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A Failing Regional Power? Nigeria's International Status in the Age of Boko Haram

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ABSTRACT

Given its population size, economic strength, military capability and foreign policy directions, in past years Nigeria has been considered a major regional power in Africa. Clearly, this makes the country relevant at international and global levels. However, its status as a regional power on the continent is increasingly being affected as a result of the notorious terrorist activities of Boko Haram. Once a major contributor to peacekeeping operations in Africa and the rest of the world, Nigeria found itself relying on the support of other African states, including smaller ones, to fight Boko Haram. Furthermore, a huge number of Nigerians are now refugees across West Africa, especially in Chad Republic, Niger Republic and Cameroon. In view of this development, this article analyses the implications of Boko Haram terrorism for Nigeria's contemporary status in the international arena. The authors argue that the instability created by the terrorist group and the government's failure to deal with it decisively and timeously dents Nigeria's credibility and legitimacy to assert its influence at sub-regional and regional levels.

Introduction

It is clear that the Nigerian government and the international community did not perceive the Boko Haram threat as serious until the group abducted 276 high school girls in April 2014. Indeed, the weak initial response to the terrorist group at local and international levels facilitated its rapid growth from a domestic terrorist group into a full-blown international terrorist network. As an indication of its increased growth and sophistication, Boko Haram formally declared its allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in March 2015, and this continues to generate fears of potential ISIS rule in the West and Central African sub-regions. In its campaign of terror spanning almost six years since its emergence in 2009, Boko Haram has wrecked serious havoc in Nigeria and neighbouring countries including Cameroon, Niger Republic and Chad Republic. Although accurate data on the casualties of Boko Haram is not available, a dataset created by the United States' Council for Foreign Relations via its Nigerian Security Tracker (NST) reported that Boko Haram-related violence caused 22,712 deaths from May 2011 to August 2015 (www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/). In January 2015, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that about one million people had been displaced in Nigeria as a result of the Boko Haram violence (IOM 2015).

At the international level, Nigeria was often regarded as Africa's 'giant' or 'big brother' that is capable of addressing issues that concern African peoples. This status has been eroded owing to the raging violence of Boko Haram that raises questions about the

country's capacity to resolve its internal conflicts (Bagaji 2012, 34). The lack of sustained internal cohesion evident in the continued strife is stifling Nigeria's claims as an African leader and regional power (Adebajo and Landsberg 2003). Failure to address and arrest internal violence, which is gradually spilling over to other countries, could change other African nations' perceptions of the country's leadership credentials in the region.

Against this background, this article analyses the impact that the challenges of the Boko Haram insurgency present to Nigeria's regional power credentials. It answers the following main question: how does the instability created by the terrorist Boko Haram group and its struggle to curtail this menace question Nigeria's credibility and legitimacy to assert its influence within the African region? Given the paucity of research on the consequences of the Boko Haram terror for Nigeria's international prospects and more specifically, its regional status, the article thus adds to the existing body of knowledge on the international context of the Boko Haram phenomenon.

The remainder of the article is organised into five sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the concept and elements of regional power status with the aim of providing a conceptual and theoretical background. The second section discusses the substance of Nigeria's status as a regional power in Africa within the framework of the prescribed conditions for regional power status. In the third section, we analyse the implications of the Boko Haram uprising for Nigeria's regional power profile by examining how the sect's activities affect the country's credibility and legitimacy to act the part of Africa's regional power. The fourth section discusses the new approaches adopted by the Nigerian government to counter Boko Haram that show promising signs of redeeming Nigeria's lost image of regional leadership. The final section presents a conclusion and suggestions on how to mitigate the devastating effects that Boko Haram terrorism imposes on Nigeria's emerging status as Africa's regional power.

What makes a state a regional power? Conceptual and theoretical perspectives

Scholarly research on regional (hegemonic) power has initiated stimulating debate on the prescriptions for categorising states as regional powers. A number of efforts have been made to distinguish between regional powers and other international power configurations such as global powers, super powers, middle powers, pivotal powers and pivotal-regional powers, amongst others (Prys 2008). Robust intellectual energy has been expended to understand the geographic context in which the concept of regional power operates in contemporary analyses of regional interactions and to achieve a meaningful theoretical explanation of this phenomenon (see Destradi 2010). However, a review of the current literature reveals that there is no consensus on the constituents of regional power status. This is due to the fact that several different approaches have been used to understand the empirical nexus between power and leadership. Furthermore, due to the peculiarity and specificity of regional dynamics, the term 'regional power' has been used in varied contexts and has sometimes resulted in its misuse. Nolte (2010) notes that the inherent confusion and intersections between countries deemed regional, middle or emergent powers highlights the paucity of uniformly applicable criteria to succinctly categorise countries as belonging to these classes. He further argues that the difficulty in developing a concise classification of regional power resides in the fact that it combines

two concepts – region (a geographic concept) and power – a basic concept in international relations studies (Nolte 2010, 883–884). Destradi (2010, 904) observes that a number of uncontested assumptions have been made with regard to regional powers and agrees with Nolte that the salient features of what constitute a regional power are still largely subject to controversy and are under scrutiny by many scholars (see Flemes and Nolte 2010).

Østerud (1992, 12) made one of the first efforts to define the term ‘regional power’ in his reference to the concept of a ‘regional *great* power’, conceptualised as a state that is (1) a geographical part of a delineated region; (2) able to stand up against any coalition of other states in the region; (3) highly influential in regional affairs and (4) in contrast to a middle power, might also be a great power at the world scale in addition to its regional standing (see Nolte 2010, 1). Regional powers can also be considered as role models and leaders within a particular region due to the fact that they take the lead in activities that are generally accepted by neighbouring states (Schirm 2005, 110–112).

Flemes (2009, 135) argues that a state can be defined as a regional power if it passes four benchmarks: ‘claim to leadership, power resources, employment of foreign policy instruments, and acceptance of leadership’. Destradi (2010) asserts that among the uncontested characteristics of regional power in the literature is the fact that the country under discussion should belong to the region it is thought to lead. She adds that such a country should indubitably have the highest level of power in the region and should exert its influence (Destradi 2010, 905). Prys (2010, 1–2) observes that in many cases, regional power status has increasingly depended upon a state’s capacity to ‘take care of conflicts, economic deprivation and political instabilities in their regions’.

Schirm (2010, 197–221) advances the following criteria for the classification of a state as a regional power: (1) The articulated claim for leadership as a rule maker which is part of the state’s own definition and is communicated to other actors/states; (2) the material and organisational resources for regional and international power projection (power over resources); (3) activities to honour the claim of leadership and to mobilise power resources; (4) recognition and acceptance of its leadership status by other actors/states in the region and outside of the region; and (5) real political influence in the region (power over outcomes).

From the foregoing, it is clear that there is less controversy about some of the features that indicate the regional power status of a country. What is also not in doubt is that the prospect of regional power status is increased when a state not only has substantial power advantages and capabilities within a regional sphere but also has considerable influence on its neighbours while enjoying a measure of acceptance of its regional leadership.

Another component which cannot be ignored in the assessment of a state’s regional power identity is its soft power which, according to Nye (1990, 95), is the ability to ‘ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment’. By wielding non-military resources alongside its traditional hard power competences, a state is able to attract the prerequisites that qualify it as a regional power. This aligns with Flemes and Nolte’s (2010) position that regional powers are identified, among other factors, by their possession of the necessary material and ideational capacities and the provision of collective public goods for the region as well as acceptance of their leadership by other states in the region.

By implication, regional powers are not only measured by their possession of material capabilities of military and economic resources, among others, but more importantly by

how they are able to influence other states and equally attract reputation through wielding these power credentials. As Nye (1990) affirms, the moral authority that a state enjoys can be the result of the aggregation of its material (hard) and soft power assets to attract payoffs within the international system. In essence, regional power status not only transcends a state's capacity within a region, but its identity, reputation or prestige and moral authority. The combination of both factors often enables a state to seemingly punch above its weight that means that it is able to play an international role at a higher level than its state capacity allows for. Regional powers are therefore conceptualised on the basis of their superior power capabilities, political, economic and ideational membership of a particular region and the exercise of a measure of influence within that region. A regional power thus exists in a regional hegemonic system where it is considered a powerful actor that wields a superior level of influence within a delimited region.

Nigeria as Africa's regional power: the elements

In Africa, Nigeria (and South Africa, of course) stands out as major candidates for regional power status in terms of both the hard and soft power capabilities outlined above. However, there has been much debate on Nigeria's regional power status. Many of these arguments have revolved around whether Nigeria qualifies to be regarded as Africa's regional power by any standards (Shaw et al. 1996; Onuoha 2005; Mazrui 2006; Bach 2007; Adebajo and Mustapha 2008). While it appears that the country's leaders have over the years directed the country's foreign policy goals towards advancing a subtle and what can be considered an unofficial hegemonic claim in Africa, Nigeria's capacity to act the part of a regional power has always been called into question (Ogunnubi 2014). In view of these debates, the analysis that follows in this section shows why Nigeria should qualify as a regional power in Africa. The argument hinges on the following power elements: population size; economic strength; military capacity and peacekeeping operations; and foreign policy directions based on its strong commitment to African development and unity and representation of Africa at global level.

Economic strength

In terms of economic capacity, Nigeria is endowed with rich mineral and natural resources including hides and skins, cement, coal, columbite, cotton, crude oil, palm oil, natural gas, peanuts, rubber, textiles, tin and wood. Prior to the rebasing of its economy, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) purchasing power parity as at 2013 was \$478.5b while its real growth rate was 6.2%. During this period, Nigeria's per capita purchasing power parity stood at \$2800, up from \$390 in 2001 (Freemantle and Stevens 2012; Enweremadu 2013). Its growth rate far exceeds the average for sub-Saharan Africa of 5.6% and compares favourably with the world economic growth rate of 2.8% between 2009 and 2011 (Enweremadu 2013). In the same vein, according to the *Economist* (2013), the size of Lagos' (the largest economic centre in Nigeria) economy at \$45bn is equivalent to the entire Kenyan economy and larger than Ethiopia's. Following the recalibration of its GDP and the announcement of rebased figures in April 2014, Nigeria's economy is without doubt the biggest in Africa with a GDP of \$522b and an annual growth rate of 6.2%. South Africa,

another African regional power, is ranked second, with GDP of \$350b and a growth rate of less than 2% in 2015 (*Trading Economist* 2015).

As these statistics demonstrate, Nigeria's economic value is far less conditioned by revenue generated from the exploration and production/exportation of crude oil that accounts for 14% of GDP and includes other non-oil sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and services. Recent economic reforms have positioned the country as the third fastest growing economy in 10 emerging markets (EM10). Nigeria is also one of only two African countries on the list of 3G countries (Global Growth Generators) identified by Citigroup as sources of growth and potential investment opportunities and is also among Goldman Sachs' Next 11 countries. Goldman Sachs' analyst Jim O'Neill, who coined the BRICS acronym to refer to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa as the most promising emerging markets, has subsequently identified Nigeria as part of a MINT (Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria and Thailand) group of emerging economies (Boesler 2013). In a related study by Invest (2012) that surveyed the investment appetite of 30 countries in the African market, over half (51%) of the respondents cited Nigeria as having the best investment prospects for the immediate future. The 2015 Forbes list of Africa's billionaires also helps to entrench widespread perceptions of Nigeria as Africa's economic powerhouse. The country's Aliko Dangote tops the list of Africa's richest people with a net worth of \$25b (Forbes 2014).

It is clear that Nigeria has been able to use its economic strength to project its influence, particularly within Africa. For instance, following the oil boom of the 1970s, and in the aftermath of a devastating civil war, Nigeria nudged other sub-regional states to establish the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) under its military leader, Yakubu Gowon. It has used the ECOWAS platform to play a pivotal role in the West African sub-region, largely based on its significant financial contribution to the regional bloc. To this end, aside from taking up the Chairpersonship position of the organisation on many occasions (1978/79 [Obasanjo], 1985 [Buhari], 1985/89 [Babangida], 1999/00 [Abacha], 1998/99 [Abubakar], [2008/10] and 2010/12 [Yar Adua]), Nigeria continues to shoulder more than 30% of the ECOWAS annual budget (Francist 2009). Besides being a major contributor to the building of the new ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja, with a contribution of 15 million USD, Nigeria has made a significant contribution to the maintenance of the secretariat. The country has hosted the ECOWAS Summits of Heads of States and Government on many occasions. Furthermore, Nigeria has continued to provide various forms of support to ECOWAS member states.

Over the years, Nigeria has made conscious efforts to use its human and material resources to further the cause of Africans through financial, material and logistical aid and development assistance (Daura 2010). Using four main technical cooperation strategies, the Directorate of Technical Cooperation in Africa (DTCA), the Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS), the Nigerian Trust Fund (NTF) and the Nigerian Technical Cooperation Fund (NTCF), Nigeria has harnessed its financial muscle to deepen its foreign policy relations with Africa (Bassi 2010). For example, the TACS introduced in 1987 by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bolaji Akinyemi remains an important channel through which Nigeria has been able to direct its economic wealth for the benefit of Africa (Inamate 2001). Aimed at 'using Nigeria's large pool of trained manpower as a means of enhancing cooperation, understanding and development among developing countries' (Daura 2010, 110), this initiative which was originally inspired by the US Peace Corps

involved the secondment of Nigerian graduates and professionals – doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and others – to various African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, entirely at Nigeria's expense. The programme boosted Nigeria's status as a major contributor to African economic transformation and development. It was reported that, by 2001, the Nigerian government had sustained its commitment to the TACS with total expenditure of over \$22.5 million since its inception in 1987 (Kolawole 2005).

Due mainly to strategic reasons, Nigeria's economic strength is also evident in its provision of electricity to neighbouring West African states including Niger, Togo and Benin Republic. Niger imports most of its electrical power from Nigeria while gas is supplied for power generation in Ghana, Benin and Togo through the 678 kilometre West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP) that has the potential to supply the entire continent (International Monetary Fund 2012).

Population

Under what circumstances does its population bestow regional power status on a state? The argument put forward here is that there is a connection between the population of a country and its capacity to play a meaningful role and achieve prestige in the international arena (Morgenthau [1948]1993). Population measured in terms of size, age distribution, health and education is a critical ingredient for the assertion of power. There is thus a strong correlation between a large, youthful, healthy and well-educated population and a state's capacity to project power in the international arena. It should be emphasised, however, that the quantity of the population might not necessarily constitute the strength of a state; rather, its quality in terms of human capabilities and development is important. This partly explains why a number of European states with small but strong populations have the capacity to exert more power than many African and Asian states with enormous but weaker populations.

To put things into perspective, Ethiopia's population of about 70 million is the second largest in Africa, but barely half of Nigeria's estimated population. Nigeria's population grew from 45.2 million in 1960 to 166.2 million in 2012, a 268% increase over 50 years (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics). Nigeria's population is equal to that of the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy combined. It accounts for 47% of West Africa's population and approximately one-sixth of Africa's population and one-fifth of that of sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria is home to 2.35% of the total world population, which implies that one of every 43 people on earth is a Nigerian (*Trading Economist* 2015). However, as noted by the Goldman Sachs analysis of the country as part of the Next 11 countries, the World Health Organisation puts Nigerians' life expectancy at 55 years, which is expected to rise to 61 by 2050 (Sachs 2007).

A major reason why Nigeria is referred to as the 'giant of Africa' is its demography. This implies a large market for goods and services as well an abundant source of the human resources necessary for development. *The Economist* (2014) noted that 'roughly one in five of Sub-Saharan Africa's 930 m people lives there. Its population is growing at a rate of 2–3% a year. Its people are young, ambitious and increasingly well educated', which makes Nigeria an attractive investment destination. Many companies that have tested the market potential of the country have good stories to tell. A notable example is South Africa's telecommunications company MTN that invested 285 million USD to

secure a license for mobile telecommunications in Nigeria. In just five years of operations, the company garnered 32 million customers. In 2012, it reported that more than 29% of its revenue emanated from its Nigerian branch (Oyeniyi 2013).

In political terms, it is often believed that Nigeria derives its legality as Africa's *true* representative from being the most populous African country. For instance, Nigeria's permanent representative to the United Nations (UN), Ambassador Humphrey Ojiakor, alluded to Nigeria as 'the real face of Africa' because the country is the only one to provide the geographical space for over 170 million Africans (Channels TV 23/09/2013). According to Fawole, the country's demography has since independence invoked in its leadership a historic sense of responsibility and an equal perception by other states of Nigeria as an inspiration for development within the continent (Personal Communication 2013).

However, while Nigeria's population has been a blessing in inspiring a form of legitimization, claim and power base to project its influence, it may also hamper its capacity to play a pivotal role in Africa. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the government to effectively cater for all citizens; hence Nigerians' emigration to countries across the world. The enormous pressure on scarce resources leads to a seeming disconnect between the people and their government. This had led to apathy and a lack of commitment and patriotism towards the country. The pride and honour of being a Nigerian has been dissipated through long years of neglect of people's needs. Therefore, the population of a country is only a positive factor in claiming regional power status when it is able to translate the positive gains of its population into valuable assets for exerting power; it is clear that Nigeria has not succeeded in this regard.

Foreign policy and representation on multilateral platforms

In terms of representing Africa at global level, Nigeria has always demonstrated its preference for cooperation rather than confrontation in line with its foreign policy principle of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states. The country has been able to project its influence through its membership of multilateral institutional frameworks such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), African Union (AU) and ECOWAS. Nigeria's reintegration into the international system against the backdrop of President Obasanjo's shuttle diplomacy manifested in its reacceptance into the Commonwealth in 1999 and being given the hosting rights and Chairpersonship of the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) in 2003 as well as of the G-77 in 2000. These platforms were used to reassert Nigeria's interests within Africa and, of course, the Global South. It also represented Africa on five occasions,¹ in 1966/67, 1978/79, 1994/95, 2010/11 and 2014/2015 as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, which makes it a strong contender for one of the two slots for Africa in the proposed enlarged permanent membership of the Council (Saliu and Omotola 2008).

In recognition of Nigeria's efforts to ensure peaceful coexistence within Africa and on the strength its previous record at the UN, Nigeria was elected unopposed with a total vote of 186 out of a possible 193 to secure a fifth term of office at the UNSC. According to the Nigerian presidency, this is a 'glowing expression of support and encouragement for Nigeria's active participation in the promotion of peace, security and political stability in Africa and other parts of the world' (Channels TV October 17, 2013). In the arena of

continental multilateralism, Nigeria played a quintessential role alongside South Africa, as the leading powers in the region, in the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the AU and in establishing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as part of an African initiative to find African solutions to African problems (Pogoso 2009, 68). Nigeria was also instrumental in the introduction of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and was among the first countries to subject it to peer review in 2007.

Equally, Nigeria has played a leading role in the elevation of ECOWAS (whose origins date back to the Lagos Charter of 1975) to the status of a celebrated, recognised and perhaps the most active sub-regional organisation in Africa (Bach 2004, 69–92). The country has also been able to successfully use the sub-regional body's Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as an instrument to perpetuate its power politics within the sub-region, particularly in conflicts in Côte D'Ivoire (2003–2004), Guinea Bissau (1998–1999), Liberia (1990–1998 and 2003) and Sierra Leone (1997–2000). Nigeria used the ECOMOG 'to stamp its authority in West Africa, foster its national security and defense nests, and promote the political whims of the Nigerian military cabal, thus undermining the real object of regional peacekeeping' (Howe 1997, 65). Tavares (2011, 166) demonstrated how 'national and individual interests (of Nigeria), rather than any institutional principle, served as the basis for the interventions'. To say the least, in its sub-hegemonic capacity, Nigeria has capitalised on its membership of ECOWAS to extract national dividends. As is evident in many of these cases, it has become extremely difficult to engage in any military intervention without its support, particularly given the extensive material and financial challenges involved (Tavares 2011).

Military capacity and peacekeeping operations

In contrast to its neighbours on the continent, Nigeria enjoys substantial military strength with reasonably well-equipped armed forces that are capable of defending the country against any likely external threat or internal insurgency. As Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, Nigeria is ranked 36th in the 2012 GFP military power indicator and 3rd in Africa according to SIPRI Report on Military Expenditure between 2005 and 2014.

Over the years, the Nigerian military has continued to improve its stock of weaponry while engaging in numerous military adventures targeted at improving their readiness for battle (Omede 2012). The country is therefore able to project its military power without much restraint within the region with a total strength of about 200,000 personnel and an estimated 300,000 paramilitary personnel (Omede 2012, 293). To its credit, before the period of the Persian Gulf War (1989–1990), Nigeria was the only country in West Africa and Central Africa to sponsor and sustain military operations abroad.

Nigeria's military industrialisation project began in 1964 with the establishment of the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), aimed at building the country's self-reliance in producing small arms and ammunition, and maintenance and repair services in order to support its defence, security and strategic foreign policy goals with international best standards (DICON 2010). As far back as the 1970s, its facilities in Kaduna produced West German-designed HK G-3 rifles, BM-59 and PM-12 handguns, and 7.62 mm and 9 mm Parabellum ammunition. In many ways and for many years since independence, Nigeria's diplomatic behaviour and role within the region and beyond has always been

Table 1. Nigeria's Military indicators.

Military manpower	Total Population: 162,470,737 Available Manpower: 72,319,838 Fit for Service: 40,707,659 Reaching Military Age Annually: 3,455,147 Active Frontline Personnel: 100,000 Active Reserve Personnel: 0
Land system	Tanks: 363 Armored Fighting Vehicles: 1407 Self-Propelled Guns: 48 Towed Artillery Pieces: 680 Rocket Projectors (MLRS): 0 Portable Mortar System: 300 Portable AT Weapon: 120 Logistical Vehicles: 6000
Air power	Total Aircrafts: 294 Helicopters: 84
Naval power	Total Strength: 37 (including auxiliaries) Aircraft Carriers: 0 Frigates: 2 Destroyers: 0 Corvettes: 4 Submarines: 0 Coastal Craft: 16 Mine Warfare: 2 Amphibious Assault: 0
Military budget (in USD)	Defence Budget: \$2,215,000,000

Source: Global Fire Power (2013)

defined and shaped by its military capabilities. The Republic's commitment to regional peace, stability and security is essentially tied to the responsibilities of its military. Indeed, Alli (2012) notes Nigeria's 'considerable military capabilities bestow on her, as it were naturally, the role of a regional hegemon'. In other words, over the years, Nigeria's foreign policy that emphasises regional security has been largely influenced by the adequacy of her military. It can thus be inferred that the country's military plays a significant role in the regional security framework.

Furthermore, it would seem that no other country in Africa has contributed more to international peacekeeping than Nigeria. Since 1960 when it became a sovereign state and joined the UN as its 99th member, the Nigerian military has participated in many peacekeeping operations, with its first troops involved in the UN Peace Mission in Congo barely days after its independence (Isiaq 2012). In line with its national foreign policy objectives, the country has contributed significantly to building sustainable peace particularly within the African region as demonstrated in a long history of commitment in the form of finance, human power, leadership and involvement in peacekeeping operations across the world under the auspices of the UN, AU and ECOWAS. More than 17,000 Nigerian military personnel are currently contributing to peace-building outside its

Table 2. SIPRI Military expenditure database of Major African Countries from 2005–2014 (\$USm).

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total Average
Nigeria	674.2	776.2	971	1616	1504	1990	2385	2316	2419	2265	1691.64
Egypt	2659	2953	3307	3780	4017	4407	4464	4558	4360	4961	3946.6
South Africa	3567	3506	3526	3286	3593	4188	4594	4490	4135	3895	3878
Angola	1365	1970	2032	3164	3311	3501	3639	4145	6091	6841	3606.2

Source: Ogunnubi (2015); see SIPRI Report (2005–2014)

borders in countries such as Angola, Iraq, Kuwait, Liberia, Rwanda, Western Sahara, etc. Nigerian troops previously served in peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Chad, the Congo, India–Pakistan, Lebanon, Mozambique and Somalia.

There is no disputing the fact that Nigeria has gained a considerable level of respectability and international prestige among the comity of nations as a result of its extensive international peacekeeping involvement. There is hardly any major peacekeeping or peace enforcement mission carried out under the auspices of the AU or ECOWAS that the Nigerian military has not been involved in. However, the progressive withdrawal of the military from politics from 1999 changed its level of involvement in the foreign policy trajectories of the country. To a considerable extent, it is this foreign policy marker that provides the basis for Nigeria's treatment as a regional power and a pivotal state for Africa (Bach 2007).

It is clear that these prevailing domestic conditions and global circumstances impact directly on Nigeria's capacity as a regional power to act in a decisive manner. However, given the prescribed conditions previously highlighted, this limitation does not undermine its status as a regional power. Despite internal complications and obvious limitations, regional powers such as Russia, China and India have continued to play a pivotal role and Nigeria should be no exception.

Nevertheless, the rough texture of the Nigerian state as well as its poor international image are some of the issues that distract the state from effectively playing the role of a regional power. It is in this context that the Boko Haram insurgency that has ravaged the Nigerian state since 2009 should be perceived. We argue that the activities of the terrorist group indeed impose numerous costs on Nigeria, but may not totally disqualify Abuja as Africa's regional powerhouse. Nevertheless, the incessant attacks wrought by Boko Haram and its members question Nigeria's credibility and legitimacy to offer leadership on behalf of Africa aside from the fact that they distract the country from asserting its influence on the continent in a manner that it would naturally have acted. The following discussion considers the different dimensions through which the Boko Haram insurgency has imposed foreign policy and development costs on Nigeria's regional power credentials in ways that make it almost impossible for the country to effectively assert its influence within a region that is in dire need of direction.

Nigeria's failing strategies on Boko Haram

Based on reports and qualitative assessment, Nigeria is seemingly struggling to counter the Boko Haram insurgents despite consistent claims in government circles that the war on terror has achieved a measure of success. As noted earlier, the US Council for Foreign Relations' Nigerian Security Tracker (NST) recorded that Boko Haram violence had caused 22,712 deaths as of August 2015. Amnesty International (AI) reported that more than 5500 civilians were killed between 2014 and the terrorist group (AI 2015) abducted early 2015 alone, while more than 2000 girls and women in different raids on communities. In August 2015, the IOM reported that 2.1 million people had been displaced (AFP 2015). Furthermore, daily news reports show that there has been an upsurge in Boko Haram attacks since the coming to power of a new president, Muhammadu Buhari on 29 May 2015. Some reports estimate that 625 people were killed from May 29 to the middle of July 2015 (*The Punch* 2015).

The government has tried different approaches to contain Boko Haram, which cannot be considered totally successful. These can be categorised under the following headings: political, socio-developmental and military approaches (Uzodike and Onapajo 2015). The political approach is mainly founded on the idea that Boko Haram emerged as a consequence of the many grievances of the peoples of northern Nigeria over power distribution that works against the interests of the region. As such, it is considered in government quarters that a rational way to address these supposed grievances would be to engage Boko Haram in dialogue. Amnesty was offered to the terrorists and strategies were developed to respond to the issue of perceived marginalisation in northern Nigeria. Following this, the government inaugurated a special committee in 2014 to reach out to the leadership of the terrorist groups and the elites in northern Nigeria. This approach did not succeed for various reasons. First, the northern elites distrusted the Goodluck Jonathan-led federal government's willingness to seek a substantial solution to the problem. The elites claimed that the government had frustrated their previous efforts to assist it to appeal to the leadership of Boko Haram (Onapajo 2013). Second, there was growing belief in northern Nigeria that Goodluck Jonathan's government was somehow fuelling the Boko Haram terror in order to diminish northern Nigeria's political influence, and increase the president's chances of re-election in the 2015 presidential elections (Onapajo and Usman 2015). Third, Boko Haram had split into different factions and loose networks which prevented the government from identifying a particular group to negotiate with (International Crisis Group 2014).

In light of perspectives that suggest that Boko Haram is driven by the large-scale poverty, unemployment and socio-economic inequality prevalent in northern Nigeria, the government also adopted a socio-developmental approach to ameliorate the situation. A notable strategy in this regard is the policy on modernisation of the traditional Almajiri Islamic education system that is popular in the northern region, which began in 2012. This strategy specifically targets the army of the Almajiri youth who in the name of acquiring Islamic education have been rendered destitute and made vulnerable to criminal activities. The government's objective was not only to expose the youth to western education and disabuse their negative perceptions of such education, but also empower them with proper education. By 2014, the government had established more than 125 Almajiri model schools with state-of-the-art facilities. However, despite its potential, this strategy is a long-term approach whose outcomes may not materialise immediately. Furthermore, educators have been grappling with the challenge of integrating western and Islamic education that represents the underlying philosophy of the education programme (see Leadership News 2014; Uzodike and Onapajo 2015).

The military approach, which is obviously the most popular of the approaches, has been pursued with greater vigour due to Boko Haram's increasingly lethal nature. In 2011, the Joint Task Force (JTF) representing the main components of the Nigerian armed forces was established with the main task of engaging the violent group in all-out warfare. Following the continual advancement of the terrorist group, especially the loss of many territories in northeastern Nigeria, the state resolved to utilise the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) – a combined military operation involving Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Benin and Nigeria initially established in 1998 to secure the Lake Chad region – by expanding its mandate in April 2012 to include fighting terrorism in the sub-region (Musa 2013). In addition, the government collaborated with local community vigilance groups under

the name of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to engage in grassroots military operations against the terrorists. However, despite the huge resources committed to the war and claims that the Nigerian military is the strongest on the continent (given its history of successful peacekeeping missions across Africa), the military operation cannot yet be adjudged successful.

Implications of Boko Haram terrorism for Nigeria's regional status

As shown in the earlier part of this article, Nigeria has the requisite qualities to provide regional leadership in Africa. Its foreign policy directions over the years, with Africa as the centrepiece, have provided impetus for other African states to accept the country's legitimacy as a regional leader on the continent. Indeed, this generated the idea of *Pax Nigeriana* which was first introduced by former Foreign Affairs Minister, Bolaji Akinyemi, to capture the essence of Nigeria's leadership role in promoting African unity and development (Adebajo 2008, 12). *Pax Nigeriana* was the philosophy behind Nigeria's strong commitment to the liberation of African states from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid, conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions, economic intervention and economic integration on the continent. The leadership status earned and enjoyed by the country may, however, be diminishing given its inability to arrest the Boko Haram insurgency in its territory. This section of the article therefore, shows how protracted Boko Haram terror has impacted negatively on Nigeria's status as a regional power in Africa and an important player in the global system.

Weak military capacity

One important quality that makes Nigeria stand out in Africa is its military strength, which is underscored by its history of extensive peacekeeping activities on the continent and beyond. Adebajo (2008, 14) noted that: 'Over 200, 000 Nigerian soldiers have been deployed to peacekeeping missions around the globe, and the country has contributed troops to nearly 40 major UN and regional peacekeeping missions in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.' In 2001, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo remarked that his country had spent about USD 13 billion on peacekeeping operations across Africa in a 12-year period (Esler, 2003).

Given its tremendous military stature in Africa, it is thus puzzling that Nigeria has been unable to successfully fight an emergent terrorist group that was very much local and non-sophisticated at inception. The leader of the group, Abubakar Shekau, once exclaimed: 'is it not amazing that we, who started with sticks and machetes, are today the biggest headache to the almighty Nigerian soldiers? What a shame!!' (Audu 2015). Amao and Maiangwa (Forthcoming) cite compelling reasons that could explain the drastic change in the capacity of the Nigerian military in contrast with its previous impressive record in Africa. Pieri and Serrano (2014), they suggest that 'fundamental structural changes to the military and political systems in Nigeria' are an important reason. The return to democracy in 1999 was followed by a deliberate policy of de-militarising the state and keeping the soldiers in the barracks in order to prevent a military disruption of the nascent democracy. This was reflected in the forceful retirement of top army officers at the commencement of Obasanjo's democratic administration in 1999. In addition, many outstanding military officers who

had proverbially tasted the good life associated with politics during the long period of military rule, retired to take up politics. It is argued that this caused the 'politicization and weakening of the military' (Amao and Maiangwa [Forthcoming](#), 13), gradually diminishing its capacity and status as Africa's military giant.

Furthermore, the capacity of the Nigerian military has been corroded by many years of neglect and corruption. The large-scale corruption that is a feature of the country is much very alive in the defense ministry. As noted earlier, the huge amount allocated to the defense budget ended up in the pockets of defense chiefs, greatly affecting capacity building. The damage did not manifest until the country had to fight a major battle such as that with Boko Haram. The situation deteriorated to the extent that on several occasions, Nigerian soldiers fled the battlefield because they could not match the firepower of the Boko Haram fighters. For example, 200 soldiers were dismissed in May 2015 for 'acts of cowardice' in the war on Boko Haram (Ajijah and Ibeh [2015](#)).

This has grave consequences for Nigeria's reputation in the international arena. Other countries that are supposedly weaker in military terms because of its failure to effectively quell Boko Haram's violence today ridicule the Nigerian army. For example, the Republic of Niger's Defense Minister, Mahamadou Karidjo, was reported to have remarked that: 'our soldiers are not like Nigerians. They don't run' (Adetayo, Adeoye, and Alagbe [2015](#)). In similar vein, it was reported that Chadian Foreign Minister, Moussa Faki Mahamat, commented: 'The Nigerian Army has not succeeded in facing Boko Haram ... My fondest wish is that they assume their responsibilities ... [o]ur biggest wish is that the Nigerian Army pulls itself together – that it takes responsibility in the towns' (Baiyewu [2015](#)).

Nigerians as refugees

Another important source of international disrepute for Nigeria arising from the Boko Haram terror is the rising number of refugees fleeing the consistent attacks to neighbour states. One of the major characteristics of a major power in the international arena is its ability to attract immigrants, especially in terms of providing refuge and asylum to those that are forced to flee their countries as a result of conflicts, political repression, humanitarian crises and economic hardship. A UNHCR report identified Germany, the United States, Turkey, Sweden and Italy as the world's primary recipients of asylum seekers during 2014 (UNHCR [2014](#)). Since the end of apartheid, South Africa led the field in this regard in Africa, which has contributed to its status as a regional power on the continent. Nigeria has played this role in Africa since the oil booms of the 1970s. It offered refuge to many Africans that fled conflicts in their countries (for example, Sierra Leoneans, Liberians and Ivorians), political repression (for example, South Africans and Angolans) and economic hardship (Ghanaians, Togolese, Guineans, Cameroonians, Burkinabe, etc.). The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants reported that Nigeria hosted about 10,000 refugees as of 2001, including 4000 Sierra Leoneans, 3000 Chadians, 3000 Liberians and others from another five African countries (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants [2001](#)). Interestingly, Nigeria adopted a sound integration policy that offered ample opportunities for migrants to live a new and better life. In 2007, Nigeria allowed the last set of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone to settle permanently in the country (Reuters [2007](#)).

However, the Boko Haram crisis is reversing this trend. Rather than being a major recipient of migrants from other conflict-ridden African states, Nigeria is contributing to the

number of refugees in Africa. People in the northeastern region of Nigeria that are affected by increasingly deadly attacks by Boko Haram have been fleeing to neighbouring countries. One report suggests that about 192,000 Nigerians have sought refuge in Cameroon, Niger and Chad. The situation is so serious that the UN has launched an appeal fund of USD 174 million to cater for Nigerian refugees in their host countries. Recognising the enormity of the refugee crisis caused by Boko Haram, UN Refugee Chief António Guterres stated that the situation is comparable to that of the Syrian civil war (Kindzeka 2015). It cannot be denied that the worsening refugee crisis has impacted negatively on Nigeria's reputation. One way to measure this is the mistreatment of Nigerian refugees in the recipient countries (owing to their own incapacity to accommodate many migrants because of their economic situation). For example, in May 2015, an estimated 3000 Nigerian refugees were deported from Niger under disgraceful and harrowing conditions. They were forced to trek for three days back to Nigeria, resulting in many deaths (Umar 2015).

Insecurity in the West African sub-region

A regional leader is expected to play an active role in ensuring security in its region. Nigeria has been very proactive in ensuring peace and stability not only in the West and Central African sub-regions but the whole of the African continent. As noted earlier, the country has committed significant human and material resources towards achieving this objective. It has also been at the forefront of regional initiatives for security and stability in Africa. Sadly, its inability to contain Boko Haram within its territory is having a spillover effect on the security of West African and Central African states. It has been argued Nigeria's failure to address Boko Haram terrorism has a strong possibility of endangering its neighbours (Onapajo, Uzodike, and Whetho 2012). This is fast becoming a reality, especially in the Republics of Niger, Chad and Cameroon. In addition to the influx of Nigerian refugees into these countries, which has already caused humanitarian crises, they now experience growing Boko Haram attacks in their territories. For instance, in May 2014, the terrorists invaded a construction company in Waza, Cameroon, kidnapped 10 Chinese workers and killed a Cameroonian soldier (VOA 2014). In July 2014, they invaded the home of the Prime Minister and kidnapped his wife, with three people reportedly killed in the raid (Al Jazeera 2014). The most deadly attack occurred in February 2015 when about 800 Boko Haram fighters unleashed terror on the town of Fotokol, killing an estimated 90 civilians and injuring about 500 others (The Guardian 2015).

In other countries including the Republics of Niger and Chad that share borders with the northeastern parts of Nigeria, there have been a series of attacks. In Niger Republic, one of the most violent attacks was recorded on 19 June 2015 following Boko Haram raids on the villages of Lamina and Ungumawo where more than 38 people were reportedly killed (BBC 2015a). Boko Haram launched its first major attack on the Republic of Chad on 13 February 2015 which led to an undisclosed number of deaths (BBC 2015b).

The new phase of the Boko Haram war and the resuscitation of Nigeria's image

With the coming to power of Muhammadu Buhari as the new president of Nigeria on 29 May 2015, there were high expectations on the part of both Nigerians and the

international community of a totally different and more effective approach to confront Boko Haram. The expectations are based on the fact that President Buhari is a retired military chief who not only played a major role in confronting the Biafra soldiers during the civil war of 1967–1970, but defeated similar terrorist groups as a military leader of the country in the 1980s. Furthermore, Buhari's anti-corruption crusade while serving as the military head of state (1983–1985) in a country where corruption is a popular culture, informed people's positive opinions of his capacity to address the corruption menace that hinders the success of the war against terror. It is instructive that Nigerians and the international community perceived the failure to defeat Boko Haram as a reflection of President Jonathan's shortcomings. This undoubtedly contributed to his losing the presidential elections in March 2015.

Since he assumed power, Muhammadu Buhari has shown positive signs of changing the course of the war and ending violence. This became apparent following his first decision as president to relocate the military headquarters to the heart of the Boko Haram insurgency in Maiduguri. Interestingly, President Buhari has focused more on a diplomatic approach to address the problem that is seemingly redeeming Nigeria's lost image in the international arena. A few days after his inauguration, Buhari began diplomatic visits to seek a multi-national approach to fight the terrorist group. His first ports of call were the countries in the MNJTF alliance to seek better cooperation and build capacity for the joint military force in order to effectively confront Boko Haram. He visited Niger and Chad on 3 and 4 June respectively, which produced progressive outcomes. On 11 June the president hosted other countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in Abuja to discuss the modalities of re-engaging terrorism around the sub-region. At the meeting, Nigeria pledged USD 100 million to the MNJTF, of which the government has already released USD 21 million for the takeoff of the new phase of the war (Vanguard 2015). In similar vein, the president attended the G7 meeting held on 7 and 8 June in Germany to seek the assistance of the major powers to defeat Boko Haram. He was assured of substantial support (Vanguard 2015). The president subsequently visited the US from 20 to 23 June at Washington's invitation to promote collaboration and the re-establishment of bilateral relations. This occurred against the backdrop of strained relations between the countries under Jonathan's presidency after Abuja accused Washington of sabotaging its war on Boko Haram due to the US' refusal to supply arms to Nigeria. It is noteworthy that Washington has shown more commitment to the war on Boko Haram since the emergence of Buhari. For example, the US announced a donation of USD 5 million to the fight against Boko Haram as part of its new partnership with Nigeria to deal with the terror waged by this group (Premium Times 2015).

The above developments suggest that there is still hope for Nigeria to redeem its diminishing status as a regional player in the midst of the protracted Boko Haram war. The willingness of the international community to renew its partnerships with Nigeria to fight Boko Haram is a strong signal that the country is on the verge of reclaiming its lost glory among the comity of nations. The new leadership has demonstrated its willingness to deploy Nigeria's strong military capacity to win the war, which has been readily accepted by other countries. A good example is the president's insistence that Nigeria should lead the multi-national military force against Boko Haram in the face of proposals that leadership of the multi-national force should be rotated amongst the partnering

countries. In an apparent reaction to these new developments, the Committee of African Ambassadors in Nigeria declared in August 2015 that:

... the battle which is now fought in Nigeria against terrorism is the one which is fought on behalf of All AfricansNigeria will have the possibility of winning the real battle which remains all the time leading Africa and African people to develop [a] stable and democratized continent. (Ehikioya 2015)

Conclusion

This article demonstrated the negative impacts of Boko Haram terrorism on Nigeria's international status as a regional power. It showed that the government's inability to put an end to this insurgency has informed perceptions that the state lacks the capacity for regional leadership. The article argued that Nigeria's dwindling status manifests in the following areas: its weak military capacity given its inability to match the gunfire of the terrorist group; the increasing number of Nigerians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries; and the spillover of insecurity into the West and Central African sub-regions. However, Nigeria is perhaps on the path towards redeeming its image following the steps taken by President Buhari's administration that came on board on 29 May 2015. The new regime has shown convincing signs of addressing the Boko Haram crisis. Perhaps, Nigeria's ability to contain the group under the administration of President Buhari may further confirm the state's regional power in Africa.

Note

1. Besides being the one of the first countries to represent Africa at the UNSC in a non-permanent capacity, Nigeria's five times representation is higher than any other African nation. Although Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire served at the UNSC in 1962/1963 and 1964/1965, respectively, this was based on their membership of the Commonwealth. On the other hand, Egypt's membership in 1946 and 1949/1950, respectively, was ceded to the Middle East region.

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