Article

Boundaries of Terror: Boko Haram attacks and Border Security Management in the Lake Chad, 2015-2025

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Abstract

The Lake Chad Basin, a vital socio-economic hub shared by Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, has been transformed into a theater of protracted conflict due to the activities of Boko Haram. This paper unpacks the boundaries of terror and examines the intersection of insurgent activity and border security management in the Lake Chad between 2015 and 2025. Using a qualitative research design rooted in the "ungoverned spaces" theory, the study evaluates how the sect's exploitation of porous borders and difficult terrain such as the Sambisa Forest and the Lake's Tumbuns (islands) has undermined Nigeria's state sovereignty. Findings indicate that while the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has successfully reduced large-scale territorial holdings, the evolution of the sect into decentralised factions has sustained a climate of asymmetric terror through the use of explosive devices and suicide bombings. The paper concludes that sustainable security in the region cannot be achieved through kinetic approach alone. It recommends a shift toward integrated trans-border governance that prioritizes intelligence sharing, harmonized legal frameworks for border policing, and socio-economic stabilization to address the environmental and political grievances fueling recruitment

Keywords: Boko Haram, Lake Chad Basin, Border Security, Trans-border Governance, Ungoverned Spaces

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Introduction

The Lake Chad Basin (LCB) has historically served as a fluid corridor for trade, migration, and cultural exchange. However, since the mid-2010s, this fluidity has been weaponized by the Boko Haram insurgency, transforming the borderlands of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger into a "frontier of fear." Beginning from 2015, the conflict has undergone a critical shift: the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the subsequent fragmentation of insurgent groups necessitated a more sophisticated, multi-national response. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgents have caused devastating effects on socio-political and economic stability of the countries around the Lake Chad.

Boko Haram group attracted worldwide attention in July 2009 when it staged a violent anti-government uprising that killed over eight hundred people, including civilians, group members, and security personnel. Since then the targets of the Boko Haram insurgent sustained attacks have remained government institutions and security agencies; mosques, churches, clerics, Christian businesses, and relaxation centres, as well as media houses and tertiary institutions (Eme & Ugwu, 2016). These violent attacks have become a serious national, regional, and international concern as they have killed no fewer than 9352 people over time (Dingji *et al*., 2020).

To this end, Onuoha (2014) notes that Boko Haram came into existence in early 2000s under the leadership of Muhammad Ali and later Muhammad Yusuf. The sect, also known *Jama'atu Alisunnah Lidda'a awatil wal jihad*, meaning "people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and jihad", has its core objective to overhaul the secular Nigerian state with a regime that strictly adheres to Islamic Sharia law (Steven & Raymond, 2016).The sect consists of radical Muslims who "believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt and false Muslims. It wants to wage war against them, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a "pure Islamic state ruled by sharia law" (Tar & Safana, 2021).

Adamu (2013) notes that Boko Haram had existed peacefully in Borno State preaching against Western values and pervasive corruption, inequality, injustice, unemployment, immorality that contradicted their belief. However, the anti-Western posture of Boko Haram led to more confrontations with the government. Incidentally, the operation of Boko Haram has moved from the sphere of domestic or internal uprising to international menace. This suggests that Boko Haram insurgency has metamorphosed to a daunting security challenge bedevilling Nigeria and its neighbours in the Lake Chad (Onuoha, 2014).

This extension of attacks to the Lake Chad has assumed a deadly dimension with a heavy toll on lives and properties in the countries and people of the region. The victims of these insurgent acts include civilians, aid workers, and security personnel. Between 2017 and 2018, for instance, Boko Haram insurgents unleashed 90 armed assaults, 59 suicide attacks with 2,700 reported fatalities (Matfess, 2019).

The violent attacks of Boko Haram not only pose serious threat to internal security in Nigeria, but also threaten stability in the Lake Chad (Onuoha, 2014). Such dastardly acts have reshaped the relations between Nigeria and other countries in Africa, following the unwarranted suicide bombing, kidnapping and hostage taking of foreigners, among others. For instance, in Nigeria, insurgent related deaths increased by 25% in 2018 in comparison to 2017 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019). Also, in Cameroon, 275 people were killed in attacks by Boko Haram in the far North, and about 160,000 people displaced from their homes in 2019 (Aljazeera, 2020). It was also reported that in one of the deadliest attacks against security forces in the region, 174 Nigerien soldiers, 100 Chadian soldiers, 50 Nigerian soldiers, and 21 Cameroonian soldiers were killed in separate attacks by Boko Haram between December 2019 and June 2020. More worrisome is the fact that between January and August 2020, Boko Haram insurgents in the Lake Chad accounted for at least 200 civilian deaths from attacks across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger (Aljazeera, 2020)

The various border security strategies such as Super Camp, Operation Last hold, MNJTF, amongst others adopted by Lake Chad have not effectively mitigated the threats of Boko Haram in the region. Various measures advanced by the Lake Chad Basin Commission to curb Boko Haram insurgency appear to have been defective due to the challenges of trans-border governance. This indicates that border security management in the Lake Chad is grossly inefficient to contain the menace of Boko Haram insurgency. The inability of concerned governments to exercise strict control and authority over their borders is quite worrisome. The apparent functional incapacitation apparent in poor border management in the Lake Chad tend to undermine socio-economic integration and development in the region.

Scholarly efforts to offer explanations on the trajectories of Boko Haram insurgency and trans-border relations in Africa abound. Onwuzuruigbo (2020) examines terrorism and the impact of porous border in tackling the insurgency in the Lake Chad. Similar studies such as Ojo (2020), Olaniyan and Akindele (2017), Aniche *et al*., (2021) have separately interrogated how the security challenges associated with ungoverned border spaces, irregular migration and

land disputes have contributed to the ragging activities of insurgents in the Lake Chad. However, despite the numerous scholarly expositions, the incidence of terrorism and associated vices have continued to threaten human and environmental peace in the Lake Chad. Boko Haram insurgency has continued to undermine trans-border security management in the Lake Chad. More fundamentally, none of the studies reviewed accorded adequate and systematic attention to Boko Haram insurgency and trans-border security management in the Lake Chad. This apparent gap provokes the interest of this research. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the nexus between Boko Haram attacks and border security management in the Lake Chad between 2015 and 2025.

Perspectives on Boko Haram, Insurgency and Trans-border governance

Boko Haram, which literarily translates to 'western education is forbidden' refers to the notorious terrorist group based in north eastern Nigeria. Its official name is *Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awatiwal* Jihad (meaning: people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad). The sect was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri, Borno State, by a radical Islamist cleric, Mohammed Yusuf. The group's ideology is based on extremist jihadism, with strict observance of Islamic law (Sharia) in Nigeria (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). In the early 2000s, the insurgents were active in the greater part of northern Nigeria, almost overrunning states like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.

ACAPS (2015) states that Boko Haram, meaning Western education is forbidden, an Islamist militant insurgent group based in north-eastern Nigeria, has been carrying out armed attacks on civilian populations since 2011. This perspective which sees Boko Haram as religious extremists and a militant insurgent group further observes that the sect is seeking to establish an Islamic state with strict adherence to Shariah (Islamic law) in the economically marginalised north eastern states. This implies that the sect is domiciled in northeast Nigeria.

Aduloju *et al*., (2014) see Boko Haram as an unofficial name for the radical Islamic sect that began its activities in Nigeria in 2009, although its origin can be traced to the formation of a group called Sahaba in 1995 headed by Abubakar Lawan. The religious connotation embedded in Boko Haram affirms its status as a sect that employs violent methods to destabilise the Nigerian state. The author further reveals that the official name of Boko Haram is *Jama'atuAhl as-SunnahLidda'awatihwa-Jihad* (in Arabic) and translated to mean people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teaching and Jihad. It is apt to note that the ideology of the sect is opposed to western education and culture which they see as a threat to traditional values, beliefs and customs among Muslim communities in northern Nigeria.

Yayla and Yahaya (2023) maintains that as an anti-government sect, Boko Haram has directed its attacks on the security agencies and government institutions, which it believes are bastions of injustice, corruption and maladministration. Guided by this perspective, Boko Haram fights against public institutions to bring justice, ensure good governance and promote a corrupt-free society. Thus, they are more of freedom fighters in the eyes of sympathisers.

On the contrary, JHAP (2015) designates Boko Haram as an insurgent group. Affirming their position, the Nigerian government declared that the ongoing armed confrontation between Nigerian security forces and the Boko Haram insurgents in the North east is not a civil war but a fight against terrorism. Thus, Boko Haram is an insurgent group that adopts various methods to achieve its aim (Eneanya, 2015). Berne (2016) however avers that the term Boko Haram is not the name the group chose for itself. It was given by observers and outsiders trying to understand its ideology. Boko means "book" in Hausa and Haram means "forbidden" in Arabic. It should be noted that some members of the Boko Haram sect distant themselves with the name "Boko Haram" holding that is not representative of what they stand for and they do not like to be addressed this way. They call themselves *Jama'atuAhl al-Sunnah li Dawahwa-l-jihad*, which means "People Committed to the ways of the Prophet (*Sunnah*), Proselytization (*Dawah*) and Striving, Struggling or Holy War (Jihad)" (Berne, 2016, p.3).

The above scholarly positions provide a narrative on the origin, name and ideology of Boko Haram. However, little emphasis is placed on the dangerous effects of Boko Haram insurgency on the society. Moreover, even though there are contradictions in the name and ideology of the insurgent group popularly known as Boko Haram, the obvious fact remains that the sect is an insurgent group and its members have carried out several violent attacks resulting in killings and wanton destruction of infrastructure and means of livelihood.

Insurgency entails a deliberate attempt by a group of citizens of a state to oppose a sovereign government thereby making the smooth running of government affairs difficult. It involves the use of a combination of subversion, sabotage, guerrilla tactics, and sundry extremist machinations to attain politically amenable objectives (Albert, 2017). The countries around the Lake Chad have been confronted by the nefarious violent attacks of insurgents. It is an organized venture with a defined aim to achieve. In this view, Thomas (2018, p.12) posits that insurgency is "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict". As observed by Manual (1986) and Joel (1998) as cited in Ford (2018), insurgency movements traditionally find their roots in a desire for social and/or political change, and they utilize guerrilla warfare to accomplish their goals.

Insurgencies converse internally from leader to leader, leader to fighter, and fighter to fighter, and externally to civilians and the international community.

Imasuen (2015) notes that insurgency occurs when activities of a group constitute an attack on defenceless citizens and other property resulting in injuries, loss of lives and properties, as well as forced or massive internal displacement of people out of their habitual places of residence. Insurgents tend to adopt unconstitutional means to foster their interest in overthrowing the legitimate authority. Abraham (2006) as cited in Imasuen (2015) however hold a contrasting view regarding insurgency. The contrasting views exist as a result of differences in the region and time at which the scholars carried out their studies. By and large, the target of a sect defines it as an insurgent or just an ordinary movement.

Movement of people across the international boundaries, otherwise called trans-border movement, is a universal phenomenon which can be legal or illegal depending on the circumstances warranting such type of trip. When a national or foreigner passes across an international boundary without having the required documents that back up his trip such movement is regarded as illegal and unconstitutional. In modern African societies, the political border imposed by the colonial imperialist necessitates the need for trans-border governance to shape the relationship among neighbouring countries and curtail illegalities (Adetunji, 2014).

Governance is understood as "the act of governing," a political decision-making process where actors organize themselves through relationship structures, shaping a set of principles, rules among others to implement processes (deliberation, negotiation, decision making and others) for a "better use of power" to ensure better performance and/or obtain better outcomes (Zumbusch & Scherer, 2015). To this end, trans-border governance is the act of governing cross border regions, and this has risen as an opportunity for rethinking integration and development at border regions (Jose *et al*., 2020). It also serves as a co-operative mechanism to bridge territories (Knippschild & Wiechmann, 2012). In a nutshell, trans-border governance is a complex process that primarily fosters a positive impact over cross-border relations.

The foregoing implies that trans-border governance provides the pedestal for overcoming barrier effects of national borders as well as for meeting functional inter-linkages in transport, business, environment, and other policy fields. In this sense, trans-border governance is considered as a fundamental strategy or political procedure to promote territorial integration by exploiting the opportunities within the border regions.

Theoretical Anchorage- Ungoverned Space theory

The analysis in this paper is anchored on Ungoverned Space Theory. The theory provides a critical len for understanding why the Lake Chad became a fertile sanctuary for Boko Haram insurgents. According to this theory, state power is not a monolithic blanket but a variable presence that thins out at the periphery. In the Lake Chad Basin, the vast, rugged terrains comprising the Tumbuns (islands), the Sambisa Forest, and the Mandara Mountains represent "physical ungoverned spaces" where the difficult geography acts as a natural barrier to state penetration. These areas allowed insurgents to establish operational bases, training camps, and "shadow states" far from the reach of the capital cities of Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.

Furthermore, the theory emphasizes that these spaces are often not truly "empty" but are instead "alternatively governed." As the formal states failed to provide security, justice, or basic socio-economic infrastructure, a "governance vacuum" emerged. Boko Haram exploited this by imposing its own crude form of order, taxation, and social regulation (Taylor, 2016). This created a dual reality where a line on a map denoted national sovereignty, but the actual lived experience of border communities was dictated by insurgent authority. Therefore, even as the MNJTF conducted kinetic sweeps, the inability of the four nations to permanently "fill" these spaces with civilian administration meant that as soon as troops withdrew, the "ungoverned" nature of the terrain allowed the insurgency to rapidly reconstitute itself.

Thus, the "porosity" aspect of ungoverned space theory highlights how international boundaries in the region are often "imaginary lines" that do not impede the movement of non-state actors. In the Lake Chad Basin, the convergence of four national borders in a remote, water-logged region created a "security intersection" where jurisdictional confusion and uncoordinated policing thrived. Insurgents utilized this lack of synchronized trans-border governance to engage in "jurisdictional arbitrage" by attacking in one country and retreating into the ungoverned thickets of another. Thus, the "boundaries of terror" as witnessed in the Lake Chad are not created by the strength of the insurgents alone, but by the functional incapacitation of the states to project a consistent, legitimate, and integrated presence across their shared frontiers.

Empirical Review

Nigeria shares a land border with the Republic of Niger, Chad and Cameroon (James, 2015). Despite this extensive border, there are no natural barriers like mountain ranges, rivers or hills separating these countries leading to it being vast, open and densely populated. This border proximity created a platform for common customs, language and religious romance

between Nigeria and Niger despite being separated by colonial powers. The cohesion and solidarity among the people across these boundaries and movements across the border remain unhindered despite the aforementioned arbitrary international borders drawn by the colonial powers.

Victor (2015) notes that there is a new policy consciousness between Nigeria and its neighbours on how best to manage threats between them. This official policy consciousness response ranges from unilateral actions to promoting cooperation basically to ensure the security of their borders. This has led to the arrest of dozens of Boko Haram insurgents along the borders. This implies that trans-border security between Nigeria and its neighbours, which is maintained by the policy of good neighbourliness, is aimed at stabilizing relations with its immediate neighbours and making the Lake Chad safe for migrant workers.

Similarly, Omenma (2020) highlights the interconnection between Boko Haram insurgency and oil and gas business in the Lake Chad. The study locates a link between water resources and terrorism. Using Boko Haram activities in the Lake Chad, it links religion to the root cause of terrorism and further argues that there is an economic dimension of Boko Haram terrorism, which is based on two interrelated indicators: the attack on the Nigerian oil exploration team in the Lake Chad basin, and the continuous exploitation of oil and gas by Chad, Niger, and Cameroon in the region. These attacks have dire implications for both the security of the Lake Chad and counterterrorism at large.

James (2015) argues that the porous nature of Nigeria and its neighbours' border pave way for smuggling, trafficking and movement of arms and ammunition that occur across the border regions. This also facilitates the infiltration by religious fundamentalists such as Boko Haram. Nigeria's security relations with Niger, Chad and Cameroon have been redefined by Boko Haram violent attacks, and other cross-border related crimes. This viewpoint illuminates on the nature and character of the Nigerian border but fails to proffer adequate solution on how the identified challenges could be ameliorated. It also fails to demonstrate the overall impact of common customs, language and religious romance between Nigeria and its neighbours.

Furthermore, Okoli (2019) examines Boko Haram insurgency and necessity for trans-territorial forestland governance in the lower Lake Chad Basin. The study posits that Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria has followed the logic of tactical opportunism and unconventional warfare to sustain itself through a firm occupation and exploitation of the Sambisa forest in the lower Lake Chad Basin. Boko Haram insurgency exploit difficult or scarcely governed spaces to gain a strategic, asymmetric advantage. Supporting this viewpoint,

Tella (2017) opines that insurgent groups often utilise difficult terrains, such as mountains, creeks, deserts, and jungles as safe havens or sanctuaries.

Beacon (2018) argues that trans-national alliance between the ISWAP and Boko Haram is major facilitator of insurgency in the Lake Chad. The trans-national terrorist alliances offer opportunities for deeper and more sustained exchanges, and therefore, can pose a greater threat to cross border security management. Terrorist and transnational organized crime groups, as well as foreign terrorist fighters continue to illegally cross borders to traffic arms, ammunition and explosives, drugs, contraband, other illicit goods, and human beings.

Calléja, (2021) argues that the inability to ensure effective border security management is responsible for the rising cases of Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad. This implies that the geographic particularities of the region, namely the Lake Chad's watery expanses which are difficult to control, the porous nature of national boundaries, and the cross-border linkages have all rendered the region a suitable environment for actors who wish to use it as a base to challenge state authority, even prior to Boko Haram's emergence.

Methodology

The study is both descriptive and qualitative. Relevant secondary data on Boko Haram attacks and border security management in the Lake Chad were drawn from books, journal articles, official documents and other relevant articles using documentary method, while related primary data on border security management in the Lake Chad were drawn from key stakeholders/informants using Key Informant Interview (KII). Both secondary and primary data were analysed with the aid of qualitative content analysis.

Discussion and Analysis

Boko Haram's violent activities in the Lake Chad Basin present a complex security challenge that transcends Nigeria's borders. The insurgents exploit the porous and difficult-to-monitor boundaries between Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger to conduct cross-border attacks, smuggle arms, and retreat into safe havens when pursued. It is no longer news that Boko Haram is no longer just a domestic insurgency; it operates as a regional network with affiliates across borders. Their operations include hit-and-run raids, suicide bombings, abductions, and ambushes targeting both civilian populations and security forces. Inadequate joint patrols and limited real-time intelligence sharing between Nigeria and neighbouring states create operational blind spots plus the geography of the Lake Chad which, characterised with swamps, islands, and marshlands, offer insurgents natural concealment. During an interview, a Senior Director, Defence Operations stated that:

> Boko Haram's violent activities in the Lake Chad Basin have evolved into a complex, transnational security challenge. The insurgents exploit Nigeria's porous borders with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger to conduct cross-border raids, smuggle weapons, and retreat to safe havens beyond our immediate reach. The terrain's marsh lands, islands, and thick vegetation further complicate our ability to monitor and intercept them (Key Informant Interview, Abuja, 2025)

His statement captures the outright truth that the porous nature of the Nigeria's borders facilitated unhindered flow of criminal elements as well as small arms and light weapons. The porous nature of the borders gives them overwhelming leverage to lunch attacks and escape without traces. Thus, the senior official further observed that:

> From our operational experience, it is clear that Boko Haram is no longer just a domestic insurgency. They coordinate with regional affiliates, using hit-and-run tactics, ambushes, and targeted bombings to stretch our security resources thin (Key Informant Interview, Abuja, 2025).

Concerted efforts have been made to bring the activities of Boko Haram under control but there are gaps that seem to limit these efforts. This was revealed in the statement of Senior Adviser, Defence Strategy and Policy, Ministry of Defence. He remarked that:

> While we have made progress through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), gaps remain in joint patrols and real-time intelligence sharing across borders. The absence of harmonised communication systems often delays critical response times during cross-border incidents (Key Informant Interview, Abuja, 2025).

The insurgents' tactics ranging from smuggling arms and recruiting fighters to seeking refuge across neighbouring territories have significantly altered how border security agencies plan, coordinate, and execute their operations. Against this backdrop, the perspectives of the Deputy Comptroller-General and the Assistant Deputy Comptroller-General (Border Unit) provide valuable insight into the institutional and operational changes necessitated by the insurgency. The Deputy Comptroller-General noted:

> Since 2015, Boko Haram's violent activities have forced a fundamental restructuring of our border security framework. Before then, border control in the Lake Chad was primarily administrative, focusing on documentation, inspection, and routine patrols. However, the insurgency shifted our priority towards a more militarised and intelligence-driven model of operation. We have had to integrate joint task forces with the military and police, especially in high-risk border corridors. Our officers now receive counterinsurgency and tactical response training, which was not part of the traditional immigration role prior to the insurgency (Key Informant Interview, Abuja, 2025).

On the other hand, the Assistant Deputy Comptroller-General (Border Surveillance and Enforcement) added:

> Operationally, the biggest change has been the adoption of advanced surveillance systems, including drones, thermal imaging, and mobile border monitoring units. These tools became essential because Boko Haram exploits remote crossing points and the difficult terrain of the Lake Chad Basin to move undetected. We have also established rapid response teams stationed in strategic border posts. Their mandate is to respond instantly to intelligence on insurgent movement, whether from our officers, the military, or local informants. In addition, our collaboration with regional immigration agencies particularly in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger has intensified, with more frequent intelligence-sharing, meetings and coordinated patrols (Key Informant Interview, Abuja, 2025).

The foregoing suggests that the ability of Boko Haram to move across borders, exploit weak governance, and take advantage of regional issues like poverty, resource scarcity, and climate change to launch violent attacks have created a severe trans-border security crisis in the Lake Chad Basin. This has led to displacement, hindered economic activity, and increased the need for regional cooperation, such as that provided by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), despite numerous tactical and operational challenges.

From the foregoing submissions, it is glaring that border security in the Lake Chad has shifted from a largely administrative framework to a highly militarised and intelligence-driven operation. The porous and difficult-to-monitor borders have provided Boko Haram with strategic advantages, enabling the seamless movement of fighters, as well as small arms and light weapons across Nigeria's frontiers. The insurgency's transnational networks and adaptive tactics such as hit-and-run raids, ambushes, and coordinated attacks reflect the increasingly regional nature of the threat. Although the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has made notable progress in countering these activities, the absence of harmonised communication systems and real-time intelligence sharing continues to hinder swift and effective operational responses. These dynamics points to the dual challenge of confronting a more sophisticated insurgent strategy while addressing the structural limitations that weaken coordinated countermeasures.

The escalation of Boko Haram's violent attacks has also reshaped the operational priorities of border security agencies. Traditional administrative duties such as documentation and routine patrols have given way to militarised joint task force operations, supported by specialised counterinsurgency training for personnel. The integration of advanced surveillance technologies, including drones, thermal imaging, and mobile monitoring units, marks a significant enhancement in technological capacity. Additionally, the establishment of rapid

response teams in strategic locations, coupled with intensified regional collaboration with neighbouring states, demonstrates a shift towards more agile and cooperative approaches to border security. Collectively, these developments depict a security environment in which Boko Haram's trans-border activities have compelled border agencies to adopt dynamic, technology-driven, and collaborative strategies aimed at mitigating a persistent and adaptive threat.

The incidents and patterns as highlighted reveal that the ability of Boko Haram to exploit the weaknesses of internal border is rooted in a combination of geographic, operational, and institutional vulnerabilities. The repeated use of unmanned or difficult-to-monitor crossing points, such as the Elbeid River and informal tracks along the Diffa–Damasak corridor, underscores the challenges posed by porous borders and vast, inaccessible terrain. These ungoverned spaces create operational blind spots where insurgents can move fighters, weapons, and supplies without immediate detection. The case of the January 2019 Rann attack, where insurgents crossed into Borno State after striking in Cameroon, exemplifies the limitations of rapid-response capability and the difficulties in pursuing insurgents once they cross into neighbouring jurisdictions (Amnesty International, 2019). Figure 1 demonstrates that the surge in Boko Haram activities is linked to porous borders in the Lake Chad.

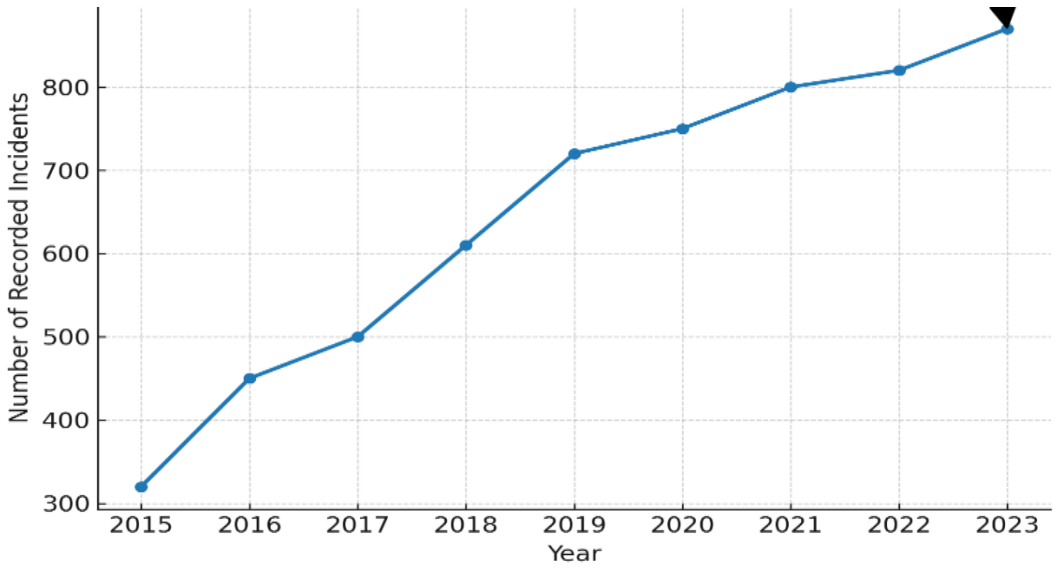


Figure 1: Surge in Boko Haram activities linked to porous borders, 2015-2023

Source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) aggregated reports, 2015-2023 www.acleddata.com.

Figure 1 reveals that Boko Haram's cross-border mobility thrives where physical surveillance is limited, inter-agency coordination is slow, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms are not fully synchronised across Lake Chad Basin states. Addressing these weaknesses requires a multi-layered approach that combines real-time intelligence fusion, targeted surveillance of

known infiltration routes, and community-level cooperation to disrupt the insurgents' operational networks.

The combination of swampy islands, seasonal channels and informal footpaths across the Lake and its littoral spaces produced multiple unmonitored transit routes that insurgents repeatedly used to stage raids, evade pursuit and smuggle weapons and materiel (UN OCHA, 2017). These cross-border maneuvers were not anomalies but part of an adaptive repertoire. Insurgents combined the use of waterways and islands to conceal logistics and fighters, which complicated detection at checkpoints and static border posts (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The point being made is that terrain and routine economic activity, when coupled with weak surveillance and patchy jurisdictional coordination, create the most persistent vulnerabilities for trans-border insurgent operations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study indicates that violent activities by members of Boko Haram significantly undermined border security across the Lake Chad, fundamentally altering the political, economic, and social character of these peripheral zones. Historically, the borders between Nigeria and its neighbours, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad functioned as relatively open socio-economic spaces, enabling vibrant cross-border trade, pastoral migration, and kinship-based exchanges.

Boko Haram insurgency, which remains one of the most complex security challenges in the Lake Chad, driven not only by extremist violence but also by the weaknesses of trans-border governance, has exposed the porous nature of Nigerian borders with its neighbours, the limitations of unilateral security measures, and the fragility of regional cooperation. While joint military operations under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) achieved some tactical successes and reduced large-scale territorial holdings, the group's evolution into decentralized factions has sustained a climate of asymmetric terror through the use of explosive devices and suicide bombings. The study therefore concludes that sustainable security in the region cannot be achieved through kinetic force alone.

The study therefore recommends a shift toward integrated trans-border governance that prioritizes intelligence sharing, harmonized legal frameworks for border policing, and socio-economic stabilization to address the environmental and political grievances fueling recruitment. There is need to shift from purely military border control to a framework that harmonizes customs, immigration, and police protocols across the four countries of the Lake

Chad. This includes establishing joint border posts and a unified digital database for tracking the movement of goods and persons. Beyond the MNJTF, there is an urgent need for a "Trans-border Intelligence Hub" that includes local community leaders and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), and community-led early warning systems that can bridge the trust gap between border populations and formal military structures.

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