Transborder Migration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Security in Nigeria, 2015-2020

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Abstract
This study was carried out to critically evaluate the effects of migration of foreign terrorist fighters on the security of Nigeria. The paper aims at understanding migration-security nexus and security threats on Sub-Sahara Africa particularly Nigeria, due to the influx of illegal migrants between her and the neighbors. The study adopted securitization theory as documented by the Copenhagen School. For the framework analysis, the study relied on documentary method of data collection and content analysis. The study found out that with the fall of the caliphate of ISIS in Syria and the unchecked and porous border in Nigeria the influx of foreign terrorist fighters posse serious security threat to Nigeria. The study, among others, recommended reorganization of Customs and Excise and Nigerian Immigration Services and encouragement of community boarder monitoring particularly within the areas experiencing high influx of migrants.
Keywords: Migration, Foreign Fighters, Terrorism, Security, Nigeria.

Introduction

Migration has not, as a rule, been part of the security agenda. This notion emerged around the 1980s, when mass immigrant settlements were considered a disruption to public order. cultural identity, societal security and the labour market (even though they actually posed almost no threat to internal cohesion at the time). However, not long before, European countries had highly appreciated working migrants. During the 1950s and 1960s, immigrants constituted an extra workforce, which satisfied the need for cheap and flexible manpower, since this type of workers did not exist in the domestic market. In this context, many countries promoted migration through their policies, and even though they tried to regulate it, the legal status of immigrants was not a principal concern. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s there was a shift in terms of migration control. The topic generated public anxiety, even though it did not change the understanding of migration itself. The changes were mainly based on economic factors, related to the heavy transformations that the market had suffered. In this scenario, states were driven to protect their domestic workforce, which meant that some restrictions were established so fewer foreign workers could enter the country.

Since the catastrophe of 9/11 and the onset of global war against terror, the international system has witnessed a rapid surge in security challenges associated with arm conflict, espionage, subversion, and insurgency. The mounting global discontents arising from poverty, widespread anger and resentment, ideological extremism, population pressure, corruption and weak institutions have made insurgent and terrorist groups common and strategically significant especially in the developing African countries. Unfortunately, Nigeria is one such state where these bad elements penetrate and survive.

Concept of Foreign Terrorist Fighters

In accordance with the United Nations, Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) can be defined as individuals who leave their country of origin or habitual residence and become involved in violence as part of an insurgent or non-state armed group in an armed conflict. Foreign fighters are motivated by a range of factors such as ideology among other benefits, most importantly they do not reside in the state affected by the conflict and have traveled from abroad to join the insurgency.

Concept of Insecurity

Security however, can be described as stability and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance or knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in one's community or neighborhood and by people around. It focuses on emotional and psychological sense of belonging to a social group which can offer one protection). This description structured the concept of security into four dimensions. However, these dimensions can be weaved together to give a composite definition of security as the protection against all forms of harm whether physical, economic or psychological. It is generally argued however that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise.

Insecurity as the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury, or the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. A major point about insecurity implied in these definitions is that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware

of what would happen but they are also not able to stop it or protect themselves when it happens. insecurity therefore would be referred to as a lack of control, and inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or what make them vulnerable'. 'Vulnerability' is the situation that we do not know and we cannot face or anticipate. It is also something one may know would happen but is not able to face it.

Securitization Theory

The securitization theory has become a fundamental part of international relations studies, and has produced a whole new field of research. Securitization refers to the quality of "existential threat" that an issue might acquire, even beyond the actual threat that it represents. This could justify the use of extraordinary measures or the implementation of new policies and institutions with the aim of protecting the object that has been threatened or perceives a threat. In other words, the securitization of an issue implies the transfer of the issue from low to high politics in order to protect a fundamental piece of the state (territory, population and government). The securitization process, according to the Copenhagen School, takes place through a speech act, which frames the issue in security terms. For a speech act to be successful, not only the actor involved in carrying out the securitizing move has to have the legitimacy to do so, but also, the speech should include a security language (Balzacq, 2005). However, the existence of the speech act is not enough for an issue to become securitized. The audience must also accept and embrace the speech. For the Copenhagen School (CS) securitization is viewed as a decisive moment, an instance in time, where an issue is moved from normal politics to the realm of security politics. For the CS, securitization has several stages.

The first modification to securitization theory involves recognizing that securitization is an ongoing political (and sociological) process rather than a specific binary moment whereby a decision is made in relation to whether (or not) an issue should be moved into the realm of security (Salter, 2008). The speech acts in the context of the FTF issue in that by viewing securitization as a process rather than an event, it is possible to identify how this concern first emerged and the way in which the perception of the threat has evolved over time. This draws inspiration from the longitudinal methods favoured by Aglaya Snetkov (2017), which allow the analyst to highlight the evolutionary, multifaceted and incremental processes through which the securitization of an issue occurs.

Second, the idea that security is all about existential threats and exceptional responses is also problematic in the context of the Nigerian security, 'much of what is being done in the name of security is quiet, technical and unspectacular, just as much again does not declare itself to be in the name of security at all'. Although this is also true of security practice in many countries and institutions. Indeed, the communications or statements of the European Union institutions are less widely reported, and although they play a key role in policy-making, where the legitimization of policy proposals and security measures is framed not only through the language of existential threat but often through the language and practice of everyday risk and insecurity although Nigerian actors still stubbornly speak security, even in the absence of existential threats' but do so in the form of the 'institutional communities in to which they are organized'.
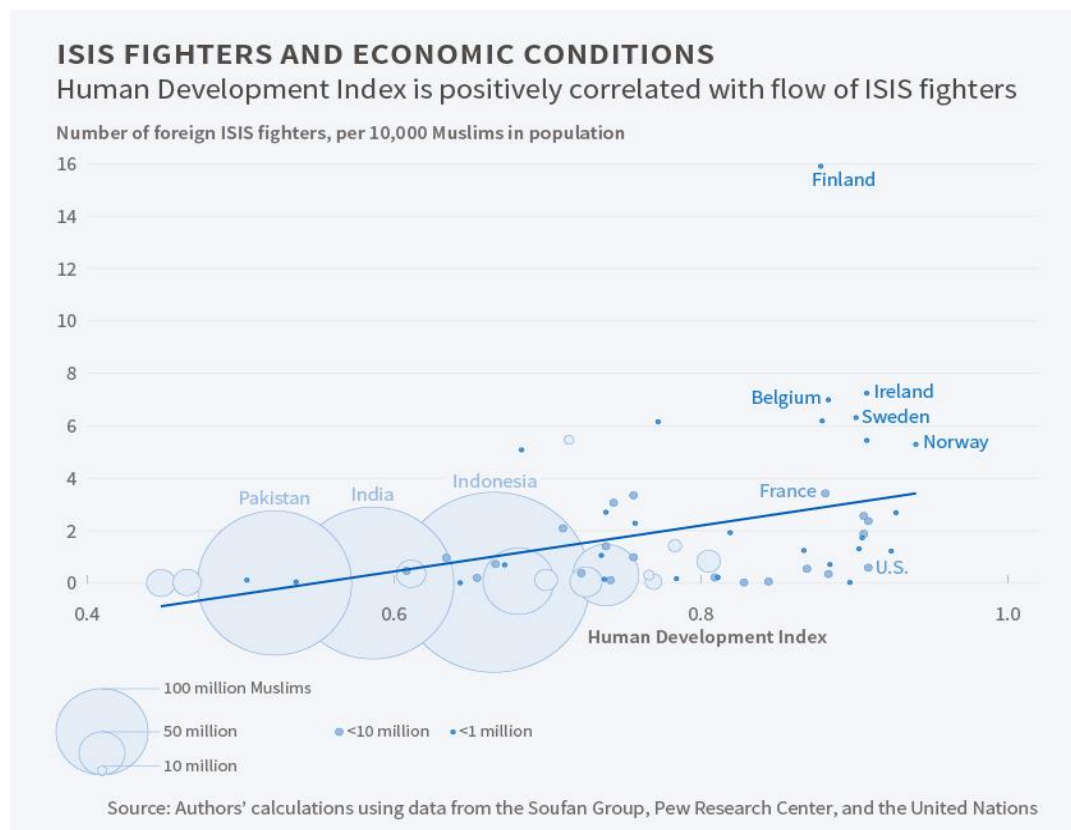
Moreover, although the role of the 'speech act' retains importance in terms of identifying issues that are framed as danger, risk or threat, the framework employed here emphasizes that securitization can also be understood as a non-linguistic process (Balzacq, 2010: 22-25) or a form of discursive practice (Doty, 1993; Hansen, 2006). This draws parallels with the Paris School approach to securitization (see Bigo 2002; 2008), as well as analysts such as Ciuta (2009: 312) who believes the role of practice in securitization theory must be 'reconsidered'. In Nigeria, where securitization manifests itself, we see it not only in the statements of politicians and institutions or the calculative language and rationalities of risk identifiable in security policy documents but also in the bureaucratic, mundane, routinized security practices made possible by, and designed to mitigate, those same risks (Bigo, 2008).

Foreign Terrorist Fighters, Security and Migration

Foreign fighters (i.e., non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil wars) are a familiar presence in conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. Since the end of World War II, Africa has featured the largest proportion of insurgencies with foreign fighters relative to other regions. Nearly half of the African insurgent groups active in this period have recruited foreign nationals into their ranks. West Africans have generally fought in countries that are close by, and in groups such as AQIM, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in Mali, and Boko Haram in Nigeria. With the proclamation of the caliphate of Islamic State in Libya in 2014, many West African fighters joined extremist groups in Libya. This decision was no doubt influenced by difficulties in reaching Syria,

including visa denial and closure of border crossings by Turkey. With the final collapse of the so-called IS Caliphate, returning foreign fighters are a particular challenge for the next few years, but mass migration, transiting terrorists, cross border organized crime, human trafficking, small arms, weapons of mass destruction and drug smuggling will continue to be areas of major concern for the global border community.

With the territorial defeat of Islamic State in Syria in March 2019, the security situation in West Africa, particularly in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin region, could worsen. The inability of foreign fighters to stay in Syria could mean they return to their countries of origin, migrate to third countries, or move to other combat zones such as Afghanistan, the Egyptian Sinai, the Philippines and Libya, which has become a refuge and transit zone. As a result, West Africa could see an increase in extremists returning to their countries of origin. There could also be a relocation to West Africa if Africans from other regions and non-African fighters who temporarily withdraw, join or start other cells in Africa. In 2017, the African Union (AU) expressed its concern about a possible security threat from these combatants who, even if imprisoned, could recruit others or plan attacks. The AU estimated that 6000 Africans could return from Syria, but West African states have little data on the phenomenon. Few governments in the region report on how many of their nationals have joined Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, Libya, Nigeria or Mali.

ISIS FIGHTERS AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
Human Development Index is positively correlated with flow of ISIS fighters

Number of foreign ISIS fighters, per 10,000 Muslims in population

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the Soufan Group, Pew Research Center, and the United Nations

With the figure above it is easier to understand where these foreign terrorist fighters come from. Sub-Saharan Africa will attract foreign fighters because it is a swiftly expanding front in the transnational jihadist effort. Islamist extremism is ramping up in the region, marked by increased activity in the Sahel, the Lake Chad region, the Horn, and Central Africa. One on hand, the origins and impetus of African Islamist insurgencies are deeply local and this should not be ignored. On the other hand, many African Islamist groups have continued to establish stronger linkages with transnational extremist networks. In 2018, over 4,000 Islamic State fighters were active in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly in the Lake Chad region.

Violent competition between local rivals produces an incentive for insurgent factions to seek out foreign support. Competition between groups nested within a broader network (e.g., Salafi jihadists) increases the strategic and symbolic importance of a conflict theater, which may appeal to potential foreign recruits aligned with each side of the divide. Islamist militancy is not a new phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa. Neither is the foreign fighter problem. Gen. (ret.) William E. Ward, former commander of U.S. Africa Command, stated ten years ago that "the foreign fighter phenomenon is a measurable threat to global peace and security and, like many places, Africa is vulnerable." To be sure, jihadists are hardly the only militant organizations that recruit and deploy foreign fighters in Africa. However, the rapid propagation of Salafi jihadism throughout the region and the rising competition between these organizations should be of special interest to the global supply of fighters connected to these networks. As such, it is within regional jihadist groups that we should expect to see the greatest increase in foreign fighter recruitment in sub-Saharan Africa over the next years.

Factors supporting the influx of foreign terrorist fighters in Nigeria

1. Ethno-religious conflicts: These have arisen from distrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the country. Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), Hazen and Horner, (2007), Salawu (2010) and Igbuzor, (2011) identified ethno-religious conflict as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria. Ethno-religious conflict was defined as a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. Frequent and persistent ethnic

conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity), present the country with a major security challenge. In all parts of Nigeria, there exist ethno-religious conflicts and these according to Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002) have emerged as a result of new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious identities. The claim over scarce resources, power, land, chieftaincy, local government councils, control of markets and sharia among other trivial issues have resulted in large scale killings and violence amongst groups in Nigeria (Adagba, et al, 2012).

2. Porous Borders: One major immediate factor which has enhanced insecurity in Nigeria is the porous frontiers of the country, where individual movements are largely untracked. The porosity of Nigeria's borders has serious security implications for the country. Given the porous borders as well as the weak and security system, weapons come easily into Nigeria from other countries. Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation and the availability of these weapons have enabled militant groups and criminal groups to have easy access to arms (Hazen and Horner, 2007). Nigeria is estimated to host over 70 percent of about 8 million illegal weapons in West Africa (Edeko, 2011). Also, the porosity of the Nigerian borders has made it possible for unwarranted influx of migrants from neighbouring countries such as Republic of Niger, Chad and Republic of Benin (Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012). These migrants which are mostly young men are some of the perpetrators of crime in the country.

3. Weak Security system: This results from inadequate equipment for the security arm of government, both in weaponry and training. This is in addition to poor attitudinal and behavioural disposition of security personnel. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment to handle the situations in a way to prevent them from occurring. And even when these exist, some personnel get influenced by ethnic, religious or communal sentiment and are easily swallowed by their personal interest to serve their people, rather than the nation. Thus, instead of being national watch dogs and defending national interest and values, and protecting people from harm by criminals, they soon become saboteurs of government effort, by supporting and fuelling insecurity through either leaking vital security

information or aiding and abetting criminals to acquire weapons or to escape the long arm of the law.

FTF and Security Implications

With ISIS losing territory in the Middle East, Nigeria has recently seen an influx of foreign fighters joining the ranks of Boko Haram and ISWAP via Iraq and Syria. According to a CNN report, approximately 1,500 foreign fighters have joined Boko Haram and around 3,500 have joined ISWAP. Currently, there are over 3,500 to 5,000 fighters who belong to ISWAP who regularly carry out attacks in Borno State. ISWAP has been effective in recruiting members and building support as they have learned to blend into the community at large, and have assured locals that they will not be harmed in ISWAP-controlled territories as long as they do not cooperate with the Nigerian military. Additionally, the group provides financial incentives to future fighters and young entrepreneurs in the region. By offering loans to businesses in the region, ISWAP reinforces the loyalty of their supporters while also receiving foods and goods services from the merchants. Furthermore, given that armed bandits have become more common in northeastern Nigeria over the past few years, some locals rely on ISWAP to protect them against that threat.
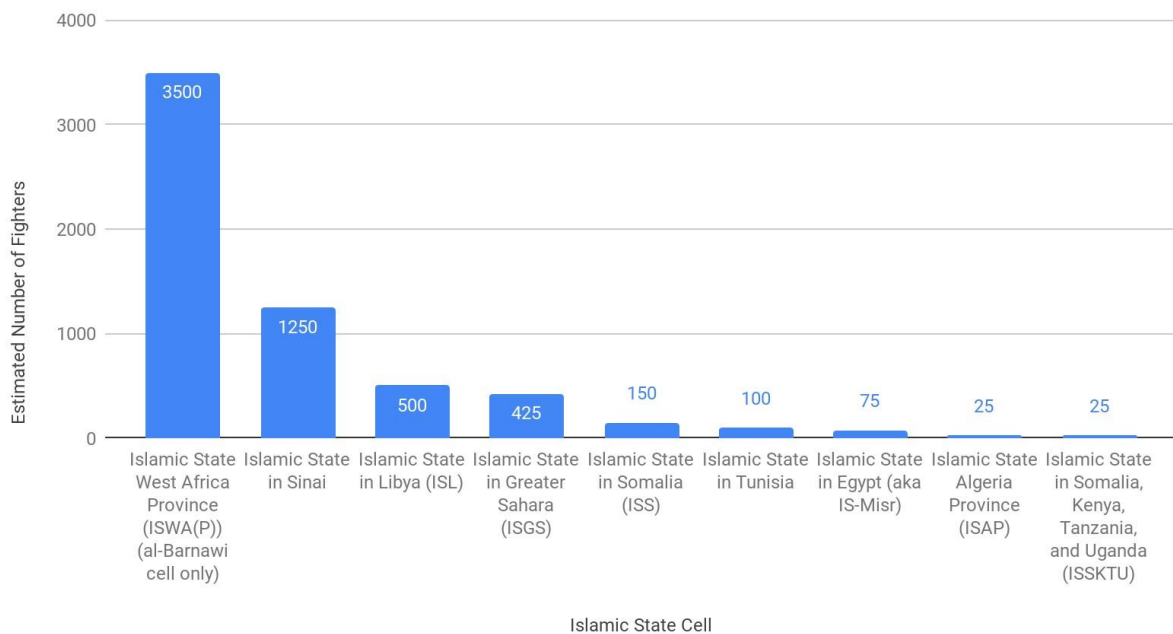
Foreign fighters serve as conduits of organizational learning. By expanding the set of violent tools available to the armed groups they join, foreign fighters can enhance

insurgents' mode of warfare at the operational and tactical levels. While many foreign fighters are greenhorns, others are battle-hardened combat veterans of conflicts in the Levant, West Africa, Somalia, Afghanistan, or Yemen. For instance, foreign fighters who returned from Iraq to fight alongside al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb "brought back new terrorist techniques that had not been used previously in the Maghreb, effectively broadening the scope of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's capabilities in terms of casualty rate, lethality, and the execution of multiple, coordinated attacks. These foreign fighters have brought in rocket propelled grenades and boxes of homemade explosives. And wherever you find improvised bombs, you are likely to find foreign fighters. They brought a lot of bomb-making experience from the insurgency in Iraq.

Tactical innovation does not always translate to changes at the strategic level. However, militant organizations that employ multiple approaches to violence are "more likely to stretch state defenses, achieve tactical success, and threaten state security." A number of armed technologies (e.g., the adoption of armed drone attacks) which were introduced and refined in other recent conflict theaters, such as those in the Levant and Yemen, may begin to find their way to armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. While groups like Boko Haram have used drones for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance purposes, none have yet conducted armed drone-based attacks. The flow of veteran foreign fighters from regional and extra-regional theaters to other conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa may introduce new technologies to old and new battlefields. Militant groups with foreign fighters tend to inflict more violence against civilians than insurgent groups without foreign recruits. With foreign fighters, there will be a significant increase in the expected count of rebel-inflicted civilian casualties; this is especially true when foreign fighter join militant organizations with more centralized systems of command and control as can be seen in Nigeria after the allegiance and influx of foreign fighters who are in support of ISWAP.

Conclusion

With the free movement protocol of ECOWAS, there will always be a free movement of persons and migrants from different countries into Nigeria and the fall of the caliphate in Syria and Iraq, making Africa and Nigeria a vulnerable zone for foreign terrorist fighters to settle while pursuing their salafist goals. Prior to the 9/11 attack, migration did not pose any serious challenges to the security of any nation, with the war of terror becoming

the order of the day, and the rise in terrorism there spread of an ideology which supports violence as an end game resulting in the securitization of migration ensure that the security implication will be brought to the barest minimum.

Recommendations

1. **Utilization of social media:** Social media applications can be powerful tools for monitoring events and/or people for intelligence purposes. It should be stressed that OSINT relates to open information, freely posted by individuals or groups to the internet, and available without the need to access restricted areas of the world wide web (for instance, so-called "closed forums", which are password protected and moderated by nominated users and would, more than likely, require surveillance authorities or warrants prior to an investigation). The veracity of open-source intelligence should be treated with care. In practice, corroboration of OSINT is always desirable before executive action is considered.

2. **Enhancement of border control:** The Nigerian Immigration Services or other agencies should be equipped to process and analyze data derived from immigration entry and exit cards, data derived from registers of Nigerians in the diaspora at the respective missions abroad and from organizations of Nigerians in the diaspora, and other sources. There is a need to fill gaps in the migration profile by collecting data on special groups for whom data are not available or at best fragmentary, such as Nigerians in prison and detention cells overseas, Nigerians with dual citizenship, Nigerian students overseas, child migrants, and migration, gender and human rights issues. It should be mandatory for MDAs working in these areas to collate the relevant data which could periodically be accessed by relevant migration coordinating bodies.

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