



Journal of Politics and Development

ISSN 2632-4911

Volume 10 ■ Number 1 ■ Winter 2020

THE REST: Journal of Politics and Development

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** The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.*

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Nigeria and the Great Powers: The Impacts of the Boko Haram Terrorism on Nigeria's Foreign Relations

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Great Powers
Boko Haram
Counter-terrorism
National Security
Foreign Relations

Received 26 November 2019

Revised 11 January 2020

Accepted 21 January 2020

This paper argues that two incidents in the terrorism of Boko Haram primarily attracted the attention of the international community. First, the mass abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls by the group and secondly, the pledge of allegiance by Islamist sect to the Islamic State group in the Middle East. It is against this background that this study examines the interventions of the United States, France and Russia in the counterterrorism operation in Nigeria. It contends that while their responses have only had a slight impact on the war against terrorism in the country, they have had ramifications for Nigerian foreign relations. The paper shows that the wavering attitude of the United States to the war based on human rights issues, strained US-Nigerian diplomatic relations, while France's participation further helped to improve Franco-Nigerian relations. The involvement of Russia, which primarily revolved around economic imperative, reignited the largely lukewarm Russo-Nigerian relations.

Introduction

After many years of a brutal campaign of terror in Nigeria by the jihadist Boko Haram group, the international community formally directly intervened to put an end to the atrocious activities in Nigeria as well as around the Lake Chad Basin region. Two momentous issues were significant in the attention Boko Haram group generated globally. In the first instance, the mass abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls in their hostel in northern Nigeria by the group generated international outrage and condemnation, especially after the #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign went viral. The abduction demonstrated the monstrosity of the jihadi gang in the country and helped to highlight the plight of the thousands of victims rendered homeless, kidnapped, maimed and bereaved. Despite the State of emergency already declared in the beleaguered region coupled with the military blockade imposed on Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States, the successful attack on the Chibok became an eye-opener to the ineffective counterterrorism strategy mounted by the Nigerian military, and thus, in dire need of outside help to defeat the rag-tag soldiers of the caliphate.

Secondly, the pledge of allegiance by the Nigerian terror organisation to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), had implications for the global fight against Islamist extremism. The acceptance of the allegiance by Abubakr Abu Musab al Baghdadi, the slain caliph of the now virtual Raqqa-based Islamic caliphate, made Boko Haram a dangerous affiliate of ISIS in West Africa and a major stakeholder in the

global jihadi movement. Boko Haram's change of name to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) reflecting its regional aims, and its subsequent trans-border attacks into the neighbouring francophone states in the Chad Basin area required the intervention of the international community. In spite of their decade-long engagements in Nigeria's counterterrorist struggle, they have not succeeded in weakening Boko Haram terrorist structures in the country and its transnational spread in the Lake Chad region. However, their interventions have nonetheless continued to have ramifications for Nigerian foreign relations. This study, therefore, reflects on the implications of the United States, Russia and France's involvement in the counter-Boko Haram terrorism for Nigerian diplomatic relations. The paper argues that the lack of commitment of the United States; a traditional Nigerian ally, to the counter-Boko Haram effort strained the US-Nigerian diplomatic relations, while France's (a former geopolitical rival) participation further helped to improve Franco-Nigerian relations. Along the way, the paper examines the involvement of Russia in the fight, contending that while economic consideration was pivotal to its intervention, Moscow's role has reignited the largely lukewarm Nigerian-Russian relations. The paper is divided into four segments, the first segment analyses the involvement of the US in the fight against the terror group and its refusal to supply Nigerian air force with aircraft based on human rights abuses of the Nigerian military. The second section focuses on the interrogation of the impacts of France's intervention on Franco-Nigerian diplomatic relations. The implication of the positive Russian intervention for Nigerian security relations is the focus of section three while section four concludes the paper.

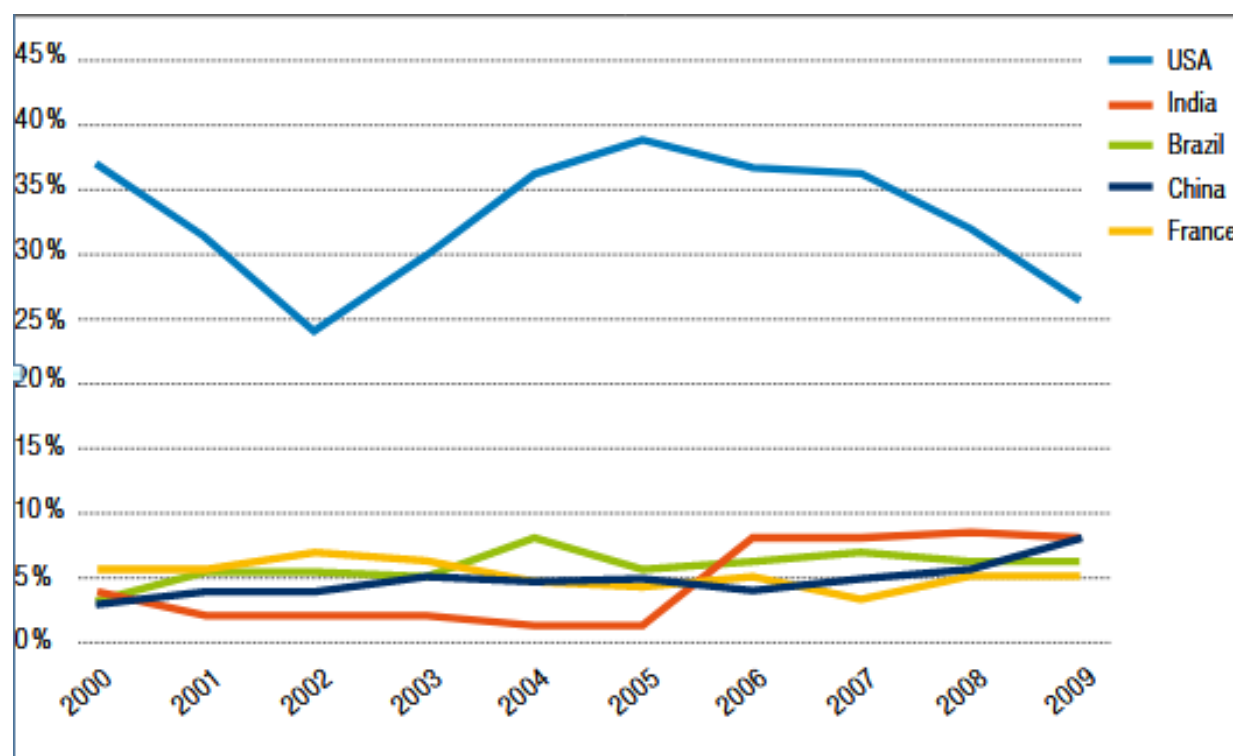
United States-Nigerian Relations in the Context of Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria

Shortly after Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, despite the non-aligned posture of its foreign policy, Nigeria was openly pro-West and showed abhorrence to the Communist East to Washington's admiration (Anglin, 1964; Philip, 1964; Fawole, 2003). In fact, in the immediate years after independence, Nigeria developed very cordial relations with the US across all sectors. It abandoned the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy of the British, its colonial master, in favour of American presidential democracy. The United State has, over the years, been supportive of Nigeria reform agendas, including anti-corruption and anti-narcotic struggles, economic and electoral reforms and development in restive Nigeria's delta region among others (Blanchard and Husted, 2016). Since experiencing an oil boom in the 70s, until recently, Nigeria ranked as the US's largest trading partner and biggest ally in tropical Africa after the United Kingdom (Ogunbadejo, 1976).

Indeed, the commercial relations between the two states were quite strong as Nigeria became a major player in the international oil politics due in part to the volatility in the Middle East. Nigeria was able to provide the US with an increasing proportion of its much-needed oil requirements, making Abuja attained a new status in the American foreign relations (*Daily Times*, 1972).

As indicated above, Nigeria maintained strong economic relations with the United States above other countries. The bilateral relations were so strong that Nigeria was one of the first few countries to express solidarity with the US following September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Abuja publicly voiced its support for Washington's declaration of a global war on terrorism (US Department of Defense, 2002).

Certainly, there were occasional frictions between the two states on many Nigerian national issues such as the US's refusal to supply weapons to Nigeria during its 30-month Civil War (1967-1970). However, their burgeoning trade relations always render such frictions insignificant in their diplomatic relations. Before the crisis of Boko Haram, the US was one of the largest suppliers of military equipment to the Nigerian Armed forces (Omotuyi, 2018a). Ogunbadejo (1976: 18) maintains that the UK and US 'remain Nigeria's first choice for the purchases of arms for many reasons'. It was certainly expected that America would be eager to offer both military and diplomatic supports to Nigeria in the war against terrorism being a Nigerian ally and a self-appointed leader in the war against terrorism globally.

Figure 1: Nigeria's major trading partners before the terrorism of Boko Haram (2000-2009)

Source: UN Comtrade, <http://un.comtrade.org>

Based on the prevailing cordial diplomatic relations between the two states, Nigeria decided to purchase lethal weapons from the US. The decision to buy weapons became urgent, given several reports blaming the government for inadequate weapons for the Nigerian soldiers in the war fronts (Udo, 2014; Bappah, 2016). Certainly, inadequate sophisticated arms and government ineptitude among other factors were critical to the failed military counterterrorist operation. In his statement to the military tribunal, a soldier, whose unit could not dislodge the terrorist from their hideout in the Borno state's section of the dreaded Sambisa forest, provides insight into the decadence within the Nigerian Armed forces. The dismissed soldier stated that the troops were only armed with five bullets each and expired bombs made in 1964, whereas the Boko Haram enemies were armed with sophisticated arms such as anti-aircraft with a range of over 1,000 meters (Vanguard, 2015). Convinced therefore that acquisition of more offensive arms was pivotal to defeating the sect; the Nigerian government opted to buy weapons from the US. Specifically, Nigeria wanted to buy Cobra Attack Helicopters and other sophisticated military hardware (McGregor, 2015). Even though US had pledged its readiness to help Nigeria decimate the sect and had since 2013 declared the group a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), it nonetheless refused Nigeria's request for weapons, citing human rights record of the Nigerian soldiers fighting the terrorists (Obaji, 2015; Goldsmith, 2014). It only supplied defensive weapons such as landmine-resistant vehicles to the Nigerian military (Arseneault, 2015; Ezeamalu, 2016), but declined to supply offensive weapons to the country. Of a truth, the military operation against Boko Haram under the umbrella of the Joint Task Force had grave consequences for the human rights of the people in the region. The security outfit has been variously accused of extra-judicial and summary executions of the suspected terrorists, detention of innocent citizens for years without trial, arbitrary arrest of individuals suspected of being members of the outlawed sect, intimidation and harassment of the residents of the place (Amnesty International, 2014; Amnesty International, 2015; Bappah, 2016).

Washington hinged its refusal to sell the weapons based on the implementation of the Leahy Law against Nigeria. The Law was specially enacted within the US external relations to deny the US military assistance to foreign military units involved in the violations of human right (Foreign Affairs, 2017). Commenting on the outrageous human rights profile of the Nigerian fighting force, Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos (2014)

maintains that human rights abuses of the military especially its summary and extra-judicial executions played a major role in the radicalisation of many members of the sect who were known to be pacifists. Accordingly, the Leahy Law states that: 'No assistance shall be furnished under this Act... to any unit of the security forces of a foreign country if the Secretary of State has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights' (Legal Information Institute, n.d). Over the years, Leahy Law has been implemented to block military assistance to some countries whose military units involved in the abuses of human rights of the civilians. Such countries include Turkey, Columbia, Bolivia, and Mexico (Tate, 2011). Also, the Pakistani military has equally come under the hammer of the Law for its extra-judicial killings and other forms of gross human rights abuses (Schmitt and Senger, 2010).

While justifying the US's refusal to sell deadly arms to Nigeria, American ambassador to Nigeria, Ambassador James Entwistle stated that Washington would not sell arms to Nigeria because 'the US government is against human rights abuses by any country in the world'. He maintains that the 'Nigerian military had been massively involved in human rights violations in its war against the terrorists (*The Guardian*, 2014: 1&2). Israel and Brazil also declined to supply offensive weapons to Nigeria due to the US's pressure. Elaborating on the 'No Objection' request from these two countries to sell arms to Nigeria, Entwistle declares that:

The US Department of State and Defense review all potential arms transfers for their consistency with US policy and interests, as detailed in the US Conventional Arms Transfer policy. This includes any requests from a country that we have sold or donated weapons to resell or donate those same weapons to another country, such as Nigeria. We examine whether an arms transfer makes sense for the needs of the prospective country. Part of our review considers whether equipment may be used in a way that could adversely affect human rights. The United States believes that we bear a certain responsibility for how equipment is ultimately used. We take this responsibility very seriously, and our laws require strict accountability for all sales (Entwistle, 2014: 53).

Expectedly, the US's global arms embargo imposed on Nigeria was largely interpreted by Nigerians as a betrayal by a friend that failed to help Nigeria in its moment of crisis (Siollum, 2018). The President Barak Obama's Nigerian policy during the administration of the President Goodluck Jonathan especially the regime's refusal to supply the Nigerian air force with Cobra attack aircraft, all helped to wreak serious damage to the US-Nigerian relations. The diplomatic furore generated by the US's action made Jonathan's government to sever Nigeria's security partnership with Washington (Tukur, 2014) to protest the US's 'betrayal'. Also, President Muhammadu Buhari, who succeeded Jonathan, heaped the blame of lingering Boko Haram crisis on the US decision, pointing out that the arms denial amounts to 'aiding and abetting Boko Haram terrorists in the country' (BBC, 2015). In its desperation, Nigeria was forced to turn to the South African black market to procure weapons. However, the weapons sales were blocked by the South African government who described the botched deal as illegal (Ibekwe, 2014). Reprieve only came the way of Nigeria when Russia was approached for the much-needed arms. Moscow's prompt response (Campbell, 2017) in the delivery of the weapons to Nigeria severely shattered the aura of invincibility with which Boko Haram had been carrying out its attacks. The deployment of the Russian weapons as well as the regional military alliance; the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) degraded the terrorists and dislodged them from their Gworza caliphate and other dreaded camps in the northeast. The weakening of the sect prompted President Buhari to publicly proclaim that the Boko Haram terrorist group has been technically defeated (Onapajo, 2017). However, the group has since recovered from the battlefield losses.

Despite the military supports Nigeria got from Russia, the Nigerian military planners were not unaware of the importance of the US's military support in totally defeating the terrorists. Therefore, immediately Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in as Nigerian President in 2015, efforts were made to normalise the fractured US-Nigerian relations. Likewise, the newly elected Donald Trump government's body language was suggestive of the policy change from the Obama administration's arms denial to the one that favours arms sales to Nigerian government (Campbell, 2017). Even though the President had targeted Africa and Nigeria in particular for cruel mockery, by calling the continent a 'shithole' (Dawsey, 2018) and Nigeria, a 'hut' (Ogundipe, 2017), the President still invited Nigerian President to White House in what is largely perceived in the country as a move to patch up the ruptured US-Nigerian diplomatic relations and put their bilateral relations on a more secure basis. However, the State Visit failed to achieve anything significant in

reviving the goodwill both sides have enjoyed over the years. It only helped to deepen distrust between the two powers as Trump reportedly insulted the Nigerian President, describing him as 'lifeless' (Inyang, 2018).

The US's visa ban imposed on individuals alleged to have compromised the integrity of the 2019 General elections in Nigeria (*Leadership*, 2019) has further complicated efforts at normalising the ruptured diplomatic relations. President Buhari, who was declared the winner of the 'rigged' poll, has not reacted formerly to the visa ban. While the US declined to reveal the identity of the affected persons, it is believed that the list contains the names of the President's 'big boys' and members of the ruling All Progressive Party (APC) (*Leadership*, 2019). The policy to stonewall arms delivery to Nigeria underscores the growing irrelevance of Nigeria in the US's geo-economic and strategic calculations. The upsurge in Shale oil production, making the US the largest oil-producing states in the world (Kelly, 2019) means that Nigeria is no longer crucial in the American energy sector. Ditching Abuja's efforts to get arms, therefore, brings no consequence to Washington. Although President Buhari has declared that Nigeria had paid for the delivery of lethal arms from the US (Ibrahim, 2018), however, as of writing, the weapons are still being awaited in the country.

Counter-terrorism and Franco-Nigerian Relations

Since the emergence of Nigeria as the most powerful state in sub-Saharan Africa with an ambitious foreign policy of projecting power in West Africa, it has had to contend primarily with France for sub-regional leadership. Paris has left no one in doubt in respect of its readiness to intervene in the affairs of its ex-colonies in West and Central Africa. Within the Lake Chad region comprising Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, Nigeria's regional leadership aspiration was primarily perceived as posing a credible threat to France's interest in the region (Azikiwe, 1961; Ogunbadejo, 1976; Nwokedi, 1989). The Nigerian Afrocentric external relations anchored on its 'historic mission' for 'totally political, economic, social and cultural liberation of African' (1979 Nigerian Constitution, section 19) did not bode well for France's design in the region. Therefore, Abuja and Paris have, for a long time, locked horns on the leadership of West Africa because of each country's perception that the other is infringing upon its rightful sphere of influence (Buzan and Weaver 2003, 250). Therefore, diplomatic relations between the two powers had always been punctuated with animosity and mistrust.

The simmering distrust between the two came to a head in 1961 when Nigeria severed diplomatic relations with France to protest Paris' atomic tests in the Sahara desert. Expectedly, this shabby treatment was unacceptable to the European Great Power, whose international pride had been subjected to ridicule (Omole, 2010; Griffin, 2014). Consequently, France's policy towards Nigeria was aimed at retaliating against Lagos and neutralising the threat posed by Nigeria to Paris in the contested region. The French President, General Charles De Gaulle, had only one unwavering ambition: to keep France solidly within the ranks of the Great Powers (Nwokedi, 1989). Therefore, he could not accept the humiliation and embarrassment of the severance of diplomatic relations by an African country brought on France (Nwokedi, 1989). The Nigeria-Biafran war fortuitously provided a unique opportunity for France to actualise its design against Nigeria as it seized upon the secessionist bid to dismember the country (Aluko, 1981). Its unwavering support for the rebel through arm shipment and diplomatic support was meant to cut Nigeria to size (Nwokedi, 1989).

The post-Civil War Nigerian sub-regional policy was primarily meant to integrate the economies of the 15 countries in the West African through the framework of ECOWAS as part of its good neighbourliness agenda. However, the undeclared intention of the sub-regional economic mechanism was to limit France's meddlesomeness in West Africa and deter the francophone states from further courting Paris' intervention in the sub-regional affairs (Adebajo, 2002). In other words, the sub-regional economic mechanism was not just a tool by Nigeria to pursue a leadership role but to also reduce the dependence of its Francophone Neighbours on France. Certainly, France was not unaware of the Nigerian agenda, and was prepared to frustrate Nigeria's sub-regional design. France's antagonism to ECOWAS was to ensure that these French-speaking states remain forever under France's grip. Consequently, Enor and Chime (2015) observe that the ECOWAS' lacklustre performance was as a result of France's opposition to the economic bloc among other factors.

However, Nigeria's persistent positive engagements with other African countries whether Francophone or Anglophone, as well as the current myriad political and economic woes battling Nigeria, has shown that Nigeria poses no credible threat to France's interests in the sub-region. Indeed, its evolving regional agenda,

in contrast to its grandiose regional aspirations of the independent years, appears to be in tandem with that of the policy pursued by France in the region in recent times. It was Abuja's awareness of Paris' role as a stabilising factor and indeed, as a counter-weight to the terrorism and political debacles in the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel that encouraged it to agree with France's positive interventions in West and Central Africa under the umbrella of the UN. This evolving collaboration was displayed during the Ivorian Presidential election crisis of 2010.

Their coordinated responses to the crisis ultimately culminated in the joint sponsorship of UN Resolution calling on the defeated president; Laurent Gbagbo to hand over power to the winner of the election; Alassane Ouattara (World Peace Foundation, 2017). The enforcement of the Resolution by France through the deployment of French troops to oust Gbagbo from office received the support of Nigerian authorities (World Peace Foundation, 2017). France's growing involvement in the efforts at resolving security challenge in the perennially volatile Sahel and Lake Chad regions had ramifications for improved security and political relations between Nigeria and France.

Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, all the successive French Presidents have had to pay a state visit to Nigeria. The incumbent President, Emmanuel Macron's state visit to Nigeria in 2018 highlighted the importance the French leader attaches to anti-Boko Haram efforts in the region. Speaking about the visit, Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister, Ambassador Geoffrey Onyeama says that the visit further helped to reinforce the French support to Nigeria in the area of security. Apart from working together through the MNJTF and intelligence sharing, France has been helpful, especially on the issue of funding for the fight against terrorism (*Vanguard*, 2018).

Certainly, Boko Haram's trans-border terrorism in the Chad basin region set this Jihadi group in opposition to Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad and by extension, France. The incursion of Boko Haram into the French-speaking countries constitutes an unacceptable threat to French interests in West and Central Africa. This is more so given the several attacks by Boko Haram against France's interests in the region. The Boko Haram attack in Waza Park, in northern Cameroon where the terrorists abducted seven French tourists on February 19, 2013, was one of the classic examples of the sect's direct threat to France's core national interest. Commenting about the abduction, former French foreign affairs Minister noted that: 'it (abduction) shows that the fight against terrorist groups is a necessity...' (Musa and Felix, 2013). Therefore, both France's and Nigeria's interests converge on the Boko Haram crisis. France's active participation in the counter-terrorist effort 'was informed by the fear that the escalation of terrorism in Nigeria poses a threat to French geostrategic interests in its former colonies' (Ogbonnaya, 2016: 193). The burden of fighting the group's terrorism ultimately falls on all the regional countries in the Basin, including France. This is more so given the French policy of dealing with the threat posed by many Islamic terrorist gangs that seek to further destabilise the already structurally weak states in the unstable region. France's regional agenda is succinctly captured by the assertion of the country's ex-law makers; Andre Dulait, saying, 'The African continent is our neighbours and when it is shaken by conflicts, we are shaken as well' (cited in Hansen, 2007). The crisis triggered by Boko Haram had shaken the African continent particularly when it was rated the deadliest terrorist group in 2014 (GTI, 2014).

The regionalisation of the Boko Haram violence has ensured that France works closely with its African partners through the provision of right arms and specialised training on effective counterterrorism. More importantly, Boko Haram's allegiance to ISIS in 2014 and the subsequent change of name to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) suggests that the group can only be tamed by superior firepower similar to what was unleashed on ISIS in the Middle East. Commenting on the allegiance, Francois Hollande, French President maintains that the pledge of allegiance by the Nigerian terror organisation to Islamic State group poses a major threat to West Africa security and must be taken at face value (Siobhan, 2015). He further emphasises that: "We know Boko Haram is linked to Daesh (ISIS) and so receives help (and) support from this group... The fight against Boko Haram is the fight against Daesh.... Boko Haram is largely seen as IS' Caliphate in West Africa province" (Siobhan, 2015).

Essentially, the seemingly intractable security challenge induced by terrorism in the Sahel and Lake Chad region has continued to have profound positive implications for Franco/Nigerian diplomatic relations. With the ceaseless threat posed by Boko Haram, France has taken a more direct role in the conflict in the region by mobilising troops and war equipment to the Nigeria-Niger border town of Diffa in support of forces fighting the insurgents (Griffin, 2015). France's deepening involvement in the struggle against Boko Haram terrorism

certainly serves Nigeria's national security. France has, in recent times, strengthened its commitment with those Francophone Lake Chad Commission member states and improved the capacity of their field forces in the war against the nihilistic group; this has proved helpful in the battlefield with the terrorists (Ogbonnaya et al., 2014).

Traditionally, especially since the end of World War II, France, unlike the US, abhors a unilateralist approach to international issues, especially those on security, preferring multilateral arrangements such as UN, EU and other regional and sub-regional frameworks (Belkin, 2018). Its responses to the Ivorian election crisis in 2010 and the Malian political debacle of 2012 were jointly coordinated with other states (Wyss, 2017). The rejuvenation of the largely moribund LCBC's security coalition; MNJTF owes so much to France's intervention. Formed in 1994 by Nigeria to address the perennial insecurity in the Basin and went truly 'multinational' in 1998 when the francophone riparian states of Lake Chad joined the security outfit, it has nonetheless remained mostly a toothless bulldog since its formation. Obamamoye (2017) argues that it was Nigeria that demanded the intervention of France to convince other members of LCBC states before the first regional counter-terrorism meeting could be convoked in France. The Paris security Summit, as the security meeting was later called, had positive implications for the re-invigoration of the regional security outfit. The Summit which held in May 2014 demonstrated Paris' proactive support for a joint military operation against Boko Haram as the Summit officially endorsed the mandate of the revived security framework (Onuoha, 2014). Speaking on the same issue, former French Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr Denys Gauer corroborated Obamamoye's argument, asserting that France did encourage African countries affected by the insurgency to cooperate with Nigeria in the fight against the scourge (*The Guardian*, 2017). The Summit, which brought together the presidents of Benin, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria and representatives from EU, UN and US discussed strategies to combat the Boko Haram. The eventual rejuvenation of the coalition with an expanded mandate to counter the insurgents and resolve the humanitarian crisis induced by the rebellious group has been pivotal to the military success against the Sunni Islamist group in 2015. The joint effort of the affected states with international backing resulted in the dismantling of the Boko Haram's caliphate, prompting President Buhari's declaration of 'technical defeat' over the vicious group (Onapajo, 2017).

Definitely, without France's intervention, reinventing the regional security alliance would have been very problematic. The MNJTF has become a diplomatic platform under which France and Nigeria deepened their relations. The two countries further concretised their burgeoning military cooperation in the Lake Chad Security Summit which took place on May 2016 in Abuja, Nigeria. In the Abuja Summit, French and Nigerian Presidents agreed to expand military cooperation and work with West African countries to crush the terrorist and other criminalities in the sub-region. Having already deployed 3000 troops to Niger and Chad to do battle with Boko Haram, the then French President remarked that: '...when there is a threat to a country in Africa, there is a threat to France' (*Bloomberg*, 2016). France's willingness to work with Nigeria to meaningfully address the security crisis found its best indication in the supply of war equipment and counter-insurgency training for the Nigerian military.

France's support for the Nigerian fight against the Islamist group, especially in the area of intelligence coordination facilitated the capability of Nigerian soldiers in dislodging the terrorists from their caliphate in Gworza. Undoubtedly, the defence agreement was an indication of the deepening cooperation between Abuja and Paris. In his assessment of the growing Franco-Nigerian relations, Ambassador Denys Gauer argues that:

...the fight against insurgents has brought the two countries together than ever before.... Apart from encouraging African countries to cooperate with Nigeria, we have also developed a strong bilateral relationship with the Nigerian Armed Forces....We are organising training activities for Nigerian Armed Forces both in France, Senegal and here in Nigeria, I can confirm to you that we are now very close allies to the Nigerian Armed Forces in the fight against Boko Haram (Denys Gauer Interview with The Guardian, 2017).

In furtherance of the security partnership between the two states, Mr Gauer, also disclosed that France is prepared to supply Nigerian Armed forces with critical military assets, declaring that 'we have no restriction on that; we can sell any kind of equipment to the Nigerian government without any restrictions' (*The Guardian*, 2017). This disclosure was not unconnected to the arms embargo imposed on Nigeria by the US over the allegations of human rights abuses committed by the Nigerian military. France has taken a more

direct role in the anti-Boko Haram campaign. Its fighter jets positioned in Chad conducted reconnaissance and surveillance operations not only over the conflict zones in francophone states but north-eastern Nigeria has also equally come under the French surveillance activities. French intelligent officers had shared more than 2000 surveillance images and videos with their Nigerian counterparts and were trained on how to interpret those images and videos (Bloomberg, 2016).

The prevailing bilateral relations between the two powers are now marked by pragmatic cooperation in both the economic and security sectors. Usman-Janguza (2015) notes that France's former tendency for stymieing Nigeria on the sub-regional stage has appreciably reduced, if not disappeared altogether. According to him:

The past few years have witnessed a remarkable rapprochement and unprecedented alignment of views on regional security. In many cases, France has actively encouraged Nigeria, either bilaterally or through ECOWAS, to take a greater leadership role in crisis management even in Francophone West Africa (Usman-Janguza, 2015).

The coordination of military forces among the coalition partners with increased France's involvement has not only facilitated the operations of MNJTF especially between 2014 and 2016, but it has also rendered insignificance the geopolitical rivalry previously prevailing in the Franco-Nigerian relations. This is more so given the myriad economic, political and security challenges battling Nigeria at present. The country is today more concerned and preoccupied with solving domestic problems rather than exercising any form of 'Historic Mission' or regional leadership in Africa. Entangling in grandiose rivalry with France for sub-region regional leadership is doubtful even in the foreseeable future given its national leadership crisis, multiple sources of internal insecurity challenges and receding hegemonic clout.

Russia and the War against Boko Haram

Moscow has always been a political messiah of sort for Nigeria. The defeat of the Biafran secessionist movement during the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970) owed so much to the effort of the Soviets (Ogunbadejo, 1976). Nigeria only approached Moscow for the much-needed weapons to prosecute the war of national unity when the US and Britain – Nigerian traditionally allies refused to sell weapons to Nigeria to fight a war they widely perceived as genocide against the Igbo ethnic group (Aluko, 1981). The same scenario has been re-enacted in Nigeria's war against the Boko Haram insurgent group.

As the American-engineered arm embargo imposed on Nigeria took effect, it increasingly became difficult for Nigeria to procure arms from other countries. Brazil and Israel also played along under a sustained US pressure, refusing to sell arms to Nigeria after agreements on the sales had already been concluded (Wilner, 2015; Soriwei, 2016). In desperation, Nigeria opted for the controversial discreet arms purchases from a fellow African country; South Africa. Unfortunately, the much-needed arms from the country were not delivered either were the seized funds meant for the purchases returned to Nigeria (Reuters, 2014). Left without any option, Nigeria had to approach Russia for the equipment as a last resort. Russia's swift and favourable response to Nigeria's request for arms contrasted sharply with the response from the American government (Daily Trust, 2014; Omotuyi, 2018b). Russian response marked another milestone in the Russo-Nigerian relations after long years of lukewarm diplomatic relations. During the Nigerian-Biafran war, the defunct Soviet Union's decision to arm Nigeria against the secessionist Igbo Biafran group was occasioned by geopolitics in the context of the Cold War ideological contest (Aluko, 1981). Approaching Kremlin for weapons was a welcome development for the Soviets who had desired to establish a foothold in the African most populous country. As Ogunbadejo (1976: 24) has pointed out that 'the Soviets welcomed the change (a reversal of the pre-war Nigerian government's anti-Soviet's bias) for the simple reason that it offered them the opportunity of securing influence – political, economic and diplomatic – in a country that they had long coveted'. The political and economic gains the Soviets might think they reaped from its involvement in the Nigerian Civil War, soon dwindled into insignificant as the Nigerian government normalised relations with its Western allies shortly after the war.

Today, resurgent Russia touts itself as anti-Islamist Czar. Speaking at the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, President Vladimir Putin portrayed himself as an anti-terrorist champion, saying:

Russia has consistently opposed terrorism in all its forms. Today, we provide military-technical assistance to Syria, Iraq and other ...countries fighting terrorist groups. We think it is a big mistake to refuse to cooperate with the government forces who are valiantly fighting terrorists on the ground (President Putin Text of address at 70th Session of the UN GA, 2015).

While it can be argued that Russian involvements in the so-called 'fight against terrorism' in Syria and Iraq were largely dictated by the prevailing geopolitical struggle between Russia and United States (Omotuyi, 2018b), the economic issue appears to explain Russian interest in Nigeria. Putin had bemoaned the loss of Russian superpower status and international prestige occasioned by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The former KGB agent calls the event 'a geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th Century' (*Washington Times*, 2005). Since his emergence as a revered leader, the fourth-term President of Russia has charted a new course for Russian foreign policy. In contrast to the former President Boris Yeltsin's policy of accommodation with the West (Freeman 2001), the centrepiece of Putin's foreign policy is the reassertion of Russian power and prestige as a counterweight to American power, influence, and unilateralism in international affairs (Omotuyi, 2018b). This foreign policy agenda finds its expression in the Syrian civil war and Venezuelan political upheaval where Russia had intervened to counterbalance what appears to be American excesses in these countries. 'It is not about Russia's ambitions', Putin had once remarked on his interventions in Syria, '...but about the recognition of the fact that we (Russians) can no longer tolerate the current state of affairs in the world' (President Putin Text of address at 70th Session of the UN GA 2015). Russian current activities in the Middle East are tailored to mainly shield Bashar al Assad's regime from the United States in cahoots with the rebel groups seeking to end his dynasty. It is not primarily meant to fight terrorism.

In contrast to the rationale behind Russian intervention in Syria, the growing Russian economic problem appears to provide a rationale for Russia's decision to let the Nigerian military have the weapons. While geopolitical calculations were important in the Soviet Union's readiness to supply arms to Nigeria for the prosecution of the Civil War, the recent purchases from Russia have been strictly for cash on a commercial basis. By 2014, when the Boko Haram crisis peaked, and the group successfully established a state within the Nigerian state, the Russian economy was crumbling. Its oil-dependent economy experienced major shock, plunging it into recession with a growth rate of 0.6 per cent (*BBC*, 2014). The economic crunch was precipitated by two main factors; the first was the falling oil prices caused by the surge in the production of Shale oil by the US. The Russian economy was severely affected exposing its over-reliance on petroleum. Between 2011-2013, oil prices hovered between \$125 to \$135 per barrel, by 2014; however, it ended up at less than \$60 per barrel (Focus Economics 2014). The second factor was provoked by the series of Western economic sanctions imposed on Russia for violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine through its unprovoked attack on the sovereign nation. The annexation of Crimea, one of the most strategic regions in the country as well as Russia's continued support for the secessionist movement in the eastern part of the country generated global outrage especially in the Western capitals against Russia. The multiple of sanctions imposed on Kremlin for its aggression on Kyiv and to frustrate what appears to be a *Resovietisation* agenda adversely affected the investors' desire for Russian investments resulting in capital flights and high inflation which compounded Russia's economic woes (*BBC*, 2014). The two major factors had devastating impacts on Moscow's financial system as well.

The Russian national currency, Rouble, lost 46 per cent of its value against the US Dollar in the same year (Bowler, 2015). Given the Russian economic challenges; Moscow was more than willing to agree to Nigeria's request for sophisticated arms. Apart from the other military equipment, Nigeria successfully got the delivery of twelve Su-30 fighter jets from Russia. Each of the jets cost \$ 30 million (Campbell, 2017). Expectedly, Russia's arms transfer to Nigeria has continued to have implications for Nigeria's external relations. It has, for instance, reignited the largely lukewarm diplomatic relations between the two states. Moscow has since resumed the training of the Nigerian security personnel as a battalion of the military was dispatched to Moscow for training on counter-terrorism operations (Campbell, 2014). Besides the security partnership, the renewed Russo/Nigerian relations have been expanded to cover diverse areas of Nigeria's national life (Olowolagbe, 2019: 1 and 3).

Conclusion

In this study, we argue that the Great powers' involvement in the Nigerian counterterrorism operation was largely provoked by the amalgam of factors. Chiefs among them were the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls

and allegiance to ISIS leadership which makes the group a major stakeholder in the global jihadi movement. Certainly, the interventions of the United States, Russia, and France only played a marginal role in the fight against the destructive group, as the sect, though factionalised and dislodged from its caliphate, remains a potent security threat to Nigeria and other riparian states of Lake Chad. Some of the kidnapped Chibok girls are yet to be rescued. More persons have even been successfully kidnapped by the terror group. The jihadist organisation has, in recent times, successfully attacked military formations and barracks, killing a large number of soldiers in spite of the government's claim of the technical defeat over the violent group. The paper points out that while negligible success was recorded by the interventions of these powerful countries, their involvement has had significant implications for Nigeria's external relations.

Although it black-listed the terror group as FTO and pledged to help Nigeria defeat the violent sect, the US's wavering disposition to the counter-terrorism in Nigeria generated discontent in their relations. Besides supplying non-lethal arms to Nigeria such as anti-landmine vehicles with which Boko Haram was dislodged from the dreaded Sambisa forest, Washington's refusal to sell lethal weapons to Nigeria based on abuses of human rights caused diplomatic fissure between the two allies. Certainly, the Boko Haram crisis has had unintended consequences for Nigerian external relations. The arms denial policy made Nigeria to unilaterally break the US-Nigerian security partnership. President Buhari also expressed his displeasure by pointedly accusing Washington of aiding and abetting the terrorists on account of the implementation of the Leahy Law against Nigerian Armed forces. The arms denial speaks volumes of the irrelevance Nigeria has become in the US's geostrategic calculations, especially in the international oil politics. The upsurge in the Shale oil production means that Nigerian oil is no longer strategic to the American industrial economy and hence, ditching Nigeria's efforts to acquire weapons brings no consequence to the US.

In spite of the mistrust that had strongly characterised the Franco-Nigerian diplomatic relations in the past, the Boko Haram crisis is further improving the growing cordial relations between France and Nigeria. France has proved beyond a reasonable doubt that it is an indispensable partner with Nigeria in the war against the jihadist groups in West Africa. Nigeria's increasing diplomatic engagements with France especially on the counter-terrorist agenda in Lake Chad region in particular and West Africa, in general, has strengthened relations among Lake Chad riparian states. Ultimately, the Boko Haram crisis is rendering insignificant the geopolitical rivalry that previously prevailed in the Franco-Nigerian relations. Though resurgent Russia's Putin prides itself as an anti-terrorist Czar, however, its involvement in Nigeria's counter-terrorism speaks volumes of Moscow's economic challenge. Its prompt delivery of sophisticated military hardware to Nigeria is mainly for cash on a commercial basis rather than an effort to defeat the Boko Haram terrorists. This becomes compelling given the economic impacts of Western sanctions as well as the plummeting oil prices. Therefore, selling weapons to Nigeria makes economic sense. Nigeria has since prioritised security partnership with Moscow as a division of Nigerian soldiers is dispatched to Russia for specialised training on counter-terrorism.

Today, Boko Haram remains solidly entrenched in northeastern Nigeria posing credible to human security in the region. Degrading the vicious sect requires the military and diplomatic supports of the Great Powers similar to the international coalition against ISIS in the Middle East. Nigeria, therefore, needs to engage and strengthen its relations with relevant nations to tame the monster of terrorism in the country. The prevailing diplomatic relations with France and Russia should, therefore, not be allowed to suffer setback even after the total defeat of the Islamist group. More importantly, it would be in the best interest of Nigeria to normalise relations with the United States in all areas regardless of President Trump's tantrums against the country. This is very important given the seemingly intractable terrorism of the Boko Haram crisis in the country. At this critical stage, Nigeria needs all the international supports to end the brutal attacks of Boko Haram and all the jihadist elements operating in Nigeria in particular and the Lake Chad region in general.

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