

Insurgency in the North-East of Nigeria and its Implications on Inter-State and Trans-Border Mobility

By

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Abstract

There has been free flow or movement of people, traffic, goods and services from the North-East region of Nigeria and the neighbouring countries such as Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroon for centuries. But the rising tide of Islamic terrorists since 2009 in the region especially in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa states has made travels in the region a very risky undertaking. It has disrupted free flow of traffic, goods and services between the North-East region and other parts of the country including neighboring countries. Motorists and commuters on both inter-state and trans-border travels had been victims of insurgents` attacks along the major highways in the region and border communities. This paper looks at the insurgents` attacks on road users on the fringe of North-East borders with neighbouring countries and its implications on cross-border mobility. This paper submits that the on-going insurgency in the region has affected road travels in the region and disrupted social and economic activities of the people with other parts of Nigeria and other countries it shares boundaries with.

Introduction

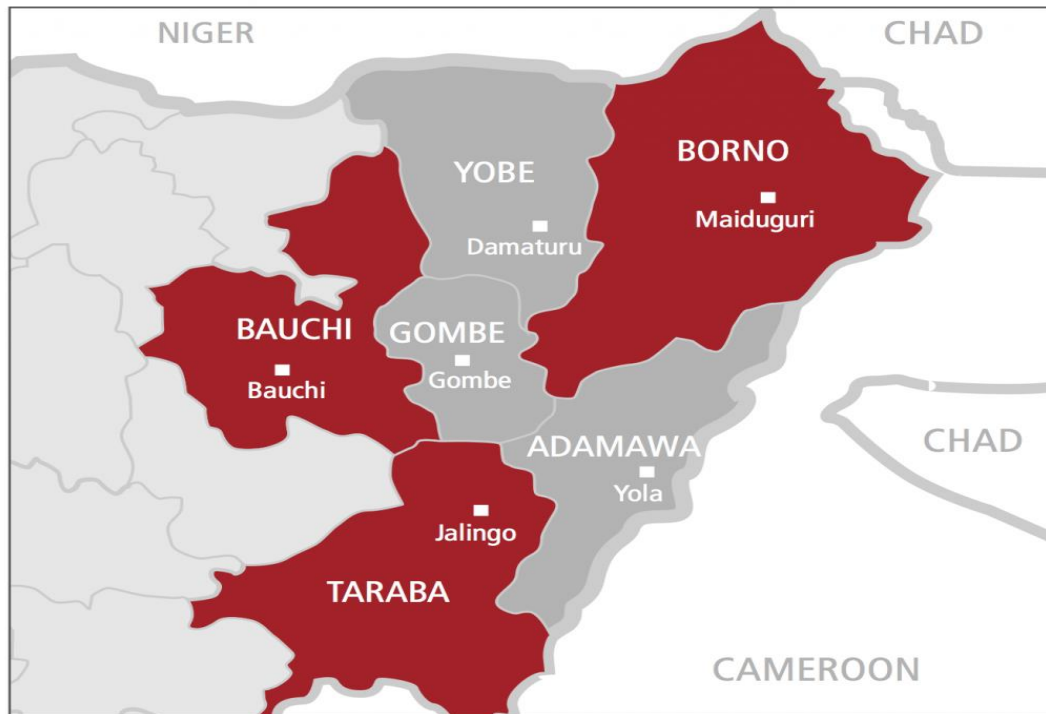
Boko Haram insurgence has been a major threat to Nigerian state since 2009 killing thousands of people and causing wanton destruction of both private and public property worth of billion of naira. Being an anti-government establishment, Boko Haram has directed its attacks on the security agencies and government institutions which it believed were bastions of injustice, corruption and maladministration. This is derived from the extremist sect`s abhorrence of western education, civilization and values and its bid to Islamize the country. The Islamist sect had unleashed terror attacks on the innocent citizens which cut across ethnic and religious divides. In Nigeria today, especially in the North-East region where Boko Haram insurgent activities are more pronounced, nobody is safe. In response to response to high levels of terrorist attacks in the region, the Federal government declared state of emergency in some local governments of Borno and Yobe States in January of 2012. When the insurgency continued unabated, state of emergency was extended to the

states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa in May, 2013. The insurgents had also unleashed terror attacks on travellers on both inter-state and trans-border road travels in the area. Most of the motorists and travellers had fallen victims of either killed or kidnapped by the insurgents on the major highways. It is against this background that this paper looks at the risk posed by insurgents in the region and its implications on inter-state and trans-border mobility.

The North-East Region

Northern Nigeria consists of 19 out of 36 states of the federation. It is clustered into three geo-political zones of North-West, North-East and North-Central. The North-east region of Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones in the country. It consists of six states namely: Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba. It is a vast and extensive region which extends from Lake Chad in the northeast corner to beyond Toro near Jos in the south west corner, and from Jama`re bordering Kano in the northwest corner to Wukari in the southeast. It is inhabited by peoples of different ethnic groups, but the major ethnic groups are Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri. It is also a home to many minority groups such as Shuwa Arabs, Mumunye, Chamba, Marghi, Kaka, Manga, Tera, Jukun, Wurkum, Tiv, Bachama, Mambila, Lungudu, Waja amongst others.¹ The North East region has an estimated population of 22.3 million people who are predominantly Muslims.² It shares common international boundaries with Niger to the west and north, Republic of Chad to the Northeast and Cameroon to the Southeast.³ The people in the region share almost similar socio-economic, cultural, linguistic affinities with nationals of the neighboring countries dating back to the pre-colonial era. With colonialism, the ethnic groups were divided by artificial boundaries created by the colonial governments. These artificial boundaries notwithstanding, mutual cooperation still exist among the border communities.⁴

The Map of North-East Region



Source: Retrieved via Online <http://www.aoav.org.ul/wp>

Road Transportation in Northeast Region Before the Insurgency

The identified conventional risks on Nigerian roads over the years have been road crashes and armed bandits. The sporadic eruption of series of ethno-religious violent conflicts in Northern Nigeria to some a lesser extent, constituted one of the threats to road transport in the region. Carnage arising from crashes from road transport features prominently in the causative index of risks on road transport in Nigeria.⁵ Hardly any day passes without news or stories of road mishaps on the major highways. The human wrecks that are found in the hospitals as well as horrifying road crash data from the Nigeria Police and the Federal Road Safety Corps are clear evidences.

Prior to the outbreak of insurgency in Northern Nigeria, particularly in the Northeast region, travelling on roads was a pleasant and eventful experience. There were no much fears of night marauders or organized armed robbery attacks and where they exist, their threats were minimal. This enabled traders and peasant farmers to transport their trading commodities and agricultural produce with minimal risks. However, the increasing waves of insurgency in the region have made inter-state road travels very risky. Likewise, trans-border travels from the region to the neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Niger and Chad are not safe either. The insurgents had terrorized major transborder highways and rural roads making travellers to contend the problems of being killed and kidnapped or taken hostage. At present, insurgents' attacks has eclipsed the menace of armed robbery and constituted the greatest menace to road users in the region.

Insurgency and Inter-State Road Transport

Terrorism is one of the greatest threats to road transport in the Northeast region in the recent time. The extremist militant group had carried out dastardly acts by killing, kidnapping and snatching of vehicles from road users/travellers. This has made people who intend to travel to the region from

other parts of the country to be in perpetual fear of either being killed or kidnapped. Inter-state travels in the region has been a risky undertaking as local and foreign media are replete with gory tales of how insurgents' had unleashed terror on travellers on the major highways. The insurgents had also bombed some bridges in the region and the ones that link the region with the neighbouring countries, thereby disrupting the social and economic activities of the people. The victims of the terrorist attacks were the motorists, commuters, traders, students, prominent traditional rulers, politicians, security personnel, expatriates and local road construction workers.

The insurgents adopted different subtle strategies and ploys in executing their murderous acts on the unsuspecting travellers. Eye witness accounts from local drivers who ply the highways in the region gave a vivid picture of how Boko Haram sects operate on highways that lead to or from Maiduguri in this way: "snipers wait in trees to fire at passing cars, which are then attacked by gunmen hiding in bushes by the side of the road".⁶ Most often, the terrorists appeared in military uniforms and mounted road blocks on the highways. A topical example is the widely reported Benishek massacre in which insurgents camouflaging as soldiers blocked Damaturu-Benishek-Maiduguri highway and carried out gruesome slaughtering of over 100 travellers. It was reported that the terrorists apart from shooting also used knives and saws to slit the throats their victims.⁷ The Benisheka massacre remains one of the gory incidents unleashed by the insurgents on travelers in the restive northeast region.

Students are other category of victims of the terrorist attacks on the highways. It was reported that twelve (12) students who were travelling along Damaturu-Maiduguri road to write the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Maiduguri were ambushed and killed. Similarly, some students lost their lives while travelling from Biu to Maiduguri to write the University entrance examination, the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME).⁸ The killing of students led

to cancelation of the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination in Maiduguri in April, 2013 in Borno State by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).⁹ Military personnel on operational patrols were ambushed and killed by insurgents along the major highways in the region. Traders on business trips were not spared. Five traders from Bodija market in Ibadan were reportedly shot on the highway in Yobe State on 5 May, 2013. Two months later, on 3rd July, 201, ten traders from Ibadan were also killed in the state¹⁰ Seven persons were found beheaded by the insurgents in Makintamari village along the Damaturu-Maiduguri road in Kaga Local Government Area of Borno State.¹¹

In border areas, some communities in southern and northeastern part of Borno State have been isolated from the rest of the country as a result of incessant attacks on the major roads and bridges in the area. According to a resident in Gwoza, “They came, killed many people, burnt houses and destroyed a bridge...”.¹² A bridge at Limankara, a border village in Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State was bombed in April, 2014.¹³ Other bridges at Gamboru-Ngala that linked Borno State with Cameroon and those that connect the state with Adamawa and Chad Republic were bombed by the insurgents in May, 2014.¹⁴ The destruction of the bridges cut the people off from the proximate communities in the state and disrupted the ease movement of good and services in the area. Mr. Andrew Tada, a resident of Gwoza who fled to Maiduguri at the wake of insurgents’ attacks on Gwoza and proximate communities echoed his frustration and helplessness when he lamented:

I have not gone to my home town for about a year now. At first, the *Boko Haram* people were always attacking villages and towns around Gwoza. These attacks forced many to flee the area and since then, many of us aren’t willing to take the risk of going home but the worst thing now is that roads to our towns have been destroyed. We can’t even go to Gwoza now and people there can’t come out. We are completely cut off from the rest of Nigeria.¹⁵

A frightful dimension to the terrorists' onslaught on travelers is the targeting of its attacks on the traditional monarchs. On 30 May, 2014, the Emir of Gwoza, Alhaji Shehu Mustapha Idris Timt was killed while travelling on convoy with the emirs of Askira and Uba to the funeral rites of the late emir of Gombe, Alhaji Shehu Abubakar. The terrorist attacked the convey killing the emir of Gwoza while the other two emirs narrowly escaped unhurt.¹⁶ Due to precarious nature of insecurity in the area, none of the traditional rulers from within and outside the region was able to attend the burial rites of the slain emir of Gwoza. The Borno State governor, Alhaji Kashim Shettima who attended the burial was said to have been escorted by 150 security operatives of the 7th Division; Nigerian Army, Maiduguri. Confirming the risks involved in travelling on roads in the region, Kashim Shettima in sheer bravado confessed that "travelling to Gwoza takes more than courage" ¹⁷ The governor was also quoted to have testified that:

If I say I was not petrified travelling through that ... road to Gwoza I would be lying because that road had been designated a no-go area for about two months now due to the incessant attacks and killings that occur there.¹⁸

The heightened insecurity in the region made President Goodluck Jonathan to cancel his planned visit to Chibok in Borno State where over 200 girls were abducted by Boko Haram on 14 April, 2014. In addition, the covey of the presidential committee on the rescue of Chibok girls was reportedly attacked in Bama in Borno State in the course of carrying out their assignments. These attacks portend serious threats to travellers in the region.

Foreign and local contractors working on road projects in Maiduguri and Gombe had been either killed or kidnapped at the construction sites. A Chinese construction worker and five local staff of CCC Construction Company were killed in Maiduguri. Seven expatriate staff of Setraco

Construction Company were kidnapped by the insurgents. The kidnapping and/or hostage taking of alien workers and tourists in the region have been attributed to Ansarau sect; a splinter group of Boko Haram.¹⁹ Two engineers of the Federal Ministry of Works were slaughtered by the insurgents. The incessant attacks on road construction workers by the insurgents had adversely affected road rehabilitation and construction works in the region. This development made the Federal government to suspend all road projects in the region.²⁰ In wake of the heightened terror attacks and kidnapping of expatriates that the United States Department of International affairs alerted her nationals in Nigeria warning them to avoid travelling to the Northeast region especially Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States stressing that the region was not safe and secured for investment and other socio-economic activities.

Trans-Border Mobility

Nigeria has a long history of trans-border mobility with her neighbouring countries which predates the colonial era. The enabling factors that enhanced trans-border interaction are many, but they can be reduced to socio-economic, linguistic and cultural factors. Nigerian nationals and peoples of the neighbouring countries like Niger, Chad and Cameroon have been involved in trans-border crossings or mobility in the conveyance of people and goods before the advent of colonialism.²¹ Despite colonial boundaries, the peoples of the region still have good socio-economic and cultural ties with the people in neighbouring countries. This has enhanced the free flow of trading contacts and movement of people across national boundaries, except in areas where such movements were restricted by either environmental or internecine strife. Along the present borders, one could see the same ethnic group tends to settle on either side of the borders. They also tend to share the same

language or dialect and exhibit identical socio-economic characteristics. These situations make it easy for inter-mingling of peoples in different countries in the area.²²

The peculiar and precarious nature of the neighbouring countries makes it exigent for them to rely heavily on Nigeria for survival. The shared economic and socio-cultural contacts between the people in the north east and part parts of Northern Nigeria with the neighbouring countries, makes cross border interaction to be very easy and mobility unhindered. The porous nature of Nigeria`s northeast region with the neighbouring countries has made it vulnerable to insurgents` attacks who had terrorized many communities along the borders. The extremists also bombed the only border bridge linking northeastern Borno to neighboring Chad and Cameroon disrupting free flows of traffic across the border.²³ Providing the historical explanation on the dilemma or misfortunes of border regions, Asiwaju reminds us that “the sub-national areas inhabited by gateway communities have been among the most depressed socially and economically border regions were traditionally viewed as disadvantaged areas”.²⁴ The spate of killing of travellers on transit and destruction of vital transport infrastructure in the area had made residents of these border communities to face a lot of socio-economic challenges. Selected cases of terrorist attacks on road users and bridges in the Northeast region and border areas are presented in the table below.

Selected Cases of Insurgents` Attacks on Travellers and Destruction of Bridges in the Northeast Region

S/N0	Date of Attack	Location	Victims
1	30 May, 2011	Maiduguri, Borno State	Bomb exploded on the early morning along Baga road in Maiduguri metropolis killing 13 people and injuring about 40 persons
2	12 July, 2011	Maiduguri, Borno State	Boko Haram insurgents hurled an explosive device on a moving military patrol vehicle which claimed five lives

3	16 April, 2013	Monguno Secondary School, Monguno, Borno State	Many students Monguno Secondary School who went to write of the school the West African Examination Council (WAEC) Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) were ambushed and brutally slaughtered by slitting their throats on their way home from examination centres.
4	3 May, 2013	Yobe State	Ten traders from Bodija Market were killed by the insurgents
5	5 July, 2013	Yobe State	Two traders from Bodija market killed by the insurgents
6	1 October, 2013	Makintamari Village in Kaka Local Government Area, Borno State	Seven persons beheaded along Damaturu-Maiduguri road
7	20 October, 2013	Gambaru-Ngala, Borno State	Insurgents in military uniform attacked motorists on a remote road between Ikwa and Gambaru-Ngala on the border with Cameroon.
8	Mid April, 2014	Limanka village in Gwoza Local Government Area in Borno State	Limankara bridge bombed
9	8 May, 2014	Ngala-Gambaru, Borno State	A bridge linking Nigeria to Cameroon was bombed including 314 trucks and cars.
10	12 April, 2014	Borno State	Students travelling on 8 vehicles from Biu to Maiduguri to write the UTME university entrance examinations were ambushed and killed along Biu-Maiduguri road.
11	16 April, 2014	Limankara village in Gwoza Local Government Area in Borno State	Over 30 persons killed including a bridegroom and family.
12	30 May, 2014	Biu-Garkida road Borno State	The convoy of Emirs of Gwoza, Askira and Uba were attacked on the Biu-Garkida road on the way to Gombe. The emir of Gwoza was killed while the other two emirs narrowly escaped unhurt
13	30 May, 2014	Potiskum, Yobe State	Corpse of two unidentified persons found on the road side.

14	10 June, 2014	Borno State	19 people killed by insurgents on the highway near a border town of Logumani.
15	18 June, 2014	Borno State	A commercial driver shot along Maiduguri-Dambo- Biu road, but passengers escaped
15	June, 2014	Bama, Borno State	Presidential Committee members constituted on the rescue of Chibok students abducted by insurgents in April 2014 were attacked while carrying out their assignments.

Source: Compiled by the author from several sources

The above list is not exhaustive as there are many unreported cases of insurgents' attacks on travellers in the region since insurgents at times; operate in isolated rural communities with poor communication network and bad roads. There is no accurate data to show the number of victims of insurgents' attacks on the highways and trans-border crossing in the area. It is believed that a substantial number of travelers were killed. This has made road transport in the region to be accompanied with trepidation.

Implications of Insurgency

The Boko Haram attacks in the Northeast region had devastated the socio-economic activities in the region. It specifically affected the economic fortunes of Maiduguri, a city known to be one of the commercial centres in Western Sudan since the period of trans-saharan trade. As a flourishing commercial and industrial base of the northeast, Maiduguri has attracted people from neighbouring countries such as Niger Republic, Chad, Cameroun and people of southern Nigeria and elsewhere. The Boko Haram persistent killings and bombings in the city have made economic activities to plummet. It has caused mass relocation of migrant and indigenous groups to more secured cities like

Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Ibadan and others in southern Nigeria. It has frightened expatriate investors away. Expatriates like the Lebanese, Chinese, Indians and other foreign investors who have been doing business and have huge investments in the region for some years had either closed down or left for fear of been kidnapped or killed.

The Boko Haram siege on Maiduguri and Kano had caused the two industrial and commercial hubs in northern Nigeria to be on the verge of collapse. According to a prominent Kano businessman and erstwhile President of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), Alhaji Bashir Borodo:

The North suffers a setback, because nobody would put his money in a place where there is insecurity. The commercial cities of Kano and Maiduguri rely more than 80 per cent on outsiders who come in to buy goods. Traders come from Niger, Chad and Cameroun to buy in Maiduguri while Kano is the supply centres for traders and businessmen in the North-west and other parts of the country. The prevailing insecurity in the North has compelled many traders to stop coming to Kano for fear of been attacked...the entire north is losing N25 billion daily to the Boko Haram crisis.²⁵

The impact of the insurgency in the Northeast region is also felt in the popular Kanti-Kwari textile and Kofar Ruwa automobile spare parts markets in Kano. Some of the traders complained that they had recorded low patronage because some of their customers from Maiduguri, Chad, Niger, Cameroon and southern Nigeria had stopped coming to Kano to buy goods for fear of their safety.²⁶ Another informant stated that their customers only come to Kano occasionally and sometimes they will send one of them to buy goods on their behalf.²⁷

Economic activities in the region and other parts of Northern Nigeria have been hampered by the activities of terrorists. Insecurity in the region has taken away substantial part of the market as northern Nigeria accounts for more than 30 per cent of the Nigerian market. The distribution of

manufactured goods has been hampered and led to significant reduction in turnover and reduction in sales by companies operating from other parts of the country. Commenting on the adverse of the terrorists' activities on trade relations between Nigeria and Cameroon, a Nigerian-based businessman in Garoua, a border town in Cameroon maintained that Nigerians on the border areas had been migrating to Cameroon in droves. He stated that:

Nigerians come into Cameroon from Banki in Borno to Marwa in Cameroon. We receive them and offer them assistance to enable them settle down without problems...The growing insecurity in northern parts of Nigeria has also affected our businesses and interests in northern Cameroon... virtually everything we use in Garoua comes from Yola, Maiduguri and Kano. These days, Nigerian and Cameroonian businessmen and women in Cameroon are afraid to come to Nigeria to do business. In the past, goods from Nigeria sustained the economies of northern Cameroon. Nowadays, business is no longer normal as people are afraid to go to Nigeria for business.²⁸

While highlighting the dwindling business in the area since the outbreak of insurgency, another source posits that:

“We have not been finding it easy since the Boko Haram attacks began. For us to enter Kano, Maiduguri or Yola to buy goods, we must weigh all options relating to our safety and security....“This has made some of us to prefer going to Nigeria through Younde or Douala in the southern part of Cameroon, which is a longer journey. The journey from Garoua in northern Cameroon to Younde in the south takes three days by road or rail, except for those who can afford to travel by air”.²⁹

It is glaring that the insurgency had affected the socio-economic systems of the region. The North-East region is reported to be the poorest region in Nigeria since 1985, with the highest incidence of poverty (ranging between 54.9%-72.2%). It has the highest unemployment rate and number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) totaling to about 11,360.³⁰ According to United Nations refugee agency, 350,000 inhabitants of northeast Nigeria are now refugees in Cameroun, Chad and Niger.

The Nigerian Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in April 2014 admitted facing challenges in resettling 250,000 persons displaced in the northeast Nigeria by insurgents.³¹ An informant confirmed that many displaced persons in the border communities of Adamawa such as Michika, Mubi, Marwa amongst others had sought refuge in Cameroon.³²

The insurgents` threats to road transportation had deepened the already socio-economic crises in the region. It has restricted movement of people, disrupted supply of goods, hampered access to basic needs/services and farming. The inhabitants in the region especially in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa states have experienced pains, sorrows, anguish, losses, deprivation and seclusion. Boko Haram has caused monumental physical and psychological damage in the region and other parts of Northern and Central Nigeria. It has traumatized many families and destroyed many public establishments and transport infrastructure.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the insurgency in the North-east region and its implications on inter-state and trans-border mobility. Northern Nigeria, particularly the northeast region is obviously facing unprecedented social and economic crises. The insurgency has turned the northeast which used to be one of the most stable and peaceful regions in the country to become the most volatile, insecure and high risk region in the last five years. This has led to lost of several lives and property worth millions of naira. According to Human Rights Watch, the insurgency has claimed more than 3,000 lives since it began in 2009. Recently, the United Nations confirmed that 6 million people had been directly affected by the insurgency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States.³³ Between 2013 and 2014 the region has witnessed the escalation of insurgents` threats to travellers on the major highways and rural roads as well as the bombing of bridges, which obviously marked a new trend in the war of terror in the Northeast enclave. The Northeast, which is strategically located on a crossroad between

Nigeria and the neighbouring countries, mobility in the region, is now often fraught with fear, uncertainty and trepidation. The fact that transportation is a necessary pre-condition for sustain economic growth of any state or region, insurgency had obviously hampered the economic growth and development of the area. This is because ease movement of people and goods acts as a catalyst for rapid socio-economic development and invariably boosts trade and other socio-economic interactions among the people is being hampered by threats of insurgents.

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Appendix i

A Bombed Bridge on the Nigeria-Cameroon Border



Source: *Saturday Sunnewonline*, May 24, 2014

Appendix ii

Wreckage of Vehicles damaged by the Terrorists



A Soldier and Other Government Officials Inspecting the Broken Bridge



Sources: *Saturday Sunnewonline*, 11 May, 2014