support and international influence contributed to the spread of the insurgency. It also shows that Boko Haram poses serious security threats to Africa’s regional security considering its spill over into Nigeria’s Neighbouring countries like Chad, Cameroon and Niger located in the West and Central African sub-regions. The study concludes that Boko Haram remains a threat in Nigeria and the West and Central Africa sub-regions despite the regional response under the MNJTS since 2015. To completely restore security in the affected regions, Boko Haram must be defeated at both national and regional levels. Finally, the paper recommends as follows:

Nigeria and its regional counterparts must consolidate on the counterinsurgency successes to avoid further spread of Boko Haram and foreign supports across the borders by maintaining effective security checks at the borders. This will require modern technological equipment for intelligence gathering, training, and collaboration among security personnel i.e. immigration, police, customs etc. Also, Nigeria and its neighbours should embark on short and long-term economic development programmes to enhance the humanitarian conditions of victims of the insurgency and promote capital development projects that will create job opportunities. Finally, Nigeria and its neighbours must take political steps to recover all the captives in Boko Haram custody, occupied territories and persuade the group to embrace amnesty with emphasis on Deradicalization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). These will require commitment to good governance and collaboration with domestic, regional and international stakeholders.
References


outside support for insurgent movements. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.


