

Boko Haram insurgency and the necessity for trans-territorial forestland governance in the Lower Lake Chad Basin

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Abstract

The significance of forests as an existential threat to national security in Nigeria has been underscored in the phenomenon of Boko Haram insurgency. The occupation and apparent ‘weaponisation’ of Sambisa and the adjoining forests by Boko Haram insurgents have continued to pose an enervating tactical challenge that complicates the ongoing counter-insurgency efforts in northeast Nigeria. The instrumentalisation of forests as an operational and defensive stronghold by the insurgents in the lower Lake Chad Basin has been enabled by the existence of large expanses of dispersed, uninhabited and un-policed forested spheres in the area. This study examines the imperative for transnational forestland governance in the lower Lake Chad Basin, in the light of a continual incidence of Boko Haram insurgency in that context. Drawing discursively from the ‘ungoverned spaces’ (territorial ungovernability) hypothesis, the study

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posits that the prevailing vacuum of effective forestland governance in the region must be filled in order to mitigate the security challenge. To that end, the study prescribes a strategic trans-territorial forestland governance regime whereby Nigeria and Cameroon synergise efforts in bringing about effective reclamation and occupation of the volatile forested landscapes.

Keywords: Boko Haram, forest, forest governance, insurgency, lower Lake Chad Basin

1. Introduction

Armed conflicts in Africa are systemic and opportunistic. More often than not, they have been symptomatic of structural misalignments within the state or the economy. But more fundamentally, the conflicts have had the tendency to complicate matters and prolong themselves by exploiting extant socio-ecological and political faultlines. A veritable and critical instance of such faultlines is the pockets of ‘ungoverned spheres’ that dot the continent’s territorial domains and frontiers. By ‘ungoverned sphere’ is meant an area within the territorial domain of a state that is lacking or grossly deficient in governmental presence and control. Ungoverned spheres are, nonetheless, not absolutely anarchic. In effect, they are often ruled by illicit non-state authorities with criminal or treasonable political agendas. Typifying this territorial category is the phenomenon of forest.

Forest has been a topical subject of academic and policy research. Existing studies in this regard however, have been skewed towards bio-ecological, agricultural and environmental studies (Food and Agricultural Organisation [FAO] 2011; International Tropical Timber Organisation [ITTO] and FAO 2009). In this respect, the emphasis has variously been on forest as a veritable site for ecological conservation, eco-tourism and recreation, as well as rural livelihood. The existing literature on environmental health recognises the forest as a veritable existential health hazard (ITTO and FAO 2009). Beyond this, only little has been done in terms of systematic studies underscoring the significance of forest as a crucial national security problematic. In the view of Albert (2017:5),

‘Though strategically important, not many academic works exist on the physical security implications of (African) forests’. In effect, scholarship in this area of study is still nascent and emerging, with scholars such as Ladan (2014), Okoli and Ochim (2016), Albert (2017), and Olaniyan (2018) as seminal contributors. The present study intends to build upon these studies, with an analytical departure that privileges the strategic importance of forest vis-à-vis Nigeria national security.

In a nutshell, previous presentations in the ongoing conference have tended to approach the theme from either a socio-ecological or an economic perspective. However, this presentation deals with the politico-strategic dimension of the subject matter. It probes the accompanying effects and strategic implications of the occupation of Sambisa forest in the lower Lake Chad Basin by Boko Haram insurgents. The exigency of trans-territorial forestland governance is then highlighted.

The paper is a product of a desk-study, drawing from library and online resources. It is an exploratory analysis of the threat potential of forests in Africa through the vantage prism of the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria, within the wider remit of the lower Lake Chad Basin. The study problematises forests as a crucial existential threat to national and regional security and logically underscores the necessity for a contingency transnational forest governance approach as the way forward. Aligning its analytical perspective to the theory of ungoverned spaces, the study underscores the strategic implication of the scarcely or poorly governed Sambisa forest in the context of insurgency and counter-insurgency, with the submission that the virtual ungovernability of the forest has provided operational incentive and advantage to the insurgents, in addition to inhibiting the efficacy of the ongoing counter-insurgency operations. It is expected that the outcome of the study would contribute to motivating and edifying future research endeavours on the relevant aspects of the subject matter.

The remainder of the paper is organised in eight thematic sections. Following this introductory section is one on conceptual clarifications

in which the concepts of insurgency, forest, and forest governance are considered with the intent to clarifying and situating their operational meanings. This is followed by the theoretical framework whereby the ‘ungoverned spaces’ thesis is appropriated as an analytical anchor for the study. Next is a brief literature review on the connections between forests and insurgency, geared towards predicating the study on the theories and results now available from our extant corpus of knowledge. Following this section is an attempt to highlight the strategic utility of forest ecology from the standpoint of the varying uses and abuses of forests in different contexts. Then there is an overview of the setting and contextual background to the study. This is followed by an examination of Boko Haram’s occupation and exploitation of the Sambisa forests. Heralding the conclusion is a section on the imperative for governing the Sambisa forest through a trans-territorial approach involving the strategic synergy between the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon. The final section is a conclusion, which summarises the developed argument.

2. Clarification of terms

Five basic descriptive terms constitute and motivate the content of this study. These are: insurgency, forest, ungoverned space, forest governance and Boko Haram insurgency. This section clarifies their meanings, provides situational contexts for each and points out how they are used to conceptualise the problems and solutions.

2.1 Insurgency

This refers to the systematic use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. By its peculiar nature, insurgency is a pattern of asymmetric violence. In effect, it involves the use of a combination of subversion, sabotage, guerrilla tactics, and sundry extremist machinations in a bid to attain a politically amenable objective (cf. Otegwu 2015; Albert 2017).

2.2 Forest/Forestland

A forest is a plant community consisting predominantly of trees and a variety of woody vegetation, which occupies an extensive area of land (Ladan 2014; Okoli and Ochim 2016). Depending on the geographical characteristics of its environment, a forest can be classified as, for instance, a tropical forest, rainforest, savanna forest or swamp forest. Generally, there are two types of forest regime, namely wild-woods and protected forests. Regarding this typology, Okoli and Ochim (2016:45–46) succinctly opine that ‘Wild-woods are naturally growing forests that are open to primitive and unregulated exploitation while protected forests are wood-lands controlled and regulated by the government’. Forests are characterised by difficult terrain, exemplified in rough and rugged landscape as well as thick and crowded foliage (Olaniyan 2018:1). Some of the common features of a typical forest are woods, jungles, creeks, caves, swamps and wild animals.

2.3 Ungoverned space

An ungoverned space refers to a territorial sphere where firm governmental control is lacking. It is ‘a physical or non-physical area where there is an absence of state capacity or political will to exercise control’ (Whelan 2006:65). This may include land areas, maritime spheres and cyberspace domains, where state control is grossly deficient or absent. Such a scenario often gives room for illicit and subversive activities by criminal or extremist elements.

2.4 Forest governance

This refers to ‘the modus operandi by which officials and institutions acquire and exercise authority in the management of forest resources’ (ITTO and FAO 2009:5). Contemporary forest governance emphasises issues that are critical to the safety, security and sustainability of forests (Yale School of Forest and Environmental Studies n.d.). This includes measures geared towards reducing illegal and subversive activities in forested areas (Kishor and Rosenbaum 2012:3).

2.5 Boko Haram insurgency

The term ‘Boko Haram’ literally translates to ‘western education is forbidden’. It refers to the notorious terrorist group based in northeastern Nigeria, whose official name is Jama’atu Ahlissunnah Lidda’awatiwal Jihad (meaning: people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and Jihad). The Jihadist group was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri, Borno State, by a radical Islamist cleric, Mohammed Yusuf. The group’s ideology is based on extremist jihadism, with strict observance of Islamic law (Sharia) in Nigeria (Okoli and Iortyer 2014:39–40). In the early 2000s, the insurgents were active in the greater part of northern Nigeria, almost overrunning states like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. The intensification of counter-insurgency operations of the Nigerian forces and allied civilian Joint Task Forces in the 2014/2015 period forced the insurgents to withdraw from its city cells and circuits into the Sambisa forest. Since then, the forest has become the safe haven and sanctuary for the insurgents.

3. Theoretical framework: The ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ hypothesis

The paper appropriates the ‘ungoverned spaces’ thesis as its theoretical compass. This theory is an attempt to highlight the threatening effects of ‘under-governed, ill-governed, contested, and exploitable areas’ in contemporary state systems (Taylor 2016:2). Stemming from the counter-terrorism/insurgency cum state-failure discourse of the post-9/11 era, the theory posits that ungoverned spaces are ‘areas of limited or anomalous governmental control inside otherwise functional states’ (Keister 2014:1) and that the prevalence of ungoverned spaces in contemporary states provides safe havens for treasonable and subversive activities, often orchestrated by organised criminals and extremist groups (Rabasa et al. 2007:1–7).

Although ungoverned spaces are controlled by criminal and subversive non-state elements, they are, first and foremost, brought about by the state through its functional incapacitation and illegitimacy (Keister 2014:1). The failure of the state to hold real and firm sway in respect of

governance and security has often created ‘governmentality gaps or deficits’ (Rabasa et al. 2007), which are exploited by aggrieved, disgruntled, or criminally motivated elements to perpetrate violent crime. This is typically the case with the instrumentalisation of forests as a strategic resort in asymmetric warfare in contemporary Africa.

Through the prism of the ungoverned spaces theory, therefore, it is posited herewith that the abusive and criminal use of forests in Africa is symptomatic of the state’s fragility syndrome, exemplified by the prevalence of ungoverned spaces within the territorial confines of the state. So, whilst sundry ungoverned spaces exist and persist, opportunistic elements (criminals and insurgents alike) within the civic domain and the underworld are inclined to exploit the prevailing ‘faultlines’ towards criminal and subversive ends. It is in this sense that the strategic significance of forests in relation to insurgency is understood in this study.

4. Forestland and insurgency: A literature review

Extant literature on the relationship between forests and insurgency presents us with two important perspectives, namely: (1) that forested landscape and resources are exploited by insurgents towards sustaining their violence; (2) that insurgency and counter-insurgency operations undermine the forests by destroying their ecology and resources (Albert 2017). The first perspective refers to the strategic and economic importance of forests in the context of insurgency. On the one hand, it emphasises the tactical deployment of the forest (for instance, its topography, ecology and cover) to gain strategic advantage in the course of insurgency. Literature is fraught with instances where the insurgents have utilised the difficult terrain of forested areas to advance their guerrilla-style violence (cf. Berdal and Malone 2000; Fearon and Laitim 2003). The other side of the perspective is illicit plundering of forest resources by insurgent movements, not only to sustain their cause, but also to make some economic gains. This viewpoint is prominent in the ‘resource war’ or ‘political/economy of war’ thesis (Atkinson 1997:4). The utilisation of forests by insurgents whether as safe havens or as economic resort, affords

them with some strategic advantage over conventional troops who are involved in counter-insurgency operations. It is in recognition of this fact that forests are considered to be one of the most critical environmental ‘force de-multipliers’ in counter-insurgency campaigns (Albert 2017:2).

The second perspective on the nexus between forests and insurgency speaks to the fact that insurgency and counter-insurgency operations are detrimental to the forest landscape, resources, and ecosystem (Albert 2017:1). The combat activities of both insurgents and government troops, the bombs, the improvised explosives, the landmines, and of course, the wanton exploitation of valuable flora and fauna in that context, add up to the collateral jeopardy of violence for which the ecological integrity of the affected forest must dearly pay.

Contemporary scholarship on the relationship between forests and insurgency has underscored the significance of forest as an existential threat to national and regional security (cf. Landan 2014; Olaniyan and Yahaya 2016; Okoli and Ochim 2016; Albert 2017, Olaniyan 2018). The dominant argument in these works is that forests are scarcely governed and therefore are vulnerable to criminal/terrorist inhabitation and exploitation. The necessary implication of this is that effective forest governance should be prioritised in national and regional security endeavours. This study seeks to make a contribution to this body of discourse by considering the contemporary trajectory of the Boko Haram insurgency in the forested areas of the Lower Lake Chad Basin.

5. The strategic utility of forest ecology: Uses and abuses

Forest ecology refers to the bio-physical, socio-ecological, topological and vegetational characteristics of the forest as an organic entity (Okoli and Ochim 2016:43–47). The strategic utility of forest ecology refers to the uses and abuses of the forested environment for specific purposes in various contexts. This underlines the understanding that forest ecology could be appropriated or misappropriated for some ecological, socio-economic, tactical (military), criminal, or scientific purposes.

Generally, a forest holds both beneficial and nuisance values, depending on the nature and motive of its exploitation. The beneficial value of the forest has to do with the legitimate economic and socio-ecological exploitation of forest resources and endowments. This includes hunting and gathering, ecological conservation, eco-tourism, scientific research, and military trainings/simulation. On the other hand, the nuisance value of the forest refers to the untoward use of the forested environment by criminals, insurgents, and terrorists towards advancing their nefarious activities.

The instrumentalisation of the forest as a means of furthering organised crime has been well documented in the extant literature (Ladan 2014:120; Olaniyan 2018:1). A case in point is the use of forests as safe havens by rural bandits in West Africa, who indulge in cattle rustling, kidnapping and arms smuggling (Olaniyan and Yahaya 2016:93; Okoli and Ochim 2016:47–48). In addition to criminal violence, forests have been used by terrorists and/or insurgents in various parts of the world as sanctuaries for the plotting and prosecution of political violence. The ‘forest wars’ in places like Cambodia, Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone provide abundant examples of this tendency (cf. Albert 2017; Olaniyan 2018).

The Niger Delta militants, prior to the 2008/2009 Amnesty deal, capitalised on the strategic cover provided by the littoral jungles and creeks of the region to wage sustained war against the Nigerian state. The difficult nature of the regional forests conferred on the militants some degree of strategic advantage over the government troops, who were not sufficiently conversant with the terrain (Okoli 2016). Besides, the forests also afforded the militants with a ‘political economy of war’ (Atkinson 1997:4–5) by providing them with an enabling environment for the exploitation and expropriation of petroleum resources through oil theft and artisanal refining (Okoli 2016). This opportunistic strategy boosted the operational efficacy and sustainability of the Niger Delta militancy in the focal era. Such a strategy has since been perfected by the Boko Haram insurgents who capitalise on their stranglehold on the Sambisa forest to sustain its operations through cattle rustling, hostage taking, and arms smuggling.

6. Overview of the setting of the study: Lower/Lake Chad Basin and Sambisa forest

This study has its locus as the lower Lake Chad Basin. Within this geographical remit, the study focuses on the activities of Boko Haram fighters in the Sambisa forests in the context of the ongoing insurgency and counter-insurgency in the area. The Lake Chad Basin is located in northern Central Africa. It covers about 8% of Africa's land mass, spreading over seven countries (Table 1).

Table 1: Lake Chad Basin: Areas and rainfall by country

Country	Total area of the country (km ²)	Area of the country within the basin (km ²)	As % of total area of basin (%)	As % of total area of country (%)	Average annual rainfall in the basin area		
					(mm)		
					Min.	Max.	Mean
Nigeria	923770	179282	7.5	19.4	285	1330	670
Niger	1267000	691473	29.0	54.6	0	635	105
Algeria	2381740	93451	3.9	3.9	0	135	20
Sudan	2505810	101048	4.2	4.0	70	1155	585
Central Africa	622980	219410	9.2	35.2	760	1535	1215
Chad	1284000	1046196	43.9	81.5	0	1350	400
Cameroon	475440	50775	2.1	10.7	365	1590	1010
For Lake Chad basin		2381635	100.0		0	1590	415

Source: FAO 1997: Chapter 6

The seven countries indicated in Table 1 are categorised into two: core and periphery. The core countries of the basin constitute the four countries that have direct contact with Lake Chad while the peripheral countries are

those that do not. The former are also referred to as the conventional Lake Chad Basin in that they are the official members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. This covers about 20% of the total area of the Lake Chad basin (427500 km²) (42% in Chad, 28% in Niger, 21% in Nigeria and 9% in Cameroon (FAO 1997:Chapter 6).

The core Lake Chad Basin is sub-divided into the Upper and Lower axis. The Upper axis refers to Chad and Niger Republic while the Lower basin includes Cameroon and Nigeria (see figure 1). This study focuses on the Lower Basin, which has been most affected by the on-going insurgency in northeast Nigeria and its cognate Lake Chad neighbours. The Sambisa forest, which has been a critical factor in the insurgency and counter-insurgency operations in the region, is located in this area.

The Sambisa forest is located between the northeastern axis of the west Sudanese Savanna and the southern boundary of the Sahel Acacia Savanna (BirdLife 2015). The location of the forest is about 60 km southeast of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in Nigeria (Kayode 2014a). It stretches northwards across the States of Borno, Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi and Jigawa, up to parts of Kano (Kayode 2014a; 2014b). Sambisa forest derives its name from the village of Sambisa which is on the borderlines of Gwoza in the eastern part of Borno State. The Gwoza hills have peaks of 1300 meters above sea level. The hills form part of the Mandara Mountain range, situated along the Cameroon-Nigeria border (Kayode 2014a). The forest is drained by seasonal streams into the Yedseram and the Ngadda Rivers (Mbaya and Malgwi 2010:135).

The Sambisa forest has been crucial to the economy and strategy of Boko Haram insurgents. The insurgents have occupied the Forest since the late 2000s. The exigencies of insurgency and counter-insurgency have transformed the Forest into a highly militarised, 'weaponised' and securitised zone (Okoli and Ochim 2016:47–48). In effect, it has been exploited by the Boko Haram insurgents as an operational base as well as a strategic sanctuary. It has also played a vital role in sustaining the political economy of insurgency by providing an enabling environment for war-time

criminal franchise, such as cattle rustling, illegal lumbering, hostage-taking/kidnapping and arms smuggling (Okoli 2017b:1; Olaniyan 2018:1).

Figure 1: Map of Lake Chad and its surrounding countries, showing Sambisa forest in the centre



Source: Creative Commons

7. Sambisa forest: Occupation and exploitation by Boko Haram

The Sambisa forest constitutes the bastion of Boko Haram insurgency. The strategic symbolism of the forest is such that it evokes phobia and mystery, signifying the territorial dimension of Nigeria's national security

debacle at the present. The Sambisa forest has been the physical and virtual headquarters of Boko Haram insurgency. According to Albert (2017:13):

Sambisa forest provides the insurgents with a space for organizing their prayer sessions, interrogating and executing abductees, producing their media instruments and doing their military trainings. They take all seized weapons and vehicles there. It is their operational headquarters.

The Sambisa forest hosts the organisational, operational, logistical and technical infrastructure of Boko Haram, including its command, armoury, training, detention and execution camps, landmines, artisanal bomb-making factories, prayer grounds, military and civilian supplies, loots, and livestock. It is also the destination for the insurgents' prisoners of war, including abductees, sex slaves, and those kidnapped for ransom.

The Sambisa forest came into international recognition in 2014, following the mass abduction of the Chibok School Girls, who were then taken to the forest for custody. As a consequence of this incident, the forest has been a critical theatre of counter-insurgency operations by the Nigerian troops and their international support forces. In spite of the significant successes made by the Nigerian armed forces in gaining entrance and reclaiming the Sambisa forest between 2015 and the present, some aspects of the forest are still under firm control of the insurgents.

The Nigerian troops have often encountered operational setbacks in their bid to dislodge the insurgents from the Sambisa forest. The challenges naturally emanate from the vast nature of the forest as well as its virtual ungovernability. The size of the Sambisa forest has been likened to that of Lagos State in South West Nigeria. In addition to its expansive nature, the forest is located along an equally expansive international frontier, characterised by porous and poorly policed borderlines (Okoli 2017a). This has made it possible for the insurgents to manoeuvre along the porous and defective borders and readily reinforce their position.

Another challenge is that the forest has been heavily weaponised and fortified over the years. Clear indicators of this trend include the presence of combat-ready terrorists, suicide bombers, landmines and human shields.

Coupled with the availability of sophisticated weaponry as well as the insurgents' brutal efficiency in the theatre of combat, the highly militarised and weaponised Sambisa forest has so far proven a hard nut for the troops involved in counter-insurgency operations.

The insurgents' occupation of the Sambisa forest has been accompanied by corresponding exploitation of the terrain (see table 2). In effect, the forest has doubled as the base for sundry illicit franchises, including cattle rustling, illegal mining, lumbering and arms trafficking. These activities support the economy of insurgency by providing funding and material sustenance to it (Okoli 2017b). The criminal exploitation of Sambisa forest by insurgents has been facilitated by their relative familiarity with and mastery of the ecology of the forest. This is in view of the fact that a good number of the commanders and foot-soldiers of the insurgent movement appear to have come from the region.

For more than a decade now, Boko Haram insurgents have maintained their strategic stranglehold on Sambisa forest, exploiting its strategic terrain and resources for sustaining its campaign of terror. Beyond this ultimate end, the insurgents have also effectively utilised the forest as a vantage site for media production dedicated to propaganda, ideological warfare and radicalisation. By so doing, they have been able to sustain an appreciable level of international visibility and propaganda.

It is pertinent to reiterate that, in comparison with other areas, Sambisa forest is the most strategically auspicious base for the pattern of asymmetric guerrilla warfare and jihadist occupation, used by the Boko Haram insurgency. It is extremely sparse and expansive, and therefore very problematic to govern. It is also located within a trans-territorial area characterised by porosity of borders. It is, furthermore, generally bereft of settled civil and military habitation. Most importantly, its physical topography, comprising woodlands interspersed by hills, rocks, waters and jungles, is amenable to asymmetric manoeuvrability.

Table 2: Dimensions of Boko Haram’s activities in the Sambisa forest

Domain of Activity	Empirical Indicators
Subsistence	Cultivation and storage of food; rearing of animals; extraction of wood for fuel; gathering of fruits and hunting of wild animals
Strategy	Operational/tactical base for combat training, planning, camping, torture and execution, holding of prisoners of war and abductees, manufacturing and testing of improvised explosives
Economy	Safe space for smuggling, cattle rustling, illicit logging, charcoal milling, mining and quarrying

Source: Author’s compilation.

8. Governing Sambisa forest: The imperative for a trans-territorial approach

Boko Haram poses a trans-national threat within the wider Lake Chad Basin. The group has launched a couple of attacks in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. Given its nascent affiliation with ISIS (Islamic State in Syria), it is apparent that the operational scope of the group will expand. The same is also true of the group’s asymmetric opportunism. The porous nature of the borderlines as well as the forested landscape in the Lake Chad region has afforded the insurgents with the opportunity of trans-border tactical manoeuvrability. In this regard, Albert (2017:12) observes that ‘When Boko Haram attacks any Nigerian community, it would simply “dive” into the forest for cover and emerge in any of the Lake Chad Basin countries that interests it and that is the end of the operation’.

Within the lower Lake Chad Basin, the transnational threat of Boko Haram insurgency has been most immanent and palpable. Cattle rustled in northeastern Nigeria have often crossed into Cameroon via the fringes of Sambisa forest (Okoli 2017b). Similarly, Boko Haram fighters have oftentimes engaged Nigerian troops in a hit-and-run combat along the northward Nigeria-Cameroon borderlines (Okoli 2017a). The exigencies

of counter-insurgency in the Lake Chad region have necessitated and recommended the adoption of a multinational approach towards finding a lasting solution to the prevailing threat. This is expedient because the threat has transcended national boundaries and has assumed a sub-regional dynamics (common threat). More so, it has persistently exploited the faultlines of the virtual porosity and ungovernability of Nigeria's northward borderlands. More importantly, the threat has overwhelmed the defence capacity and strategy of Nigeria; hence the need for a transnational strategy that leverages tactical synergy unencumbered by territorial considerations.

So far, Nigeria and Cameroon have been tactically cooperating in terms of military reconnaissance in an attempt to police and guard their common borderlines that stretch from the Bight of Biafra in the southeastern axis through the Mambila Plateau in the middle-belt region to the Lake Chad area in the far north corridor. The military cooperation has taken the form of bilateral and multilateral engagements designed to respond to the exigencies of Boko Haram insurgency. For instance, Nigeria and Cameroon are frontline members of the sub-regional Multinational (Military) Taskforce, comprised of special emergency fighters from the member states of the core Lake Chad Basin that are dedicated to counter-insurgency in the region (Okoli 2017a). Such engagements have been very challenging both logistically and tactically. The challenge arises from encumbrances of territoriality and sovereignty which often inhibit troops of both countries from engaging in cross-border combat operations.

Going forward, meaningful remediation must begin with fashioning a systematic means of vacating the circumstantial security encumbrances posed by the notorious Sambisa forest. In the light of the foregoing, this paper makes a case for a trans-territorial forest governance framework whereby the authorities of Nigeria and Cameroon synergise in ensuring military and civil reclamation of the Sambisa corridor through effective occupation. To this end, it is recommended that the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon should institute both functional and territorial mechanisms dedicated to the security and development of their common

forested frontiers on the lower Lake Chad axis. The security component of the initiative should prioritise aspects of rangeland policing, with emphasis on joint armed reconnaissance, intelligence sharing, rangeland surveillance and patrol, as well as intensive combatant operations. On the other hand, the development component should emphasise endeavours to effectively reclaim the vast and volatile trans-border forestlands through elaborate ecological conservation, agricultural extension, as well as strategic civilian and military occupation. The expected result of the process is to entrench a territorial control through effective and proper civil-cum-military inhabitation of the erstwhile 'ungoverned spaces' in a manner that forecloses its virtual ungovernability. In a nutshell, there is a need for a Nigeria-Cameroon emergency cross-border governance regime that prioritises joint rangeland security and development as well as incremental civil and military occupation of the Sambisa corridor through phased functional developmental projects in areas such as agro-settlement, military industrial complex, eco-tourism, and the like.

The above recommendation could be situated within the domain of emergency trans-border governance/security regimen which has been adverted to in the extant literature. For instance, in a study carried out on the Lake Constance Region and the Upper-Rhine Region in continental Europe, Zumbusch and Scherer (2015:500–520) reveal how the exigencies of cross-border cooperation in that context informed a governance system that transcended the imperative of territoriality. Such was a trans-territorial cross-border regimen that sought to balance the concerns of 'formalized and less formalized co-operations' in an effort to assure an effective frontier development and security (Zumbusch and Scherer 2015:500). Elsewhere, in a study on 'cross-border territorial strategy' in 'Greater Region' of Europe, Decovillea and Durand (2016:66) highlight the need for the institutionalisation of functional development initiatives as a means of dealing with the territorial impediments to sustainable cross-border governance and, ultimately, integration. These scholarly observations point out that emergency situations in this context do impose a necessity for cross-border governance which would be borne best

by way of a trans-territorial framework. This is the option before Nigeria and Cameroon in the face of their common terror-related territorial threat, especially within the forested landscapes of the Lower Lake Chad region.

9. Conclusion

Insurgency is an unconventional, opportunistic warfare. It thrives by tactical opportunism through the exploitation of difficult or scarcely governed spaces in order to gain a strategic, asymmetric advantage. In Africa, insurgent groups have often utilised difficult terrains, such as mountains, creeks, deserts, and jungles as safe havens or sanctuaries. The difficult nature of these terrains affords the insurgents with an enormous strategic operational advantage vis-à-vis the conventional forces. It also inhibits the efficacy of counter-insurgency operations by national or regional authorities.

The Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria has followed the logic of tactical opportunism. It has sustained itself through a firm occupation and exploitation of the Sambisa forest in the lower Lake Chad Basin. The Sambisa, apart from providing territorial cover and shield for the bulk of Boko Haram activities, serves as a fountain of 'political economy' for armed conflict in that context. The strategic importance of the forest is that while it has boosted the activities of the insurgents, it has at the same time encumbered the operational efficacy of the counter-insurgency endeavours of the Nigerian government and its regional allies. In view of its strategic significance in the context of the on-going insurgency and counter-insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin, the Sambisa forest poses a virtual existential threat to member-states of the region, particularly those on the lower belt (Nigeria and Cameroon). The trans-border character of this threat requires a corresponding trans-territorial forest governance strategy whereby the affected countries would synergise on an enduring basis towards finding a lasting solution to the common threat.

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