

Geosecuritysubstance: A Conceptual Approach to Bio-Geographical Hotspots of Nigeria

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Abstract: John M. Collins observed that “Modern warfare, however, is so complex that commanders at every level must consistently manipulate geographic influences advantageously to gain a decisive edge”(Collins, 1998, p. XXIII). Geographic factors like topography, weather, climate and biota influences warfare throughout history, from strategy, coursing to planning and execution of the battle. This fact was confirmed by observing how wars were won or lost throughout history. Losing the Vietnam War by the USA, and the upper hand sometimes gained by Pakistan over India in their northern border crises, are good global examples. Also, the ease of winning war against Maitasine in the past, as well as the difficulty faced by the Nigerian army in crushing Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and Boko Haram recently were all influenced by geographical factors. This study explores the geographical indices such as morphology and vegetation that favoured or disfavoured rebels or military operations in Nigerian wars against insurgencies. The Nigerian civil war of 1966, Maitasine uprising in Kano in 1980s, Niger-Delta militancy and more recently Boko Haram insurgencies are used as case studies. The study used historical facts, descriptive examination and geopolitical theories to hypothesize the geographical locations (bio-geographical hotspots) that favours rebels against Nigerian forces. The findings revealed that many successful rebellions against Nigeria were achieved using its vast geographical offerings, which favoured the rebels’ side. An epitome of this is the Boko Haram insurgency that appeared to be facilitated by topographical factors of their operational grounds, which favoured the insurgents to escape many attacks by the Nigerian military. The study concludes that there is a need for Nigerian government to re-strategize its Military geography decisively, in order to effectively conquer the bio-geographical crime hotspots in its territory, if it is to address the present and any potential future uprising.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Hotspot, Crime, Security, Geosecurity

I. Introduction

Uprising, mutiny, terrorism, insurgency, treason and many other similar malicious words are used to describe those people that crosses the interest of their and or foreign countries. However, many states failed due to mistakes committed by their leaders/rulers in securing their domain, while many others failed due to misfortune or response to natural law of states-rise-and-fall. Today’s world is engulfed with a dilemma of conflicts, conflicts-resolution and dependence of national interests. These three tiers deny many countries from achieving their aims while enhancing others to stand on the shoulders of others. The war-torn countries of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya are cultivating the fruit of hardship following a lilliputian and curable mistakes committed by their rulers as the case of Afghanistan and Syria or intentionally sown by the citizens as the case in Libya and Iraq.

For example, in the year 2011, there were 1,228 incidents of terrorism activities in Iraq, with 1,798 fatalities and 4,905 injuries (The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 2012). Similarly, in Afghanistan, the figure reached 364 incidents, with 1,293 fatalities and 1,882 injuries in the year 2011 (IEP, 2012).

The question here is that; is it the choice of humanity to remain in trouble? The answer is no! This raised another question of how can people and places be secured from such poignant?

Security as defined by the Cambridge Advance Learner’s Dictionary is the “protection of a person, building, organization or country against threats such as crime or attacks by foreign countries”. Certainly, sustenance of peace and order for stability and tranquillity in any society is arguably one of the provisions of the basic necessities of life (food, shelter, cloth and security). To secure a country, strong coexistence and utilization of the four pillars or ring of power (Population- money- military- alliances) is necessary, which Umar (2014, p.256) noted as being the tenet for the peaceful survival of any state. Also, equipping the military bases (Air, Navy and Army) is the primary concern of every peace loving society. Military must have an excellent intelligence collection targeting research and development, as well as the provision of military tactics and training. This is because target, allocation of weapon, attack and defence are generally done at appropriate point during battle, self-defence or logistics. Therefore, relating all the military activities with earth geography (space defence and geo-analysis of places) becomes a hallmark for military exercises.

As noted by Collins(1998, p. XIX), “in future wars, knowledge may be more important than terrain, but geography still exerts enormous influence on military operations, war, and security as it has throughout history. Great commanders, past and present, understand that topography, weather, and climate not only affect strategies but battle and support plans. History in fact is replete with enormous penalties incurred by those who paid too little attention to geographic factors”.The geographic factors with high military importance are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Geographic factors affecting military operations.

Physical Factors	Cultural Factors
Spatial Relationship	Racial and Ethnic Roots
Topography and Drainage	Population Patterns
Geology and Soils	Social Structures
Vegetation	Languages and Religions
Oceans and Seashores	Industries and Land Use
Weather and Climate	Transportation Networks
Daylight and Darkness	Telecommunications
Gravity and Magnetism	Military Installations

Source:Collins(1998, p. 4)

While the geographical factors affecting military operations presented in Table 1, which include both physical and cultural factors are numerous, this study focuses on the following six factors (water bodies, vegetation, topography, boundaries and their characteristics, weather and climate and population pattern) because of their relevance to the Nigerian situation, which is the case study here.

Overall, if the military and their intelligence are able to find the right geographical location that favours them in securing their country, that place is strategic to them. Strategy as hinted by Adhikari (2012) is the “art of using power”, yet, in military geography it is the use of power to maximise control over the entire territory. Therefore, strategic places are those places that give military forces or their enemies an advantage to execute their operation effectively.

This study reviews the concept of bio-geographical hot spots (geographical places) as used by rebels to succeed in their rebellion actions. The study further explores the various military strategic locations in the world as well as spatio-temporal analysis of rebellions in Nigeria by analysing the tricks of using geographical space against the Nigerian state. The trends of rebellion actions against Nigeria in the past and present provides a good ground for this kind of study, which gives an insight to the influence of geographical factors favouring this.

The study commences by critically examining the strategy of some places in relation to the ways they affect security, citing examples from international community before establishing their relevance to Nigerian scenario.

II. Examining The Strategy and locational Influence in Military Operations

2.1 Water bodies

Oceans, rivers, springs, lakes and creeks are strategic places that military must consider in its operation. Water body can both be offensive or defensive to a given territory. Some scholars like Mahan asserted that no nation without access to any ocean has ever been able to have global power militarily. Oceans are the sources of transporting heavy and bulky goods from far places. Countries with sea power are even considered the most influential geo-strategically. For example, Spain and Portugal secure a strong naval operation in the 15th and 16th centuries which enable them identify and conquer majority of South American continent. Also, during the Second World War, Britain, due to its sea power was able to subdue the advancing German submarines even after the fall of the majority of France (Krieger et al., 1992). Similarly, the surrounding ocean (from the east and the west) of USA provides a favourable environment for it to score away its enemies, because the country is difficult to reach by the missiles of its enemies such as the erstwhile Soviet Union, and the present Russia and North Korea. Conversely, Island countries of Australia and New Zealand are difficult terrain to reach by the enemy without being recognized due to their open sea borders.

For example, until the 20th century, United Kingdom controlled some of the very strategic Islands (Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Suez, Aden and Socotra) that assisted it at that time to control the businesses between Europe and Central as well as East Asia via Mediterranean (Krieger et al., 1992). Similarly, USA which controlled the Island of Diego Garcia (at the heart of Indian Ocean) gave it the advantage of reaching up to the erstwhile USSR especially during the Cold War era (Adhikari, 2012). Other countries that strive hard to control islands for military strategy include India which controlled Andaman and Nicobar islands that favoured it to have some control of business in Indochina, and parts of Indian Ocean.

2.2 Vegetation

Forests, grass lands, deserts and swamps provide different logistic and vulnerability potentials to states. For example, while bare ground favours offensive, forests favour defence. This is the strategy that the Vietnamese understood and made the tactical use of their rainforest during the USA-Vietnam war in the 1960s-70s. They used the techniques of strike and run (in to the bush) till they frustrated the most powerful-heavily armed USA soldiers despite the defoliation of about 16,200 km² of the Vietnam forest land by the USA armies (Mountjoy, 1987).

Conversely, barren land of the Azawad region in Mali provided an easy terrain for the French and African Union forces to locate and destroy the military vehicles of the Tuareg rebels that cut-out Northern Mali in 2013. Similarly, the more than 24 armed groups that operated in Congo (DRC) since its independence in 1960 were able to get such advantage due to the dense forest and mountains of the country.

2.3 Topography

The most important characteristics of the topography for military operations are elevation, level land, and depressions, which uniquely influence the abilities of air and ground forces to manoeuvre freely, locate targets, deliver firepower effectively, conduct non-combat operations, coordinate actions, and furnish essential support at strategic, operational and tactical levels. Adhikari (2012) noted that in the Indo-Pakistan-China border of the Karakoram Range, there appeared to be a significant understanding of the strategy of the mountains by the three nations. The mountains favour use of little effort to launch attack against the enemy due to its high point. These three states engage in the tussle of capturing areas near the highest point of the Himalaya after Everest (K2). While Pakistan secured the control of K2, which is the second highest point on earth, China controlled the Aksai Chin in the North of Ladakh and eastern part of Ladakh. On the other hand, India controlled the biggest city in the zone (Srinagar) but it is still uncomfortable, because the areas controlled by Pakistan and China are higher in elevation. The defeat of stronger India by less powerful Pakistan in the Kargil War of 1999 is affected by this. Also, the increased sending of arms by China toward these areas is for its realization of strategy of the place. Adhikari (Adhikari, 2012, p. 156) pointed out that “the ‘implied’ control of the Karakoram highway across Gilgit in the occupied part of Kashmir has brought China to the shore of the Arabian Sea or has provided China a direct access to the Indian Ocean which has long been denied to Russia”.

No wonder that Niccolo Machiavelli contended in his book ‘Discorsi’ “that in peace, soldiers must learn the nature of the land, how steep the mountains are, how the valleys debouch, where the plains lie, and understand the nature of rivers and swamps—then by means of the knowledge and experience gained in one locality, one can easily understand any other”.

2.4 Boundaries and their Characteristics

States are separated from one another by boundary lines, which is a piece of abstract line-space that must be shared between two or more states (Rubenstein, 2010). Necessity of direct physical contact of countries along the boundary made the potentiality of boundaries to be a focal point of conflict. Normally, the power of states from the capital reduce or even diminish toward the border, especially if the distance is very far, or the state neglect the distant locations or there is rebellion in the distant borders.

Political geographers identified different types of boundaries between states (Rubenstein, 2010), to include:

- I. Physical boundaries: These are borders delimited by physical features like water boundaries, mountain boundaries, desert boundaries etc.
- II. Cultural boundaries: These are state boundaries that coincide with differences in ethnicity, notably language and religion. Example of these boundaries are the geometrical boundaries, ethnic boundaries, religious boundaries etc.

In some cases, the shapes of the states are also significant in displaying and instituting challenges to the countries. The common shapes of the states are:

- i. Elongated countries like Chile and Gambia.
- ii. Fragmented countries like Angola and Russia.
- iii. Perforated countries like South Africa and Italy.
- iv. Prorupted countries like Afghanistan and Congo (DRC)
- v. Compacted countries like Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Nigeria.

Normally, security challenges are more expected in the elongated, perforated and prorupted states, because in the elongated states there is the issue of distance from state capital to the distant tip, like Santiago to Cape Horn in Chile. In these areas, the narrow shape can sometimes separate families, which may lead to ethnic rivalries like the case of Gambia with its surrounding neighbour Senegal.

Perforated countries usually face trouble especially if the landlocked states differ in their ideology, or are unfriendly with the surrounding state. For example, during the Apartheid regime in South Africa,

Lesotho severally had trouble in discriminating against white's government that subjugated the black majority in the region. Also, San Marino and Vatican can only survive if they are loyal to their surrounding 'mother', Italy. Prorupted countries normally deny communication between two harmonious separated states, which may lead to confusion in some instances. For example, Caprivi Strip of Namibia disrupted communication between British colonies of Southern Africa, and this made South Africa to station its troops in the Caprivi Strip to fight enemies in Angola, Zambia and Botswana in the first half of the 20th century (Rubenstein, 2010).

Even though, there are great expectations that compacted countries will be stable and strategically controlled fully by their capitals, especially where the capital is at the centre of the country. The security of compacted states does not appear tranquil in many cases. This can be seen in the case of Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda that are compacted in shape but unstable for many years of their existence.

2.5 Weather and Climate

The military strategies of climate and weather are apparent especially if one consider the defeat of Nazi Germany's eastern front by the most winter-known army of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Of course, the Soviet army took advantage of the bitterly cold western Ural winter to defeat Germany's army. The authors of 'World History Perspectives on the Past' put the event as follows;

"...then another winter set in. The soviet commander Giorgi Zhukov saw the cold as an opportunity to roll fresh tanks across the frozen landscape and begin a counterattack. Like a giant vise, Zhukov's army closed Stalingrad, trapping the Germans in the city and cutting off their supplies. The Germans' situation was hopeless, but Hitler's order came: "Stay and fight! I am not leaving the Volga!" The Germans did their best to follow the impossible order. When they finally surrendered on January 31, 1943, defying Hitler's orders even then, there were only 91,000 Germans left out of an original army of 280,000. Dazed and frost bitten, the German captives trudged through the snow to Soviet prison camps (Krieger et al., 1992, p. 719)".

These shows that mastery of climate and weather assist the army over its enemy. The proper motto of the U.S. Postal Service adapted from Herodotus said it all; "neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds".

2.6 Population

Population distribution, pattern, sex ratio, age structure, density, composition and many other vital components of population are very significant for military activities. Normally, insurgents tend to adopt the trick of hit-and-run which always became possible in the densely populated areas. For example, China and Russia in recent time, though they had upper hand over their militants – Chechens and Uyghur Muslims respectively- are frustrated by the way these militants are disguising in the crowd to wage an attack on large number of people. The 2014 Boston attack in USA is an obvious technique used by the terrorists in congested places to move freely and terrorise people undetected. Most recently, both Nigerian and Pakistani armies' are frustrated with this kind of tactics adopted by the Islamists to attack mass civilian population.

The aforementioned elaborations of the geographical factors affecting military operations shows that the geographical characteristics of places are good machineries or leverages for fighting war to victory. Like the Archimedes elaboration on the value of levers more than two millennia ago "give me a place to stand and I will move the Earth". So, the favourable geographic locations confer military advantage leverage over the enemy, while poor positions foster insecurity.

III. Reflection on some Geo-Strategy Theories

The last two centuries saw the development of geo-strategy theories that improve knowledge, influences power, enhance power management and tactics in domination and governance in the world. The most influential military strategy theories that evolved throughout history are discussed here:

3.1 Heartland Theory

In 1904 Halford J. Mackinder presented a paper entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History" in which he promoted that throughout history, there is struggle between land and sea powers, but the ultimate victory always lean towards the land power. Land power according to him are in Africa and Eurasia (the Old World- see figure 1). He noted that for the purpose of strategic thinking, "the Heartland, includes the Baltic Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet, Mongolia.... which under modern conditions, sea-power can refused access, though the western part of it is within the region of Arctic and Continental drainage" (Mackinder, 1919).

Mackinder concluded that 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island, who rules the World-Island commands the world'.



Figure 1: Heartland and Rimland Location. Source: Ahir (2011)

As far as Mackinder is concerned, controlling Eastern Europe, Central Asia and East Siberia is like conquering an inaccessible land that cannot be penetrated by enemies, and the controller can attack wherever at will and come back safe to his naturally secured Heartland (Figure 1).

Despite numerous criticisms of the Heartland model, it was still found very relevant, in the sense that the former Soviet Union and Russia today controlled most of the Heartland, which made them relatively secured, and able to locally develop themselves. To date, Russia as a power in the landlocked Heartland is considered a threat by the maritime West and their USA ally. Similarly, before the Second World War, Germany is a power occupying part of the Heartland in the central Europe, which made it possible to make some alliance in the Balkan and intimidate the maritime power of Britain, France and even far away USA. It can be argued that USA and its Western allies are deeply concerned about Russia, which is why they always try to block it from acquiring more allies from its neighbours and distant friends. Agnew et al. (1996) maintained that “Mackinder’s (1861-1947) work is still relevant in the present US foreign-policy circles”.

Therefore, countries and territories should always look unto places with any strategic importance to their territorial defence, in order to avoid vulnerability in their domain or add power to their territories, just like the way Mackinder emphasised the strategy of Heartland.

3.2 Rimland Theory

Nicholas Spykman in 1930 wrote a book titled “Geography of the Peace”, which was published in 1944. In this book, Spykman contradicts the view of Mackinder (1904) and emphasized that the real potentiality of power lay in the Rimland (see figure 1), which comprised much of Europe especially the western part, Asia minor, Arabia, Iraq, Persia, others are Afghanistan, the Indian sub-continent, the far East, most of China and east Siberia. He predicted that “whoever rules the Rimland, rules Eurasia, whoever rules Eurasia, controls the destiny of the world”. He saw Japan and England as the hub of military and economic powers separated from mainland by Pacific and Atlantic oceans respectively. To him, America is surrounded by the old world, and America should not allow the unification of old world for its security. He suggested that the USA, Britain and Soviet Union should work together for global peace.

The Rimland theory faces major criticisms, but it however, recorded several relevancies by pointing out the global power of Britain, Japan, France and other Rimland members.

Even though, both Spykman’s Rimland theory and Mackinder’s Heartland theory illustrate places that are very strategic in gaining power that states should always look for and never relent, scholars prefer Mackinder’s Heartland theory the most. Apart from the two theories discussed here, there are other important theories on security and environmental system relationship such as Mahan’s (1890) Sea Power Concept that portrayed the significance of geographical factors influencing military supremacy.

IV. Hotspot Zones of Nigeria’s Uprisings

As described in the preceding sections, the geography of a state affects its military strategy. Concurrently, the evolution and characteristics of Nigeria’s zones of uprising and the effect of geographical factors that favour such uprisings are explored here.

Since the inception of Nigeria as a country in 1914, many regard it as a mere overlapping of multi-coloured interlocking blocks that appeared different from each other. However, scholars believed that Nigerians mutually interact with one another that pre-dated its existence as a nation. This mutual relationship is favoured by contrasting geography of the country. Omolewa (1999, p. 13) described that “the river (Niger) was thus in many ways ‘a river of unity’ for the diverse Nigerian peoples before the country was formally established as a single unit”. However, there are dichotomies and conflicts that kept arising from time to time. Omolewa rightly attested that the diverse geography of the country has helped in both its unification as well as its division along

ethno religious settings(Omolewa, 1991, p. 11). He also held the view that “it is geography that has determined the type of warfare in parts of Nigeria.

It should be noted that it is outside the remit of this study to establish the social issues arising from geography that psychologically affect the country and fuelled the conflicts; rather, the study brings out the military strategies that Nigerian geographical settings offered to certain localities. These are discussed here using the four famous uprisings in Nigeria as case studies. These are the Nigerian civil war, Maitatsine uprising, Niger Delta militancy and the current Boko Haram insurgency.

4.1 The Nigerian Civil War

Immediately after independence, Nigeria fell into a difficult situation following the Igbo dominated coup of January 1966. This prompted the Igbos to move back to their homeland after the counter coup of July 1966 and with the audacity attempted to create their own country at the expense of Nigeria. This move turned the country into a bloody civil war that claimed thousands of lives(Achebe, 2012, p. 312).



Figure 2: Map of Biafra. Source Guardian A. N. (2014)

The Igbos at that time demarcated their idealized country by using some geographical features and named it Biafra (from the bight of Biafra – see figure 2). The country was separated from Nigeria along a definite physical features especially to the West, where they used River Niger as border, and to the south, where Atlantic Ocean serve as the boundary (refer to figure 2).

They took fortress from Nigerian invasion from the North using the Benue Hills and mountains that lead to Cameroon(NAIJARCHIVE, 2014).

There are some geographical tactics that should be observed here;

- i. Biafran first capital was Enugu, which was derived from the two Igbo words ‘ÉnúÚgwú’ meaning "hill top" denoting the geography of the city's hilly environment.
- ii. Their second capital is the rail town of Umuahia that is tactically a forested town with many palm oils and kernels, which is also near Aba town (a large urban market) that can serve as a source of income.
- iii. The fall of Umuahia in April 22nd, 1969 to the Nigerian army forces forced the Biafrans to relocate their capital to Owerri, which bordered the Otamiri River to the east and the Nworie River to the south, all for military strategy.

From the foregoing discussions, it can be deduced that the Atlantic Ocean, River Niger and the Benue hills are strategically physical shields used by the Biafrans. The August 1967 Biafran's occupation of the Mid-Western region of Nigeria in what Ojukwu (their chieftain) explained as “effort to seize the serpent by the head”(Achebe, 2012) was found to be geostrategic. Because, even though Biafra was defeated by the Nigerian army, the strategy of war adopted by the Biafrans implies that they saw the strength of Nigeria more from the West of Biafra, which is where the capital of Nigeria was at that time (Lagos). Hence the reason they crossed the Niger to the Mid-West, so that the war would be fought within Nigeria's territory outside their idealized boundary of Biafra (west bank of River Niger). This is similar to the tactics seen in the Israeli invasion of Arab lands in which every attempt to fight Israel remained war within Jordan or Syria and not Israel territory.

Furthermore, when Hezbollah claimed victory over Israel in 2011, the Israeli military commander said scornfully that the war started and ended within Lebanon.

4.2 Maitatsine Uprising

The Maitatsine crisis in Kano and other parts of Northern Nigeria in 1980s brought about the question of modern terrorism in Nigeria. Kano is part of the central high plane of Hausa land (a wide, flat terrain dotted

with inselbergs). Maitatsine and some of his followers settled in the ancient city of Kano, a moderate metropolis with two prominent inselbergs of Dala and Goron Dutse. River Jakara, a tributary of River Kano within the Hadejia-Jama'are river basin crosses the city. Maitatsine resides at Yanawaki area, few metres away from Jakara River, which is less than three kilometres from Dala hill, and also less than six kilometres from Goron Dutse hill. It is important here to note that Maitatsine attempted to strategize his base logically so as to avoid or escape easily in the advent of any strike by the Nigerian forces. Even though, Maitatsine was defeated after a short encounter with the Nigerian army, his followers were able to continue the war for some time as a result of their locational strategic advantage.

Nigerian army used planes and helicopters to locate Maitatsine's followers within the city, due to the flat nature of the terrain. Also, the civilians greatly assisted the Nigerian army with information about Maitatsine's movement and location. One can understand the geo-strategy of Maitatsine for living near Jakara River, which he used in trying to escape out of the city.

4.3 Niger Delta Militancy

The oil producing region of Nigeria (Niger Delta) was faced with huge environmental and ecological degradations, which threatens the renewable natural resources and the ecosystem services of the region in a number of ways (Babatunde, 2010). This was the consequence of the oil exploration in the region that many environmentalists are now questioning the techniques of the operations. As a result of that, the livelihood of the Niger-Deltans was seriously affected, which culminated into the emergence of many militancy groups in the region against the Nigerian government.

The environment of Niger Delta officially extends over about 100,000 km², which is about 11% of Nigeria's total land area (Population and Housing Census, 2006). The area covers the present Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States. The region consists mainly of forest swamps. Near the sea is a belt of saline Mangrove swamp separated from the sea by sand beach ridges. Numerous sandy islands exist within the swamp vegetation, while fresh water swamps gradually overlook the mangrove as one moves inland. Large coastal creeks canopied and jungled by trees, shrubs and tall grasses characterized the area (see figure 3).



Figure 3: Niger Delta Militants. Source: CNN documentaries, 3rd October 2010

The good understanding of this forested environment allowed the militants to conduct many successful attacks on the oil facilities without hindrances from the Nigerian military. The militants like Bush Boys, self-called Peace Makers, Ijaw Youth Council, Klansmen Konfraternity, Niger Delta Vigilante, Niger Delta People Volunteer Force and the villain-Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) waged war against the government using military tactics discussed below:

- **Swarm-Based Manoeuvres:** guerrillas used speed boats in the Niger Delta's swamps to swiftly attack targets in succession. Multiple, highly manoeuvrable units have kept the government and oil company's defensive systems off-balance defending their sprawling networks.
- **Radically Improved Firepower and Combat Training:** this strategy allows the guerrillas to overpower a combination of oil-companies' Western-trained private military guards and elite Nigerian units in several engagements.
- **Effective Use of System Disruption:** Targets have been systematically and accurately selected to completely shut down production and delay and/or halt repairs, and the guerrillas make effective use of oil companies' hostages to coerce both the government and the multinational to pay ransom.

Geographically, thick vegetation of the region remain a good hiding place for the militants, while coastal creeks provided them with corridors to disguise and gain access to speed boats easily. Similarly, the effort of Nigerian government was undermined by these skilled militants of the Niger Delta who used their biogeographic creeks to launch their attacks. However, they were to some extent disarmed through the amnesty program initiated by the late president Umaru Yaradua in 2008.

4.4 Boko Haram Case



Figure 4: Nigerian Military near Lake Chad Source: NAIJARCHIVE (2014)

Boko Haram “is an Islamic sect that believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt and false Muslims. It therefore, waged a war against the Federal Republic of Nigeria to create a “pure” Islamic state ruled by sharia law”(Walker, 2015). Most of the Boko Haram activities concentrated in the North-eastern Nigerian states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. The group “attracted attention not only because the legitimacy of a state was challenged in the course of promoting Islamic revivalism, but also because its outbreak was an indictment of the state, whose seeming ineptitude was becoming apparent with regular outbreaks of violence of many kinds despite the state’s continuous promises to check them”(Adesoji, 2010, p. 96). Obviously, Boko Haram is a very strategic, deceiving and devious group that was able to terrorise, humiliate and amaze Nigerian military and civilians.

The strategies of Boko Haram are merely crude and easy to undo if the geography of their core centre of operation is fully evaluated. The Boko Haram’s mode of attack using ambush or within crowd, kidnapping, bombing, murdering, robbing, maiming, exiling and many other acts of terrorism was initially undermined by the Nigerian government and military forces, which resulted into the continuation of their war since 2009.

The group strategically chose the North eastern part of Nigeria for its operation due to the vast sedimentary plain and mountain ranges of Mandara in the area, which gives them an advantage of ease hideout and escape. This was also aided by their good local knowledge of the area as confirmed by the Guardian (2014) “it actually took the intelligence services of Nigeria a long time to discover that the Sambisa game reserve had become a hideout for the sect”.



Figure 6: Military Operation in Sambisa Forest. Source: NAIJARCHIVE (2014)

Similarly, the sect used the Lake Chad area being a porous border between Nigeria and three other countries that might have distinct foreign policies from each other. This was observed on several occasions in the past, where the terrorist group crosses these countries borders to launch their attacks.



Figure 7: Nigerian Military within the Muddy Lake Chad Region occupied by Boko Haram. Source: NAIJARCHIVE(2014)

It will be delightful to have a glimpse on the nature of the areas Boko Haram harnessed in their terrorist strategies especially the forest of Sambisa. In 2014, Professor Umar Maryah of University of Maiduguri noted that the Sambisa forest, which the terrorist used as a hideout covers an area stretching approximately 60,000 Km² across the north east from Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe and Bauchi states. On the eastern flank of the Sambisa is Gwoza which Boko Haram captured and conjectured as their Capital. The Gwoza Hills, with heights of about 1300m above sea level provides a good scenery and is made up of ranges of mountains known as the Mandara Mountains. The mountains overlook Sambisa by meandering towards Mubi and beyond in Adamawa State. They also had connections with the Mambilla Mountain which is also home to the Gashaka game reserve at its foot and also connected to the Sambisa game reserve. It is widely circulated in the media that members of Boko Haram are knowledgeable about the enormous endowment of the Sambisa forest and have capitalised on the fact that even if military tanks are to be moved into the place to dislodge them, it must be done with knowledge and tactics (See figure 7).



Figure 8: Nigerian Military in Boko Haram Hunting. Source: NAIJARCHIVE (2014)

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the geographical locations of Sambisa forest, Mambila Mountains, Lake Chad and wetland combined together favoured the effective activities of Boko Haram in the region.

V. Biogeographical Hotspot

The word bio means life, while geo connote to earth (Singh, 2012, p. 1). According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, hotspot is a place where war or other fighting is likely to happen. Singh (2012, p.1) noted that biological studies tend to steer towards the study of physiology, morphology, behaviour and

functional aspects of an individual organism. While geographical studies concerned with the study of where things are found on the earth's surface and the reasons for the location (Rubenstein, 2010, p. 2).

As noted earlier, biosphere with its variable components of vegetation, wildlife and ecology influence military activities positively and otherwise. So also, morphology (in terms of rock outcrops, water bodies, mountains, wetlands etc.) characterized the workability of places for military operations. Such places that consistently favours conflict or attract rebellion are the hot spots.

Therefore, bio-geographical hotspot in the context of this study, is a place that the rebels use to their own advantage, and curtailing their action by the military due to the nature of the geographical area end up difficult. For example, Borno state and its surrounding in recent times, Niger Delta in recent past, and the Igbo land in distant past are hotspots in Nigeria, because these areas shared a common characteristics which the rebels used to their advantage. To undo the armoury of such areas, numerous activities are needed, such as:

- During wars in vegetative areas, land clearing, bulldozing, defoliation etc. are necessary.
- During peace times, surveillance, surveying, monitoring and observation of the forests are needed for proper mitigation of uprisings.

Examining the different insurgencies in Nigeria confirmed that they were cases which are hard to control due to the environments that the terrorists reside. The civil war in mountainous and forested land, the Niger Delta militancy in the coastal creeks and jungles as well as the Boko Haram in hilly and muddy areas confirmed this. However, those uprisings that occurred in places where the environment is not favourable for hiding, the insurgencies do not go long, just like the Maitatsine riot in Kano.

VI. Conclusion

The varied terrains in Nigeria has geographically influenced the geo-strategic control exhibit by the insurgents. Bio-geographical hotspots are found throughout the geopolitical regions of this country. Hence, the strategies to culminate them into cool, harmless spots requires a cumulative efforts of both the military and the locals who are also familiar with the terrain.

While this study does not consider the cultural aspect of insurgencies in Nigeria, however, it illustrates the regions prone to the rise of insurgencies in the country and name them bio-geographical hotspots. These areas, as well as other potential areas like the Jos plateau, and Yoruba highlands needs to be closely monitored. This is because other similar areas in the country have been used by the terrorists in the past to their advantage.

In the long run, the long corridor of forest that ran through the Northern Nigeria from Kebbi, through Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi-Gombe axis, Yobe and Borno must be under careful and systematic surveillance. This is because the corridor is very open to gangs like arm robbers, rustlers, drug dealers and terrorists in recent times. By any chance, if these areas fall into the hands of insurgents it may be a terrible hotspot. The study asserts that Nigeria should have a strong cordial relationship with her neighbours, so that hotspots that are along the borders (like north-eastern Nigeria) can be checked assiduously. Similarly, cross border pursue to capture terrorist should be adopted by Nigeria and its neighbours.

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