Insurgency and Environmental Security in the West African Sahel: The Case of Northeast Nigeria

Prof. Usman A. Tar

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Prof. Usman A. Tar
Professor, Defense and Security Studies, Nigerian Defense Academy

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Introduction

In recent years, the Sahel has been in the global spotlight due to a handful of national crises, including a prolonged drought, extremist violence and terrorism, insurgencies, arms, drugs, and human trafficking. The pace of high-profile terrorist attacks has accelerated, and the death toll is high enough to compete with other regions of Africa as well as globally, where violent extremist groups are most active. Several emerging trends in extremist-driven violence in Africa are impacting how regional governments, local communities, and international actors are reacting to the situation. Since the rebranding from a domestic Algerian Salafist group to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in early 2007, a number of offshoots and other terrorist organizations have been formed in the region, including Mokhtar Belmokhtar's Katibat (battalion) al-Murabitun (Those Who Remain Steadfast), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Boko Haram, along with its splinter group, Ansaru. Though each of these terrorist organizations have different backgrounds and dynamics, it is documented that they have communicated with one another. What is not clear, however, is the degree of any existing inter-group alliances (US Department of State, 2012). Nevertheless, the likelihood of sustained or increased cooperation between these violent extremist groups makes it imperative to examine the linkages between violent terrorist groups in the Sahel corridor, Lake Chad Basin and North African States. The Sahel region, because of its strategic location and vast ungoverned space, acts as a center of gravity in the current conflict between violent extremist groups and States in the region.

The West African Sahel has become a theatre for ongoing violent conflicts and civil wars. Various forms of conflicts – resource-based, ideational, and struggles for power – have conspired to unleash a "geography of unstable and volatile states." Recent military interventions in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have created a "military belt" in the Sahel, with direct implications for state sovereignty, regional security, and governance in the West African coastal region. The human and financial costs of armed conflict in the Sahel are massive, including its devastating impact on the environment – rivers and lakes, vegetation, and wildlife have all been threatened. In recent years, researchers and analysts have become more interested in the question of how environm-

ental degradation.[1] However, in recognition of this neglect, and the long-term and widespread negative impacts caused by environmental degradation, experts have coined the term ecocide, literally meaning "the killing of the environment."

In Nigeria, for instance, organised violence is not a new occurrence in her historical evolution – the country has witnessed violent conflicts over many years, which has posed credible challenges to her corporate existence. The astronomical rise of terrorism and insurgency, as represented by Islamist insurgency and banditry in the in the northeast, are indicative of the multiple structural and institutional crises bogging down Nigeria, leading to the labelling of the country as "the open sore of a continent."[2] An example of organised violence afflicting the region is Boko Haram, a radical Islamist movement that emerged in 2009. The group combines a sectarian, radical Islamic agenda – with violence. Its stated objective is the establishment of a Sharia state, but it also shows little interest in actually governing or implementing economic development. It is based on fundamentalist Wahhabi theological ideology and principle, opposing the broadly tolerant Islam of the traditional northern Nigerian establishment.

Boko Haram has attacked Nigeria's police and army, homes, schools, religious buildings, and public institutions. The group's attacks have undermined security across the northeast region, shattering its economy and development. Since 2009, more than 20,000 people have been killed in Boko Haram-related violence. An estimated 1.5 million people are living in internally displaced persons' (IDPs) camps, having been forced to flee their homes, and 4.6 million need humanitarian assistance, having fled the Boko Haram's savage attacks. In response, the Nigerian State launched a Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency (CT-COIN) operation code-named "Operation Zaman Lafiya" in 2013, which was later revamped and rechristened "Operation Zaman Lafiya Dole" (Peace by Force) in 2016. In spite of this, the conflict has persisted.

This protracted armed struggle between Boko Haram and the Nigerian State, and the CT-COIN counter-insurgency operations, might already be the most overanalysed armed conflict in Nigerian history, in terms of the financial, human, and material casualties. However, the negative impact of the conflict on the physical environment in the northeast still remains grossly under analysed.

It is against this contextual background that this paper interrogates the impact of armed conflict on environmental security in the West African Sahel, with particular reference to the insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. The paper is structured into seven sections. Section One contains this introduction. Section Two deals with conceptualisation of terrorism, insurgency, violent conflict, CT-COIN, and environmental security.

Section Three offers a background of the West Africa Sahel, with reference to the nature, dynamics, and intersections of violent insurgencies and armed conflicts in the region; while Section Four offers a case analysis of the impact of insurgency on environmental security. Section Five interrogates the impact of armed conflict and counter-insurgency operations on environmental security in the West African Sahel, particularly referencing Nigeria's northeast theatre of conflict. Section Five also offers conclusive remarks.

Conceptual Discourse and Theoretical Framing

A number of key concepts pertinent to this paper need to be defined. These include *terrorism*, *insurgency*, *violent conflict*, *CT-COIN*, and *environmental security.*

Terrorism

Several descriptions of the term "terrorism" abound in the literature. Schmid and Jongman define Terrorism as:

> *...an anxiety-inspired method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi) clandestine individuals, groups, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and the main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.*[3]

This definition, though robust, is cumbersome and difficult to comprehend. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2010) offers an alternative definition by distinguishing distinct categories of terrorism:

> *The term "terrorism" means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents...The term "international terrorism" means terrorism involving the territory or the citizens of more than one country...The term "terrorist group" means any group that practices, or has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism."*[4]

The above description gives rise to definitional vagueness owing to unnecessary qualification, and arrives at subjective conjecture and overgeneralization by the use of the term's "premeditation" and "international terrorist" (as if domestic terrorists are acceptable or condonable).[5] All these add to the "burden of clarity" in seeking an acceptable definition that identifies the characteristics unique to terrorism. This is further compounded by the specific inclusion of the term "clandestine agents," as the clandestine activities of agents belonging to other governments are subject to their own dynamism and taxonomy; espionage, sabotage, covert action, and direct involvement of such agents in activities contemporarily classified as international terrorism is extremely rare.[6]

To avoid the pitfalls in defining terrorism, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (Terrorism Financing Convention), which facilitates the prosecution of persons accused of involvement in the financing of terrorism, adopted a two-pronged "definitional approach" of first simply listing particular criminal acts regularly committed by terrorists and criminalising them. The Convention achieves this by simply referring to acts that contravene criminal statutes already in existence.[7] Article 2(1)(a) of the Convention defines terrorist activities to include inter alia, offences created under some other international conventions that deal with such matters as hijacking, hostage-taking, attacks on heads of states or diplomats, bombings of public places, and the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Furthermore, Davis[8] observed the complexity of this method when describing terrorism, as it captures wide-ranging actions that have little to do with established interpretations of terrorism.

The second approach to classifying terrorism adopted by the Terrorist Financing Convention (TFC) in Article 2(1)(b) defines terrorism as:

> *Any act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act.*[9]

Thus, terrorism involves the combination of distinct forms of violence and motivation. While the violence causes death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, the motivations are to either instill widespread fear or to influence the actions of governments or international organisations.[10] A common denominator in all its manifestations is how, as a strategic choice, terrorism follows a three-stage method: disorientation, target response, and gaining legitimacy. From the foregoing approaches to several other approaches that exist, scholars, international organizations, and countries have been able to arrive at satisfactory, albeit imperfect, definitions of terrorism.

For the purpose of this discourse, the approach encapsulated in Article 2(1)(b) of the Terrorist Financing Convention is adopted as a working definition.

Insurgency

Insurgency, according to Powell and Abraham,[11] refers to a violent move by a person or group of persons to oppose the enforcement of law or running of government, a revolt against the constituted authority of the state, or of partaking in a rebellion. From the foregoing definition, insurgency violates a constitution's criminal law and the international treaty obligations of a nation in the following circumstance:

> *When it constitutes an attack on defenceless citizens and other property resulting into injuries, loss of lives and properties, as well as forced or massive internal displacement of people out of their habitual places of residence. When it drives business/investors away from an insecure area and also when it constitutes domestic and international crimes punishable by law such as treasonable felony, terrorism, murder, crimes against humanity and genocide.*[12]

Likewise, the British Army Counterinsurgency Manual, Army Field Manual,[13] defined insurgency as "the actions of a minority group within a state which are intent on forcing political change by means of a mixture of subversion, propaganda, and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate the broad mass of the people to accept such a change" – an organised armed political struggle, whose objective might be varied. The definition, though deficient in failing to incorporate the peculiarities of modern insurgencies, still follows with that of the U.S Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual,[14] which defined insurgency as "an organised and protracted politico-military struggle calculated to weaken the control and legitimacy of a recognised government or other political authority while increasing insurgents' jurisdiction."

Moore[15] defined the concept more appropriately, as it fits into the peculiar features of modern insurgencies. He described insurgency as "a long-drawn-out violent conflict in which one or more groups seek to take-over or fundamentally change the political or social order in a state or region through the use of prolonged violence, insurrection, social disruption, and political engagement." This definition is wide-ranging and appropriately defines the concept, as it portrays more explicitly the extent and character of modern insurgencies and squarely situates it within the political and social dimensions. Therefore, it has been adopted as a working definition in this paper.

Violent Conflict

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human society. However, violent conflict is not an anomaly. Violent conflict, like every other concept in the social sciences, defies a universally acknowledged definition. According to Rummel,[16] conflict is "the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups in the society," while armed conflict is "the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of opposing and individual interests and goals." As such, conflict-resolution scholars conclude that conflict has its basis in human needs, and it is the denial of these needs that causes resolvable differences to degenerate into armed conflict. Likewise,[17] Coser considers conflict to be "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals."

Scholars such as Hussein[18] and Hussein et al.,[19] point out that the concept of "conflict" has been used as an umbrella term to cover a wide range of interactions. Such interactions include tension between resource users, disagreement between interest groups, and large-scale violence between groups, which according to them "are qualitatively different from each other and clearly of different degrees."[20] In order to clear this uncertainty and develop a disaggregated notion of conflict, they attempted to distinguish between "conflicts of interest, competition, and violent conflict." Conflict of interest is defined as "the fundamental relationship between people who share the same social and geographical spaces on a permanent or temporal basis and depend on the same resources as land and water, while having different objectives and interests." This type of conflict is experienced at different levels, including within and between households and within and between groups. Accordingly, conflicts of interest may take place between groups with contrasting worldviews and livelihood strategies. Once there is a conflict of interest, the stage is set for competition that may lead to violence. Though there is no automatic cause-effect relationship between conflict of interest, competition, and violent conflict, the likelihood is heightened with the scarcity of resources, on which the groups depend, and the asymmetrical manner in which the effects of scarcity are experienced by different groups.[21]

Furthermore, Galtung[22] regards violence as the basis of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is, and argues that violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which obstructs the decrease of this distance. Nevertheless, it is imperative to distinguish between "state violence" and non-state "organized violence." State violence is often conceived as the "legitimate" use of force by the armed forces and state paramilitaries to ensure law and order or achieve the objectives of national defence and security (in this case, CT-COIN), while "organised violence" is

conceived as the "illegitimate" use of violence by an armed group to achieve a given political objective outside the established norms of public communication and political expression (insurgency and terrorism).

Organised violence, therefore, refers to:

> *...the use of destructive measures by an armed non-state actor against "soft targets" (especially unarmed individuals, communities) and "hard targets" (such as strategic infrastructure, population centres) with a view to causing fear, intimidation, coercion and acquiescence on the part of the citizens and, more generally, forcing the state to compromise on its core values. The extreme violent measures include suicide bombing, use of improvised explosive devices, kidnapping abduction, and assassinations. By challenging the core values and organising principles of the state, terrorist violence tends to erode the legitimacy of the state and its constituted authority.*[23]

Applied to this paper, violent armed conflict (which is equated with terror-related violence) manifests in the use of destructive measures by an armed non-state actor, like Boko Haram, against "soft targets" (especially unarmed individuals and communities) and "hard targets" (such as strategic infrastructure and population centers), with the goal of causing fear, intimidation, coercion, and acquiescence on the part of the citizens and, more generally, forcing the state to compromise its core values. These extreme violent measures include suicide bombing, use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), kidnapping, abduction, and assassinations. By challenging the core values and organising principles of the state, terrorist violence tends to erode the legitimacy of the state and its constituted authority.

Counter-Terrorism and Counterinsurgency (CT-COIN)

Counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency are rhetorically loaded concepts – repression, military, and paramilitary actions, and systematic human rights abuses are often justified in their name. However, they hold more objective meanings as well, though the difference between those meanings can be confusing. Both concepts have been used to describe similar state activities, but they are not interchangeable. Counter-terrorism refers to multifaceted measures or operations, which can be adopted internally within a nation or across borders in conjunction with other international bodies or agencies, to deal with the threat of terrorism. To effectively implement counter-terrorism strategies, it is necessary that the perception of the terrorists and their direct or indirect victims be adjudged and ascertained. Terrorism could be committed by armed groups or individuals of an armed group within a nation, with or without external collaborations. According to Deflem,[24] counter-terrorism operations can be viewed as a matter of social control, including various mechanisms and institutions that define and respond to terrorism.

In his view, counter-terrorism operations involve measures taken by the governments of nation states and by international governing bodies.

Deflem[25] further establishes how the most formal component of social control is represented by the criminal justice system, including its agents and organisations such as the police. In the view of Ladan,[26] counter-terrorism operations are measures or initiatives that the state put on ground, with a view to prevent and control any act of terror, irrespective of identities of perpetrators and victims. Ladan's definition is based on the fact that any counter-terrorism operation must aim to prevent acts of terror unleashed on state institutions or infrastructures, the impact of which the civilians will feel the mostly harshly. He also noted that state mechanisms, such as the police, intelligence community, the military, as well as judiciary and other MDA, must work together to address terrorist acts unleashed by groups such as political actors, religious extremists, and social groups or separatist organisations. This definition covers the full range of counter-terrorism operations to create conducive environment for the socioeconomic wellbeing of the nation. It also notes the essence of the protection of lives and property. The definition is considered suitable for this paper and has been adopted.

On the other hand, counter-insurgency involves a combination of measures undertaken by the legitimate government of a country to curb or suppress an insurgency. While insurgents try to overthrow the existing political authority in order to establish their own, the COIN forces try to reinstate the existing political structures and degrade or defeat the insurgents. COIN largely holds a monopoly on violence, legitimacy, and other material resources often exclusively reserved for states. These factors also emphasise the need for COIN to uphold law and order, something that technically limits their potential action in the fight against insurgencies.[27] The US Army Marine Corps COIN Field Manual[28] defined COIN as "a military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency." The Joint Publication COIN Operations define COIN as a comprehensive civilian and military efforts, taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances. It observed how COIN is primarily political, incorporating a wide range of activities of which security is only one. While this new definition includes a key point of addressing core insurgents' grievances, it fails to reflect the different facets of COIN operations. Therefore, Mumford's definition is found to be appropriate in this paper.

From the nuanced examination of CT and COIN, what has come to the fore is that, while closely related, they are nevertheless analytically discrete. The particular way in which CT and COIN are different and related is evident from the discussion of the phenomena of terrorism and insurgency, and what it means for a state to "counter" them.

Environmental Security

Environmental security is a multidisciplinary concept, which examines the threats posed by environmental events and trends to individuals, communities, or nation-states. It may focus on the impact of human conflict and international relations on the environment, or on how environmental problems cross state borders.[29] Hence, environmental security equates security with economic and social wellbeing, thus blurring the line between security and development studies. It also underlines the impact environmental issues can have on traditional security problems (conflicts, regime change, political instability, etc). Accordingly, it allows for the securitisation of various social problems (AIDS, migration, poverty, etc.), which might be used for political purposes by legitimising the use of military force or restricting human rights.[30]

From the foregoing, the central question of environmental security centers on how various environmental factors such as climate change, resources, and processes can alter the security of states or vice versa – it investigates the relationship between different environmental issues, their effects and security questions. Thus, the environment is considered as an integrated part of a security concept, together with the dimensions of economic, social, energy or information security.

Theorizing the Linkages between Armed Conflict, CT-COIN and Environmental Security

This section looks at the analytical setting for a comprehensive environmental security analysis. However, to achieve this objective, the question that readily comes to mind is: what are the linkages between armed conflict, CT-COIN, and environmental security? There are five broad theoretical schools of thought that seek to explain such linkages, underlined by four key questions: (i) what makes an impact (source of threat); (ii) to whom/what an impact is made ("victim"); (iii) what kind of impact is made (threat); and (iv) how an impact is made (mechanism and "channels").[31]

The first school of thought is the Resource Scarcity School, which examines the nexus between scarcity of renewable resources, such as fresh water and various internal and international conflicts – their incidence, intensity, and dynamics. The second is the Resource Abundance School, which explores the relations between non-renewable resources such as oil, gold, diamonds etc., and internal conflicts, especially civil wars.[32] The third is the Climate Change School, whose central focus is the analysis of natural and human-induced environmental change, and its implications for international security, socio-economic development, and social disruptions in various regions. The fourth is the Human Security School, whose focus of environmental impacts on individual and people-centered security, which is closely related to sustainable development issues like food security, health and education, welfare, and gender issues.

Lastly is the National Disasters School, which studies the socio-economic impact of various disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, with specific emphasis on vulnerability and adaptive capacity of several social systems (states, communities, etc.).[33]

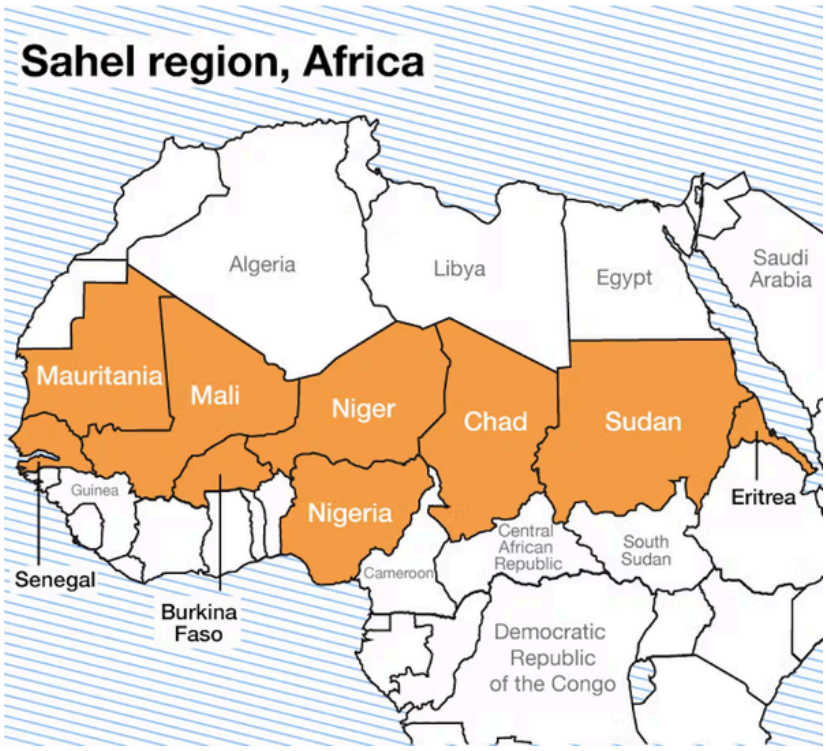
For the purpose of this paper, the theoretical underpinning of environmental security, adopted for analysis, is that of the fourth school of thought – the Human Security School, which is based on the concept of human security. It helps us to properly understand the impact of armed conflict and CT-COIN operations on the physical environment in Northeast Nigeria, and how this affects the human security of the populace now.

Background: The West African Sahel – a New Centre of Gravity in sub-Saharan Africa

Africa's Sahel region is a vast 3,860-kilometre arc-like land mass lying to the direct south of the Sahara Desert and extending east-west across the breadth of the African continent. A largely semi-arid belt of barren, sandy, and rock-strewn land, the Sahel marks the physical and cultural evolution between the continent's more fertile tropical regions to the south, and its desert in the north. Geographic definitions of the Sahel region vary. Generally, the Sahel stretches from Senegal on the Atlantic coast, through parts of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan to Eritrea on the Red Sea coast. Culturally and historically, the Sahel is a shoreline between the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. This means it is the site of interaction between Arabic, Islamic, and nomadic cultures from the north and indigenous and traditional cultures from the south.[34]

In West Africa, the Sahel is also a geopolitical entity. In 1973 the Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) was formed by Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal to group countries that were then becoming interdependent. Between them, the CILSS members cover 5.7 million sq. m of land. Sahel-like terrain and climate are also found in non-CILSS members in West Africa, particularly the north of Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Ghana. The vast size of the Sahel makes it a strategic location in Sub-Saharan Africa. Concerns abound over the region's vast spaces, often beyond the reach of the state, in an era of violent criminal and political movements operating across borders. The Sahel also suffers from ethno-religious tensions, political instability, poverty, and natural disasters.

Figure 1: Geographical Map of the Sahel Region



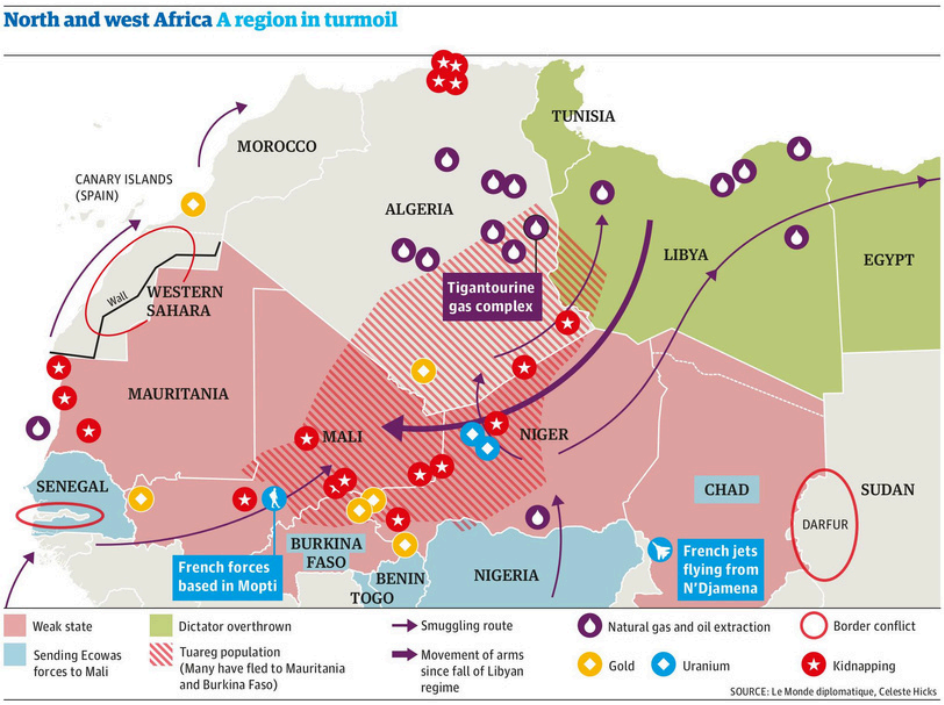
Source: *The Conversation, 2019*

Mapping Violent Extremist Groups in the West African Sahel

The countries of the Sahel are among the world's poorest and face complex security challenges, including ethnic conflict and separatism, banditry, and organized crimes. They also have a history of poor governance and military intervention in politics. While violent Islamist ideology does not appear to have been embraced by most Sahel residents, it likely resonates with certain marginalized populations, as do the financial resources wielded by AQIM and other groups.[35] Armed Islamist groups have proliferated across North and West Africa since 2011, amid political upheavals in the Arab world, governance, and security crises in Libya and Mali, and an Islamist insurgency in northern Nigeria. Many of these groups appear primarily focused on a domestic or regional agenda, but some have targeted U.S. or other foreign interests in the region, and others may aspire to more international aims. According to the Caliphate Global Workforce,[36] North Africa is also a prominent source of foreign fighters for Al Qaeda-linked groups and the Islamic State organization in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. In North Africa, numerous reports suggest that Libya has become a hub for regional terrorist actors, and Tunisia has faced increasingly large-scale attacks by individuals who reportedly trained there. Political instituions in Algeria and Morocco have remained comparatively stable, but both countries

claim to have broken up domestic and transnational terrorist cells and regularly express concern about spillover. Libya and Algeria are home to groups whose pledges of allegiance to the Islamic State have been publicly accepted by IS leadership.

Figure 2: Conflict Map of the Sahel Region



Source: nesastrategist.wordpress.com

The oldest continuously active transnational Islamist terrorist group in the region is AQIM, which grew out of Algeria's 1990s civil conflict and began to carry out attacks in West Africa's Sahel region in the early 2000s (prior to its affiliation with Al Qaeda in 2006-2007). More recently, it has sought ties with extremist groups in Tunisia and Libya. The group, which has long displayed internal tensions, has reproduced a number of offshoots and splinter movements in recent years. These include Al Murabitoun, led by longtime AQIM cell commander Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar (who is Algerian), along with several Malian and Mauritanian-led groups.[37]

Al Shabaab held significant territory in south-central Somalia, including the capital Mogadishu, in the late 2000s, until a U.S.-backed African Union (AU) military force gained momentum against the insurgency in 2011-2012. Additional troop contributions have since allowed troops from the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the nascent Somali government to reclaim further territory, though their forces remain stretched.

Al Shabaab continues to wage a violent campaign against the Somali government, the AU mission, and international targets in Somalia; it has taken advantage of security gaps to re-infiltrate rural areas that AMISOM has been unable to hold. It has also threatened the countries participating in AMISOM and conducted deadly attacks in Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda. Al Shabaab activity in Kenya has increased significantly in recent years; the group has killed hundreds of Kenyans in attacks since 2012.[38]

Boko Haram's ideology encompasses a worldview that combines an exclusivist interpretation of Sunni Islam, one that rejects not only Western influence but also democracy, constitutionalism, and more moderate forms of Islam, with "politics of victimhood" that resonate in parts of Nigeria's underdeveloped north. Some of Boko Haram's fighters have reportedly been drawn into the group by financial incentive or under threat. According to some scholars, conditions in the northeast of Nigeria gave rise to Boko Haram, which is responsible for a far higher level of deadly violence than any other violent Islamist group in Africa.[39] Key factors include a hangover of overlapping intercommunal and Muslim-Christian tensions in Nigeria; perceived disparities in the application of laws and access to development, jobs, and investment in the north; and universal frustration with elite corruption and other state abuses. Nigerian forces' occasionally heavy-handed responses to Boko Haram since 2009 has reportedly fueled recruitment in some areas. The reported erosion of traditional leaders' perceived legitimacy among local populations in northeast Nigeria and northern Cameroon may also have contributed to the group's ascendance. The shrinking of Lake Chad, previously one of Africa's largest lakes but now described by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization as an "ecological catastrophe," has exacerbated tensions among communities in the area that Boko Haram has reportedly sought to exploit.[40]

From the foregoing trends and as shown in Figure 2, the conflict arising from violent extremism in individual states are not happening in vacuums – rather, it's an indication of an entire region embroiled in conflict. However, these developments in the Sahel region are the products of both local and global dynamics, which gave impetus to the proliferation of violent extremist groups. We shall consider a few of the dynamics before delving into the linkages. Some of the dynamics that gave impetus to the proliferation of violent extremist groups in the Sahel corridor include, among others, the explosion of African-led groups, state collapse and political instability in North Africa, and transformation in warfare tactics.

- ***The Explosion of African-Led Groups*** – Al Qaeda's first acknowledged African affiliate, Algerian-led Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), was long presumed to have limited appeal among West African Muslims, and its interest in criminal activities often appeared to conceal its ideological commitment. Nevertheless, the rise of moderately powerful, locally-led violent Islamist groups in Somalia, Nigeria, and Mali over the past decade challenge past assumptions about the limited prospects for Islamist terrorism on the continent. Thus, Africa seems to have become a ground for competition between Al Qaeda affiliates and the Islamic State over recruits, affiliates, and perceived legitimacy.
- ***State Collapse in North Africa*** – Furthermore, state collapse in Libya and forced political transitions in Tunisia and Egypt have provided new vistas of opportunities for armed groups to create safe havens for training, increase their geographic spread, recruit followers, and equip themselves. Thus, contrary to some hopes, increased political openness has not protected Tunisia against domestic radicalization and recruitment. Conflict in Libya has spilled over its borders, engendering new flows of arms and combatants into Tunisia and West Africa's Sahel region. Similarly, political instability in North Africa has also drawn African recruits, seeking to join groups based in Libya or seeking to transit through North Africa en route to other global hotspots. This dynamic is further reinvigorated by the mutual distrust among North and Sub-Saharan African governments, which has regrettably subdued counterterrorism cooperation.
- ***A shift in Tactics from Regular to Irregular Warfare*** - Years before the "Islamic State" announced its caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014, Islamist extremist groups in Africa sought to hold, and in some cases govern, territory. For instance, Al Shabaab began to assert territorial control in Somalia in the mid-2000s, as did AQIM and two local affiliates in Mali in 2012, followed by Boko Haram in Nigeria and Islamic State-linked groups in Libya in 2014. However, military offensives by regional forces (in Somalia, Nigeria, and Libya) and French forces (in Mali) have upturned this trend, but gains are fragile. In response, extremists have reverted to asymmetric tactics and expanded the scope of their targets; this has made the ungoverned space in the Sahel corridor a beautiful bride.

The Globalization of Violent Extremism in the West African Sahel

As stated earlier, globalization has aided the funding and coordination of violent extremist groups around the world. Williams,[41] submits that with globalization, the flow of arms is no longer the exclusive control of nation-states, who find it difficult to track violent extremist activities since they have become decentralized and de-territorialized, having cells in different parts of the globe. Thus, violent extremist groups have acquired the capability to challenge national forces.[42]

The existence of a global interdependence chain and various interconnections has made possible the instant broadcast of terrorists' messages to a global audience.[43] Also, in order to spread their messages, recruit new adherents, and launch attacks, violent extremist groups utilize tools provided by globalization. In addition, given the globalization of organized crime in the last two decades, most weapons being used by terrorists' groups are gotten through illicit arms deals which are hatched, facilitated, and executed by the process of globalization. Besides, globalization facilitates funding and coordination of terrorist groups around the world. Accordingly, globalization is largely at the root of international collaborations and linkages between violent extremist groups in the world, and the Sahel region in particular. The manifestations of these linkages are outlined in this section.

In Nigeria, for instance, Boko Haram has expanded its operations beyond the country's borders in recent years due to increased military pressure within the territories of the country. Lake Chad's islands and waterways, Nigeria's vast Sambisa Forest, and the remote Mandara Mountains along the Nigeria-Cameroon border have been effective safe havens for Boko Haram fighters. The group has drawn some of its membership from neighboring countries, though there are no reliable public estimates of the number of non-Nigerian nationals in the group. Boko Haram has operated in northern Cameroon since at least 2013, and it began a series of cross-border attacks into Chad and Niger in early 2015, when those countries deployed troops into Nigeria in an effort to roll back its territorial gains. The group has links with other Islamic groups within and outside Africa. Its activities and operations are coordinated from Mali with funding and training from a number of sources, including a United Kingdom-based Al-Muntada Trust Fund, while its membership has spread to other West African countries such as Benin, Niger, Mauritania, and up to Cameroun and Chad, which also provide sanctuary for its members.

The linkages between Boko Haram, Ansaru, and AQIM are less clear. When Boko Haram first transitioned into a jihadist group in 2009, most scholars and policy-makers dismissed its affiliation with AQIM and al-Qa`ida core as mere rhetoric. The idea that an inexperienced domestic insurgency in northeast Nigeria would be embraced by the broader transnational jihadist community was rebuked as aspirational at best. By the summer of 2009, however, evidence suggested that Boko Haram members were training with AQIM.[44] In 2010, AQIM leader, Droukdel, declared that AQIM would provide Boko Haram with weapons, support, and training.[45] This collaboration between Boko Haram and AQIM is supported by public statements from both groups, as well as clear indications that Boko Haram's suicide attack on the United Nations office in Abuja, Nigeria in 2011 employed tactics that were strikingly similar to bombings by AQIM.[46]

In Libya, the presence and strengthening of IS supporters in the country have

become matters of deep concern to regional and international security officials. By some estimates, the conflict in Syria has attracted thousands of young Libyans since 2012, and some observers link the rise of IS-affiliated groups in Libya to the return of some of those Libyan fighters in 2014. Military officials estimated that the Islamic State had approximately 3,500 fighters in Libya in late 2015. However, in mid-2016, senior U.S. officials estimated that figure had grown to as many as 5,000 to 8,000, a much larger community of Libyan Salafi-jihadist activists and militia members. Reports suggest that Sub-Saharan Africans are among IS-Libya's fighters. Some have allegedly been lured by financial incentives, while others may be driven by ideological or personal motives (Blanchard, 2016; Wehrey and Alrababa'h, 2015).

In February 2016, CIA Director John Brennan told the Select Senate Committee on Intelligence that Libya was "the most important theater for ISIL outside of the Syria-Iraq theater; they have several thousand members there; they have absorbed some of the groups inside of Libya, including Ansar al Sharia that was very active prior to ISIL's rise."[47] Military operations against the Islamic State by Libyan militia forces had succeeded in reversing some of the group's gains as of mid-2016. Nevertheless, unresolved political disputes among Libyans and some Libyans' hostility to foreign military intervention limit options available to the United States and other concerned outsiders.[48]

Al Qaeda operatives and other violent Islamist extremist groups have had a presence in East Africa for two decades, although the extent of their operations has varied over time. Al Shabaab emerged in predominately Sunni Muslim Somalia in the early 2000s, amid a proliferation of Islamist and clan-based militias that flourished in the absence of central government authority. Al Shabaab drew support across clans, promoting a vision of uniting ethnic Somali-inhabited areas of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia under an Islamic caliphate. Some of its founding members reportedly trained and fought with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and known Al Qaeda operatives in the region were associated with the group in its formative years.

According to Meleagrou-Hitchens,[49] Al Shabaab's ability to recruit abroad and the presence in Somalia of foreign fighters, among them U.S. citizens, have been of significant concern to U.S. policymakers. Its ties with other terrorist groups, most notably Al Qaeda and its Yemen-based affiliate, and its threats against international targets, also elevate its profile among extremist groups on the continent, making it a target of direct counterterrorism operations by the United States and other Western countries. Furthermore, some Africa-based groups have affiliated with Al Qaeda or the self-proclaimed Islamic State, but many of them seem to operate autonomously. While many extremists on the continent appear to be driven primarily by local political and socioeconomic dynamics, some African groups have sought to attack Western interests in Africa, and some, like Somalia's Al Shabaab, apparently seek to inspire or carry

out attacks in the United States and elsewhere. The spillover effects from areas where terrorist groups operate, most notably Libya, Mali, northeast Nigeria, and Somalia, are of increasing concern to neighboring states and the broader region.[50]

Although collaboration was once questioned, it is now widely indicated that AQIM has linkages to al-Murabitun, MUJAO, and Boko Haram and Ansaru. The linkage between AQIM and other groups is better appreciated from a historical setting. AQIM was formed in January 2007, formally rebranding from its previous name, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The official affiliation with al-Qa`ida, beginning several months prior, was largely seen as an effort to maintain relevancy as an extremist group on the global stage, but the group's interest was still strictly regional in nature. The GSPC, formed in 1998, was itself a derivative of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) (US Department of State, 2012). While much of the overarching ideology, a leading tenet of which is a Salafist Qur'anic interpretation, remains unchanged, smaller-scale philosophical and personal disagreements eventually led to numerous spinoffs and splinter cells.[51]

In the wake of a personality clash with AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and other junior leaders in northern Mali, Belmokhtar split from the group and formed the Katibat al-Mulathamin (The Veiled Ones). Belmokhtar's group merged with MUJAO in August 2013 to create al-Murabitun. Notwithstanding whether any of these groups continue to work with AQIM and its leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and other junior leaders in northern Mali, Belmokhtar split from the group and formed the Katibat al-Mulathamin (The Veiled Ones). Belmokhtar's group merged with MUJAO in August 2013 to create al-Murabitun. Notwithstanding whether any of these groups continue to work with AQIM and its leader Droukdel, it is widely understood that the various units under Belmokhtar's control claim allegiance to the al-Qa'eda core, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri.[52]

A look at the linkages amongst violent terrorist groups in the Sahel revealed a major feature that has given impetus to the partnerships - their resilience and adaptive capacity. Differences in ideology are not mutually exclusive in group membership, funding, and coordination. On the contrary, splinters of AQIM, such as al-Murabitun and the AQIM ally in northern Mali, Ansar al-Din, collaborate at least marginally. There is even some evidence that Boko Haram and its splinter group, Ansaru, have both trained and coordinated with AQIM, al-Qa'eda core, and even Somalia's al-Shabab (US Department of State, 2013). Sahelian violent extremist groups seem prepared to change their names and sacrifice personal and ideological variances. The merger of al-Mulathamin and MUJAO in August 2013[53] (themselves splinters of AQIM) created a larger and better coordinated group, al-Murabitun, which is asserting its prominence in the region.[54]

Indeed, Scott and Daly's[55] taxonomy of how violent non-state actors recruit into their folds seems to apply to the situation in the Sahel. The first stage is "the Net," through which violent extremist and terrorist groups disseminate undifferentiated propaganda, such as video clips or messages, to a target population deemed homogeneous and receptive to the propaganda. The second stage is "the funnel," which entails an incremental approach to target specific individuals considered ready for recruitment, using psychological techniques to increase commitment and dedication. Even targeted children who resist complete recruitment may develop positive outlooks on the group's activities. The final stage is "the infection," when the target population is difficult to reach, an 'agent' can be inserted to pursue recruitment from within, employing direct and personal appeals. The social bonds between the recruiter and the targets may be strengthened by appealing to grievances, such as marginalization or social frustration, like what is obtainable in most of Africa.

Case Study: Insurgency and Environmental Security in Northeast Nigeria

Boko Haram is a radical Islamist movement that emerged in 2009, though its antecedents date back to earlier periods. It is shaped by its Nigerian context, reflecting the country's history of poor governance and extreme poverty in the north. The movement is unique in combining sectarian, radical Islamic agenda with violence. Its stated aim is the establishment of a Sharia state, but it shows little interest in actually governing or implementing economic development.

It is based on the fundamentalist Wahhabi theological system and opposes the Islam of the traditional northern Nigerian establishment, which is broadly tolerant.

Boko Haram's numerous followers and admirers – both the foot soldiers and their sponsors – also called Yusuffiya, consist largely of impoverished Islamic students and clerics, as well as professionals, mostly unemployed or self-employed, who are fighting for the Islamisation of the northern part of Nigeria. In July 2009, Boko Haram members refused to comply with a motorbike helmet law, leading to heavy-handed police tactics that set off an uprising in the northern state of Bauchi and spread into states of Borno, Yobe, and Kano. The army suppressed the protests, leaving more than eight hundred people dead. Human Rights Watch reported that the sect leader Yusuf, his father-in-law, Baba Fugu, and other sect members were arrested during the clashes and shot outside police headquarters, actions human rights groups denounced as extra-judicial killings.

In the aftermath of the 2009 unrest, an Islamist insurrection under a splintered leadership emerged. It was apparent that Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram, did not have complete control of the group, and after his execution in 2009, his

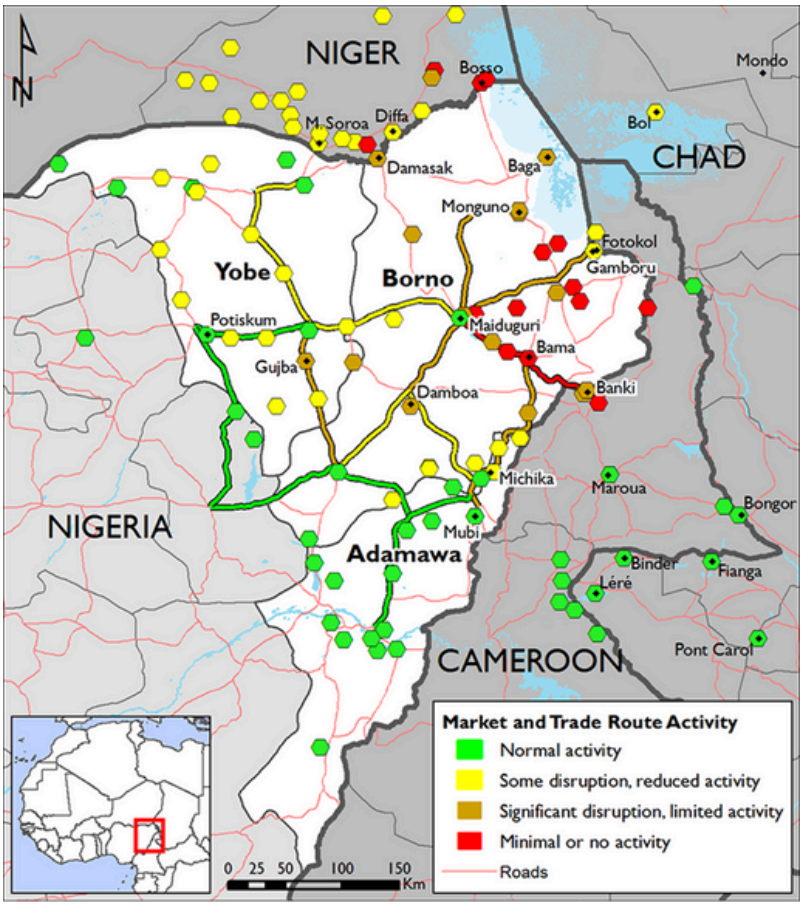
followers splintered into at least five factions.

The former leader, Abubakar Shekau, appeared to be focused on fighting the Nigerian government in Borno. Other units expanded their attacks in Nigeria and across the Lake Chad region, dispersing into Cameroun, Chad, and Niger Republic, causing havoc but especially in the border regions. Nigeria's military has claimed to have killed Shekau on three separate occasions, yet videos of the leader threatening his enemies and declaring allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria have appeared several times. Nigerian officials and many security experts are convinced that Shekau has become a brand adopted by leaders of the different factions of Boko Haram, with the men in the videos being look-alikes (Sergie and Johnson, 2015).[56] A splinter group under Al-Barnawi – recognized by ISIS as its franchise in West Africa - appears to present a less violent strain of the insurgency and one willing to speak to the government, albeit based on a clandestine format. This is, perhaps, because of the latter's determination to undermine the Shekau faction and present an alternative to Shekau's policy of zero tolerance and extreme violence even against the Muslim communities the group supposedly seeks to salvage. Nevertheless, it is premature to judge the Al-Barnawi faction as liberal or accommodating: the group's abduction of young schoolgirls at the Government Girls' Science and Technical College in Dapchi is a particular example of a case-in-point.

Some experts view the rise of this radicalized Jihadist movement as an armed revolt against the government, abusive security operations, and widening regional economic disparity.[57] The Islamist militant group has attacked Nigeria's police and army, politicians, schools, religious buildings, public institutions and until recently, actively engaged in post-election suicide bombings in the northeast region. The group's attacks have undermined general security across the region and shattered its economy and development.

Since 2009, more than 20,000 people have been killed in Boko Haram-related violence and 1.5 million people are living in internally displaced persons' (IDPs) camps, having been forced to flee their homes, and 4.6 million need humanitarian assistance after fleeing the group's savage attacks.[58] The Jihadist group is also notorious for the systematic abduction of children, many of whom are often forcefully conscripted into its ranks and / or used as human shields, child soldiers, porters, sex slaves, etc. On 14 April 2014, the abduction of over 250 schoolgirls from Chibok village sparked an international outcry.[59] In October 2016, the Federal Government of Nigeria negotiated with Boko Haram and secured the release of 21 abducted girls. Also, Boko Haram kidnapped 110 schoolgirls from the Government Technical Girls College in Dapchi, located in Yobe state, Nigeria on February 19, 2018. However, Boko Haram reportedly released all but one of the girls by March 2.[60]

Figure 3: The Topography of Insurgency and Violent Conflict in Northeast Nigeria



***Source**: Fews NET*

The conflict, which was initially local, has gradually become a regional conflict that spreads across the shores of the Western Africa and Lake Chad region, prompting a regional military coalition between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger to fight Boko Haram. The extremist Islamic sect has been garnering support across the regional borders by taking advantage of internal political grievances regarding the poor governance and underdevelopment afflicting the region. Recently, Boko Haram expressed allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a global terror franchise based in the Middle East but with a strong presence in Africa and other parts of the world. ISIS is alleged to be providing logistical and ideological support to its Boko Haram ally, to its take control of huge "ungoverned spaces," carved out of the Lake Chad region. By this development alone, Boko Haram threatens the corporate existence of Nigeria, and poses an imminent risk to environmental security in the Northeast region.[61]

How have the Boko Haram insurgency and the CT-COIN measures adopted by the Nigerian state affected environmental security in Northeast Nigeria?

To answer this question, we adopt the human security environmental school of thought, Zalpolskis[62] to analyse the impact of armed conflict on the physical environment in the Northeast region of Nigeria.

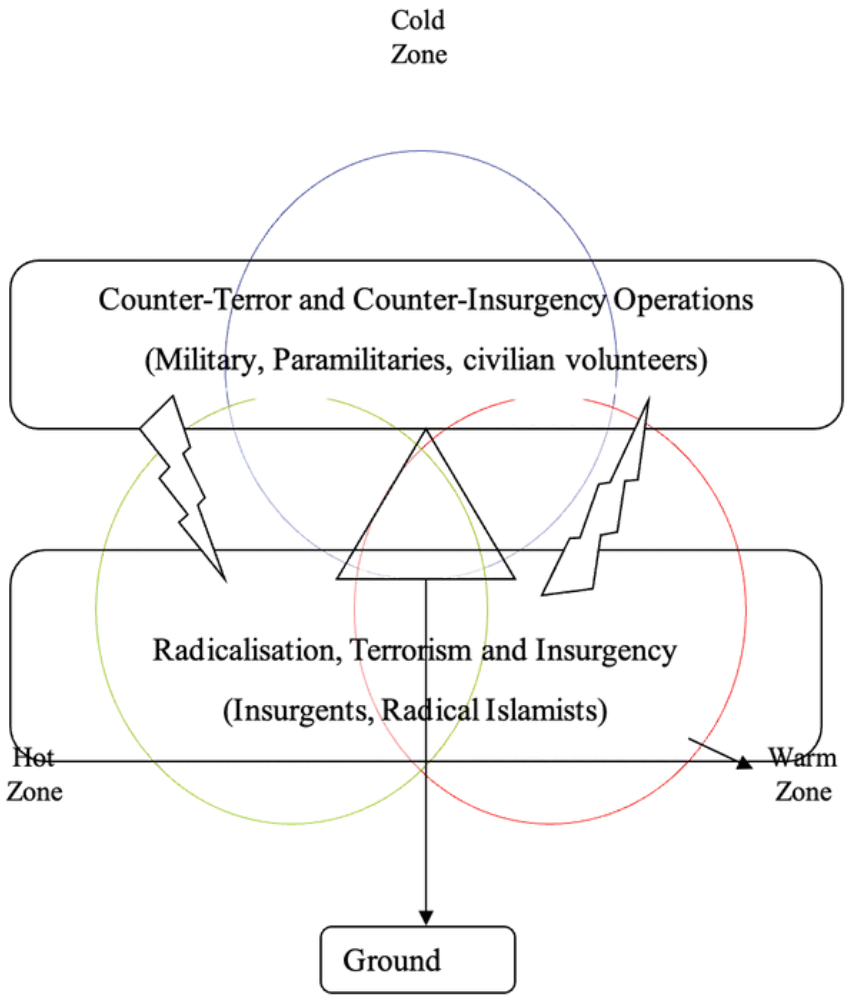
The Impact of Armed Conflict, CT-COIN on Environmental Security in the Northeast Nigeria

The natural environment has been a strategic element of war since cave dwellers threw the first rock. The armies of Rome and Assyria, to achieve total defeat of their enemies, reportedly sowed salt into the cropland of their adversaries, making the soil unusable for farming – an early use of herbicide, resulting in one of the most devastating environmental impacts of warfare.[63] Thus, the Geneva Convention (1949) places restrictions on methods of warfare intended or expected to cause widespread, severe, and long-term damage to the natural environment. Yet this has failed to yield the expected result. This prompted former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to comment as follows:

> *The environment has long been a silent casualty of war and armed conflict. From the contamination of land and destruction of forests to the plunder of natural resources and the collapse of management systems, the environmental consequences of war are often widespread and devastating.*[64]

It is apposite to articulate the "violent ecology" created by the Boko Haram insurgency. This framework would facilitate a better understanding of the human environment within which Boko Haram operates and the violent setting for CT-COIN operations. The Insurgency operates – and is confronted by the Armed Forces of Nigeria – within the contexts of hot, warm and cold zones (see Figure 4):

Figure 4: The Ecology of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria



***Source**: Tar, U. A. and Ayegba, S. B. (2020b). The Ecology of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: Environmental Security in North-Eastern Nigeria. in: Tar UA and Bala, B (Eds.) New Architecture of Regional Security in Africa: Perspectives on Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in the Lake Chad Basin Lanham, Maryland, USA: Lexington Books.*

1. ***Hot Zone:*** This is the domain of the armed operatives, far removed from society or facing a barrage of bombing from the armed forces. The core of the hot zone is the Sambisa Forest, where the leadership and foot soldiers of the insurgency have taken refuge. In addition, certain "ungoverned spaces" which have been created in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states is the result of the momentary failure of the armed forces and police to enforce territorial presence. For example, as at 2014, at least 19 LGAs were believed to be under the control of Boko Haram insurgents. The hot zone is a "safe haven" for the strategic leadership and top echelon of the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as the core operational brigades. In this zone, civilians are at the mercy of the insurgents, with most being forced to accept Islam or be lynched. Non-Muslims are either forced to accept the status of second-class citizens or convert to Islam. There is significant scope for impunity and anarchy as a result of high-handedness of some Boko Haram commanders. In addition, the leadership of Boko Haram enforce strict adherence to the tenets of Shari'ah – including kangaroo court hearings by hastily appointed Khadis, public flogging, summary executions, and heavy fines, which may be regular spectacles in this scenario.
2. ***Warm Zone:*** This is a mixed terrain wherein resides a mixture of enthusiasts, critics, and those "sitting on the fence." In this zone, both the Boko Haram operatives and the government compete for presence. On one hand, the warm zone provides a primary site for radicalisation and recruitment for Boko Haram's "Da'awah Brigade" and "operatives in turban," who go around to seek support from the populace. On the other hand, it provides a context for de-radicalisation by the government machinery, which invests in recruiting liberal Imams to spread tolerant interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. This is done to feed the population with a liberal diet of juristic content that is useful for Muslims' co-existence with other faith groups in a plural society like Nigeria. Thus, the warm zone appears to be a tenuous site for "soft contestation" between the government and the insurgents, which can degenerate into open confrontation and warfare in extreme circumstances.
3. ***Cold Zone:*** This zone constitutes large swathes of normal civilian settlements – urban, peri-urban and rural enclaves - wherein reside innocent civilians, who are susceptible to incursion, recruitment and radicalization. Clandestine Boko Haram operatives may dress in civilian attire and enter this zone to secretly seek support, funding and logistics. Securing this zone – that is, shielding it from Boko Haram incursions and providing minimum conditions for livelihood to thrive – is at the heart of CT-COIN operatives in the North East. This zone also constitutes a prime "soft target" for Boko Haram attacks since the entire population is viewed as heretics who deserve to be attacked.

In the light of the foregoing, what are the environmental impacts of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the northeast zone of Nigeria? In the following sub-sections, the key impacts are identified and discussed.

Infrastructural Decay, Air and Water Pollution

The degradation of infrastructure and basic services, brought on by armed conflict, can wreak havoc on the local environment and public health. Water supply systems could be contaminated or shut down by a bomb blast. For example, in Afghanistan, destruction to water infrastructure, combined with weakened public service during the war, resulted in bacterial contamination. The consequence was an overall decline in safe drinking water supply throughout the country.[65] Besides, water shortages can also lead to inadequate irrigation of cropland.

In the same vein, in landscapes subjected to excessive use of heavy military vehicles, toxic dust is a very real environmental issue. Containing heavy metals such as cobalt, barium, arsenic, lead and aluminium, toxic dust can cause serious respiratory disorders for military personnel and local residents alike. Besides, when they settle on plant life, the toxic metals stunt the growth of vegetation, contaminate soil, and prevent regeneration (Palmer, 2012). In Nigeria, the National Policy on the Environment[66] stated that the physical environment needs to be protected from automobile exhausts from military vehicles in the Northeast (emphasis added), and release of some chemicals into the atmosphere, notably sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxides, hydrocarbons and particulate matter, as well as biomass burning and emissions – these all have implications for forest and crop productivity and for public health. The document revealed that air pollution is a leading cause of respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, pulmonary heart disease, and bronchitis. Again, the Lake Chad Basin Desk Review[67] indicated the impact of armed conflict on environmental security in the Northeast region – it stated that:

> *Poor hygiene and sanitation practices within the region are exacerbated under climatic and extraordinary migratory pressures due to mass displacements. Now, with the onset of the crisis, cases of cholera and measles were concentrated in several refugee camps, such as in Maiduguri, following the rainy seasons. The incidence of these diseases, while triggered by outside events, represent poor health services due to a lack of vaccinations, as well as infrastructural deficiencies leading to water-borne contamination and the rapid spread of diseases.*[68]

Accordingly, air pollution arising from greenhouse gas emissions in the Northeast region is a realistic threat – following a decade-long violent conflict in the region. The high demand for fuel by Boko Haram and military vehicles is contributing to the release of significant amounts of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxide, and carbon dioxide, putting human and environmental security at a great risk.

Destruction of Biodiversity

Throughout history, war has consistently led to environmental devastation. Advancements in the military technology, used by combatants, have also resulted in increasingly severe environmental impacts. This is well illustrated by the devastation to forests and biodiversity caused by modern warfare.[69] Hence, several environmentally damaging military tactics have been banned. For example, destroying the forest canopy with chemical defoliants – a tactic the US military used extensively in Vietnam – is now a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.[70] Conventional weapons don't pose a direct threat to ecosystems. Yet, they contain harmful chemicals, including ammonium nitrate, ethylene oxide, etc. Although, when a bomb detonates, these substances don't travel very far. However, the real risks that conventional weapons pose to the environment are indirect.[71]

During armed conflicts, when belligerents move their forces and equipment around the conflict zones, they upset the natural grit that holds the underlying soil in place. This results in accelerated wind erosion, a tenfold increase in sand dune formation, and resultant loss of foliage that sustains wildlife.[72] For instance, when Iraqi and American forces took turns crossing Kuwait in the early 1990s, they disrupted the natural gravel that holds the underlying soil in place. This led to accelerated wind erosion, increase in sand dune formation, and loss of vegetation that sustained the animals that occupied Kuwait's desert and semi-desert regions. [73]

Similarly, the majority of Northeast vegetation being analogous in structure is bound to face similar damage as a result of the ongoing armed conflict – the physical environment in the Northeast, which has hitherto been facing environmental degradation, is being further degraded by armed conflict. According to the revised National Policy on the Environment (2016):

> *Drought and desertification are by far the most pressing environmental problems afflicting northern parts of the country. The visible sign of desertification, resulting from persistent drought and climatic change, is the gradual shift in vegetation from grasses, bushes and occasional tress, to grass and bushes and in the final stages, expansive areas of desert-like conditions. It has been estimated that between 50% and 75% of Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Adamawa, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi,*

> *Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara States in Nigeria are being affected by desertification. These states account for about 35% of the country's total land area . . . It is estimated that the country is currently losing 351,000 hectares of its landmass to desert-like conditions annually. . . in a haphazard manner at the rate of about 600m per year. Desertification has continued to be a serious environmental menace to the country's land resources. It has reportedly resulted in the burial of some entire villages and major access roads under sand.*[74]

Chronic Food Insecurity

Another consequence of armed conflict on environmental security is the emergence of chronic food insecurity. Military machinery and explosives have caused unprecedented levels of deforestation and habitat destruction. Agricultural production may be impaired by intensive bombing and heavy military vehicles travelling over farm soil. The presence of land mines can render vast areas of productive land unusable. The digging of trenches causes trampling of grassland, crushing of plants and animals, and churning of soil.[75] For instance, in Vietnam, bombs alone destroyed over 2 million acres of land, while two decades of civil conflict in Cambodia destroyed about 35% of Cambodia's forests.[76]

Accordingly, ongoing military operations (such as forest logging in Sambisa Forest to dislodge Boko Haram) and the expansion of network of trenches to prevent overrunning of major cities (such as Maiduguri, Damaturu, and Bama) are likely to cause erosion, as soil structures are being severely altered. Thus, the Northeast landscape would never remain the same. This poses grave danger to the food security situation in the region – Boko Haram insurgency has created economic challenges of immense proportions and brought the Northeast economy to its knees. It has completely wiped away the once vibrant local economy in the Northeast, with huge implications for the national economy. The Northeast's contribution to the national economy has decimated since the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorism. The volume of agricultural goods and raw materials that moves from the region to other parts of Nigeria has reduced significantly.[77]

Furthermore, violence and security threats in the Northeast block productive trading activities, thereby hurting the region's ability to meet growing food security needs. Simultaneously, the displacement of millions of people within and across national borders has shifted regional demographic pressures, increased food insecurity, and intensified the precarious nutrition situations in many parts of the Northeast. Likewise, conflict-related displacement draws people away from their original networks of resilience. With communities being physically displaced, migrations often entail people missing out on local-level networking, opportunities for entrepreneurship, or other fundamental survival strategies. Productive activities, including agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing, and the trade of the respective products, have been interrupted by episodes of Boko Haram's insurgency and syste-

mic violence – community assets and food reserves have been destroyed, which contributes to an already severe problem of food security and prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) in the Northeast.[78]

Unexploded Ordinance (UXO)

Military campaigns (insurgency, terrorism and CT-COIN operations) generally require large quantities of explosive weapons, a fraction of which will not detonate properly, leaving behind unexploded weapons. This creates a serious physical and chemical hazard for military personnel and the civilian population living in these areas, which were once war zones, due to the possibility of detonation after the conflict. The leaching of chemicals into the soil and groundwater also remains very real dangers.[79] Landmines are victim-activated and indiscriminate; whoever triggers the mine, whether a child or a soldier, becomes its victim. Mines emplaced during a conflict against enemy forces can still kill or injure civilians decades later. Explosive weapons that fail to detonate become unexploded ordnance (UXO) – explosive items left behind during and after conflicts. UXOs pose dangers similar to landmines. These weapons can be found on roads, footpaths, farmers' fields, forests, deserts, borders, houses, schools, and in other places where people carry out their daily activities. UXOs deny access to food, water, and other basic needs, and inhibit freedom of movement. They also endanger the initial flight of refugees and internally displaced people and prevent their repatriation or hamper the delivery of humanitarian aid. These weapons instil fear in communities, whose citizens often know they are living in mined areas, but have no possibility of farming other lands or taking another route to school. When land cannot be cultivated, when medical systems are drained by the cost of attending to landmine casualties, and when countries must spend money clearing mines rather than paying for education, it is clear that these weapons not only cause appalling human suffering, but that they are also a lethal barrier to development and post-conflict reconstruction.[80]

In the case of the Northeast, a study on food and national security found that several communities overran by Boko Haram in 2015, were facing the threat of unexploded mines, as the retreating insurgents left behind cache of mines in farmlands. This has created fears and trauma in the minds of the people.[81] The reality and impact of the menace of unexploded ordinance in the Northeast region of Nigeria was further reinforced by the Nigerian Army – former defence spokesman Col. Rabe Abubakar, [82] warned residents on the danger of unexploded ordinance:

> *Nigerians living in the northeast and any other parts of the country to be on the lookout for cluster bombs sometimes called scatter bombs as the Nigeria army engineers serving in Adamawa state had recovered some caches of these bombs in the contested areas in recent time. The military high command has discovered that the Boko Haram terrorists*

(BHT) in the areas have used such lethal instruments over time to push their callous terrorist cause. Some cluster bombs carry several hundred of very small explosives wrapped in a metal container like a pot while others carry larger sub munitions that can find specific targets such as tanks. Some of these sub munitions do not blow up immediately but remain behind and act as landmines. This can be an acceptable explanation for the recovery of caches of these bombs by Nigeria army engineers in the area.[83]

Threat of Depleted Uranium Munitions

Research indicates that depleted uranium could contain carcinogenic components, yet countries continue to use it in weapons. The residue of this toxic metal often remains in water sources, which can lead to serious health problems for both humans, plant and animal life, long after the cessation of hostilities.[84] Specifically, this possibility potentially puts the Lake Chad, which is in the centre of the theatre of the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency, in serious jeopardy.

Furthermore, Miller and McClain[85] argue that normal functioning of the kidney, brain, liver, heart and several others organs, can be affected by exposure to uranium, because in addition to being radioactive, uranium is a toxic metal. For instance, during the Gulf War, the US bombed Iraq with 340 tonnes of missiles containing depleted uranium. These bombings, Mathiesen[86] suggested, are responsible for an increase in cancer rates in Iraq, which has been linked to the shells used by the US and UK militaries. Radiation from these shells have poisoned the soil and water of Iraq, making the environment carcinogenic. In the case of the Northeast, though exact figures and data on the tonnes of bombs expended in the ongoing CT-COIN operation by the Nigerian military and the insurgents is unknown, what is certain is that the rate of bombing is likely to generate the level of radioactive exposure, capable of making the Northeast environment carcinogenic.

Conclusion

The states in the West African Sahel experiencing violent conflicts have adversely affected the capacity of the local states and regional security complexes to devise an efficient mechanism for addressing the root causes of instability in the region. A case point is Nigeria, which is presently locked in a protracted battle with the Boko Haram terrorist group. However, these threats are not peculiar to Nigeria. Across the world, countries are faced with similar challenges, making it reasonable to surmise that armed conflict and warfare, no matter how there are conducted, affect the physical environment negatively. This paper supports the human security school of environmental security, which proves that armed conflict and CT-COIN operations have negative impact on the

physical environment in the Northeast and affects the human security of the populace in the present and in the future. Despite the long legacy of environmental destruction caused by warfare, the standards set by most conventions and protocols have proven inadequate in preventing and redressing environmental degradation brought on by armed conflict. Firstly, international laws protecting the environment should be observed and enforced to ensure that military campaigns do not violate them during conflict.

Secondly, mitigating environmental atrocities from warfare requires clearer standards of conduct, enforced by credible authorities who are able to impose penalties on those guilty of violations. This will help to change the way military operations perceive and use their physical environment – in this way, the physical environment would be treated as a desirable end in of itself, rather than just a means of obtaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, there is a need for domestic regulations that pre-empt war's ecological harm and assesses threats.

Thirdly, there is need for environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the CT-COIN campaign in the Northeast, and ascertaining its ecological cost. Relevant agencies of the government – particularly, the Federal Ministry of Environment, the National Emergency Management Agency, the Northeast Development Commission, and other relevant stakeholders – should partake in the comprehensive EIA of the CT-COIN in the Northeast. The findings and recommendations of the EIA should be addressed urgently in order forestall further damage to the region's flora and fauna.

Fourthly, since armed conflict in the Sahel is seen as an expression of popular discontent or anthropology of anger and disappointment, the rise of terrorism and insurgency is symptomatic of the failure of the state to deliver the dividend of good governance. It is desirable that the underlying factors that fester discontent amongst the youth, which drive them towards violence, should be properly addressed through good governance. Lastly, there is urgent need to strengthen regional cooperation and security regionalisation in the Sahel. The construction of a tripartite alliance for security between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger should not be antagonised by ECOWAS. It should be handled with care, and without prejudice, to the existing Regional Security Communities in the Sahel and West Africa.

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ABOUT THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Usman A. Tar (PhD) is an endowed professor of Defense and Security Studies at the Nigerian Defense Academy. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Director of the Centre for Defense Studies and Documentation, and pioneer Head of the Department of Defense and Security Studies at the Academy. He has been a member of the Advisory Board of Social Science Research Council's African Peacebuilding Network (SSRC/APN) in New York, USA. Professor Tar was formerly an Associate Research Fellow at the John and Elnora Ferguson Centre for Africa Studies (JEFCA), University of Bradford, UK. He has also served as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations and Director of Postgraduate Studies at the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr in Northern Iraq.

Professor Tar holds a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Bradford, UK, a Master of Education (M.Ed) from Leeds Metropolitan University, a Master of Science (MSc) in International Relations from the University of Maiduguri, a Postgraduate Diploma in Research Methodology from the University of Bradford, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education from the University of Brighton, and a Bachelor of Science in Political Science (BSc 1st class) from the University of Maiduguri. He is the author/editor of over 30 books and has contributed more than 100 articles to high-impact scholarly and policy platforms.

Professor Tar was a member of the Federal Government Committee to review the National Defense Policy (2014-2015) and is currently a member of the Federal Government's Defense and Security Think Tank. He has also been a member of the Federal Government Expert and Eminent Persons Group of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) (2014-2015) and Chair of the Governing Board of the African Institute for Border Security, an NGO based in Accra, Ghana (2019-present). Professor Tar has consulted for various organizations including the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD, Nigeria), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, Nigeria), and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (German Development Fund). He has also served as a visiting professor and external examiner at several higher learning institutions in Nigeria and overseas. He is currently the Honorable Commissioner for Information and Internal Security, Borno State, Nigeria.

Professor Tar is happily married and blessed with children.