



The Threat Multiplier: Analyzing the Relationship between Climate Change and the Emergence of Violent Non-State Actors in Western Africa

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The Threat Multiplier: Analyzing the Relationship between Climate Change and the
Emergence of Violent Non-State Actors in Western Africa

Louis-Philippe Caron

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Abstract

The impact of climate change on the growth of violent non-state actors is a hotly debated topic with great implications for the stability and growth of the Africa. In the last few years, several groups have made significant territorial gains and posed a real threat to national governments. The instability created by their presence and rising military and political power has great implications for core interests of the international community in the region. As Africa's population is expected to double within the next 30 years, stability and economic growth within the continent are of the utmost importance to the African population, and the international community as a whole.

This study ought to analyze the emergence of violent non-state actors due to climate change and the threat they pose to national governments in Western Africa. Rather than focusing solely on classical terrorism, it shall adopt a comprehensive perspective of non-state violence in a contextualized context where terrorism, guerilla warfare, and insurgency are means to political ends.

The hypothesis advanced in this thesis is that climate change is increasingly contributing to fragility in West Africa by strengthening conflicts surrounding natural resources and livelihood insecurity through food insecurity or water and land scarcities. Such factors create a situation in which populations are more vulnerable to negative climate impacts and at the same time to recruitment by violent non-state actors who fill in the gaps left by ill-equipped national militaries that often times fail to secure regions at risk.

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The completion of this thesis represents over 5 years of hard work and dedication. My path towards graduation has been dotted with obstacles, were they personal, academic, or more recently, the result of a global pandemic. I've come to realize that achieving such a fundamentally straining undertaking alone is next to impossible.

I have been incredibly lucky to be able to count on the unconditional support of my family and friends, who were there in the darkest times to remind me of what was ahead. Without them, all of this would have been impossible. I wish to dedicate the fruit of my efforts to my parents, grandparents, extended family and my dearest friends, for they have never let me down and kept faith in me.

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MAP OF AFRICA



Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter is presented in three parts, beginning with an introduction, followed by background information on the literature on climate-related violence, and closing with a discussion of violent non-state actors' terrorism and insurgency.

The Study of Climate Change and Violent Non-State Actors

Throughout the last few decades, climate change has been a source of great bickering amongst scientists and the political class. Just as environmental issues were beginning to make their place in the arena of practical foreign and security policy-making, the attacks of September 11 shifted the attention to the war on terror—a focus that has been remarkably persistent.¹ Twelve years later, House Republicans were still arguing that Obama's 2013 executive order requiring government agencies to prepare for climate change was a distraction from the real threats the Pentagon should be focused on, terrorist groups in the Middle East.²

Yet in spite of this opposition, the general consciousness regarding the relationship between climate change and security has dramatically increased. By the end of Obama's term, climate change was understood as one of the most important threats to national

¹ Renner, Michael. "Introduction to the Concepts of Environmental Security and Environmental Conflict" in: Kingham, Ronald A. (Ed.): *Inventory of Environment and Security Policies and Practices: An Overview of strategies and Initiatives of Selected Governments, International Organizations and Inter-Governmental Organizations* (2010): 1-22. Institute for Environmental Security.

² Vinik, Danny. "Why the GOP Is Trying to Stop the Pentagon's Climate Plan." *Politico* (23 June 2016).

security. At least, such was the conclusion of the 2015 *Report on Security Implications of Climate Change* of the United States Department of Defense. Designating climate change as a ‘threat multiplier’, the report argued that climate change would “aggravate existing problems – such as poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffectual leadership and weak political institutions – that threaten stability in a number of countries.”³ Other narratives suggested much more severe links between climate and security, arguing that “resource scarcity will lead to violent conflict, either through direct competition or as a result of migrants prompted by climate change crossing international borders.”⁴ Others have argued that the links between climate change and armed conflicts are anything but simple and linear, its data being prone to certain biases.⁵

Three effects of climate change – natural disasters, sea-level rise, and increasing resource scarcity – are frequently identified by the literature as leading to loss of livelihood, economic decline, and increased insecurity either directly or through forced migration.⁶ When it comes in interaction with “poor governance, social inequalities, and a bad neighborhood, these factors in turn may promote political and economic instability, social fragmentation, migration, and inappropriate responses from governments,” eventually producing “increased motivation for instigating violence as well as improved opportunities for mobilization.”⁷ It will be advanced throughout this thesis that, as a general rule, climate

³ US Department of Defense, *Report on Security Implications of Climate Change* (Washington DC: DOD, 29 July 2015). 3.

⁴ Briggs, Chad Michael. “Climate security, risk assessment and military planning.” *International Affairs* 88, no. 5 (2012): 1049-1064. 1049.

⁵ Hendrix, Cullen S. “Searching for climate-conflict links.” *Nature Climate Change* 8 (2018): 190-191.

⁶ Thiesen, Ole Magnus, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug. “Is Climate Change a Driver of Armed Conflict?” *Climate Change* 117 (2013): 613-25. 616.

⁷ *Ibid.*

change will hinder the ability of states in Western Africa to deliver services and provide stability to populations at risk. Failure by central governments to react promptly and deliver relief can “strain the social fabric and the relationship between governments and populations [...] contributing to further instability and feeding into the downward spiral of fragility, violence and vulnerability.”⁸

The framework of this thesis shall be twofold: (1) the preexisting conditions fostering the emergence of violent non-state actors nurtured by the failure of governments to intervene in regions where populations are increasingly vulnerable; and (2) the direct effects of climate change on disaster-induced population movements and resource scarcity. Whereas one addresses the state services, the other addresses the direct needs of populations affected by climate disasters or climate-change induced needs.

Various detractors within the scientific community have attacked the relationship between climate change and international or national security. As a matter of fact, some authors argue that the policy debate is running well ahead of its academic foundation, despite prevailing studies providing mostly inconclusive insights.⁹ More recently, however, the scientific debate on how the scarcity of natural resources affects violence and armed conflict paid more attention to the vulnerability of natural and social systems to climate impacts, which ought to increase humanitarian crises and aggravate existing conflicts without being the instigating cause.¹⁰

⁸ Nett, Katharina and Lukas Rüttinger. “Climate Report.” *Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate: Analysing the Links Between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups*. adelphi (Berlin: October 2016). IV.

⁹ Thiesen et al. “Is Climate Change a Driver of Armed Conflict?” *Op. cit.*

¹⁰ Scheffran, Jürgen, Michael Brzoska, Jasmin Kominek, P. Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling. “Climate Change and Violent Conflict.” *Science* 336.6083 (2012): 869-71.

One of the main reasons for the disparity of results amongst comparative research on the security implications of climate change is the distinction between the operational definition of conflict and security used in various data sets. Security is traditionally seen as “closely related to the threat or use of violence, and military means are regarded as central to the provision of security.”¹¹ The modern conception of human security focuses primarily on protecting people from acts of violence and violent threats to their rights, safety or lives – “freedom from fear.”¹²

In light of this problematic, our research questions are the following: why are these actors resorting to terrorism to achieve their political objectives? To what extent does climate change have an impact on the rate of progression of violent non-state actors in Western Africa? How are violent non-state actors profiting from climatic crises? What can be done to stop their growth? Building upon these questions, we shall be able to lay the foundation for a theory of climate-related violence and its challenges to international security.

The suggested contribution of this thesis is to analyze the impact of climate change on the proliferation of violent non-state actors resorting to terror and its implications for international security, centering the research around the aforementioned modern conception of human security. It shall examine the *potential* eruption of violent conflicts and terrorism between national governments and violent non-state actors resulting from the destabilization of social and political order in fragile communities and states affected by climate change. Such geopolitical disruptions may lead to serious shared security issues in terms of energy, market economy, and maintaining the global balance of power.

¹¹ Renner. “Introduction to the Concepts of Environmental Security and Environmental Conflict.” *Op. cit.* 3.

¹² *Ibid.* 5.

Throughout this thesis, we will examine two West African countries to better understand how natural disasters linked to climate change influence the resurgence of non-state armed groups within their territory, in light of the onset of new emergencies and the lack of government infrastructure and capacity to deal with them – itself directly or indirectly related to climate change. The core of our study focuses on the Lake Chad area, which borders Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Its basin, which extends as far as Algeria, Libya and Sudan, is critical to the livelihood of nearly 40 million people.¹³ Despite the critical significance of Lake Chad for peace and security, none of these countries have any real government presence in this part of the Sahel, a region of Western Africa where temperature rises one and a half times faster than the global average.¹⁴

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has declared an Islamic caliphate in 2015, which later affiliated itself with that of ISIS in Syria. On pace for becoming the deadliest terrorist organization in the world – effectively surpassing ISIS – it was weakened by a coalition of African countries backed by the US, the UK and France forming a task force to combat them on the ground.¹⁵ Four years later, Boko Haram is still active, having shifted its focus to Lake Chad region, one of the most resource depleted places in the world. For years, Boko Haram has been raiding villages for food and capturing men to serve as fighters. As the group grew stronger, the Islamic State in West Africa Province, a breakaway faction formed following internal rifts in 2016, started offering protection to the surrounding villages in danger, providing stability and water supplies in a region suffering from a food

¹³ United Nations Environment Programme. “The tale of a disappearing lake.” United Nations. Web (28 February 2018).

¹⁴ “Mali and Niger: Climate change and conflict make an explosive mix in the Sahel.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ Dawber, Alistair. “Boko Haram: Five African states agree to form coalition to battle Islamist group.” *The Independent* (12 June 2015).

crisis in exchange for a tax in the form of recruits. In absence of government presence, they've moved further in Nigeria and Niger, launching attacks of their own and eventually affiliated with the Islamic State.¹⁶

In order to build a compelling argument, I shall analyze two case studies of Lake Chad neighboring countries that have suffered from this wave of terror in a very contrasting manner, namely, Nigeria and Chad. Nigeria has been by far the most affected country in the region. Between 2011 and 2018, the most populated country in Africa was home to 4155 out of the 4874 violent non-state actors' attacks listed by the Global Terrorism Database.¹⁷ Despite repeated interventions of the Nigerian military – assisted by Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger – more than 37,500 people have been killed and millions have fled the region.¹⁸ The situation in Chad seems much more under control, where only 51 incidents have been recorded by the GTD throughout the same period.¹⁹ Despite being a fertile ground for jihadist groups such as Boko Haram, Chad's military engagements and its role in the fight against terrorism in the region have brought significant diplomatic gains, such as the appointment of Foreign Minister Moussa Faki as chairperson of the African Union Commission.²⁰

The objective of this thesis is to understand the extent to which these cases experienced disruptions of political power and a resurgence of non-state armed groups within

¹⁶ Ellis, Sam. "How Islamist militant groups are gaining strength in Africa." *Vox* (20 June 2018).

¹⁷ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). "Global Terrorism Database." *University of Maryland*, Web. (28 November 2019).

¹⁸ Prager, Alicia and Simpa Samson. "The fight against Nigeria's northeastern terrorism is also a battle against climate change." *Quartz Africa* (18 October 2019).

¹⁹ START. "Global Terrorism Database." *Op. cit.*

²⁰ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures." *Africa Report n.245*. International Crisis Group (Brussels: March 2017).

each country, evaluate the degree to which climate change has influenced both the rise of these groups and the governments' inability to effectively respond, observe its impact in terms of national security on neighboring countries, political and economic partners, and examine how increasingly frequent disruptions induced by the effects of climate change could potentially threaten global security beyond the region.

I argue that different governments and their allies have had little ability to control the non-state armed groups within their territory and address the needs of their population in cases where natural disasters have deprived them a viable environment. It is essential for governments to have the capacity to redistribute food and water in areas affected by crises and relocate populations when necessary. Non-state armed groups have historically targeted civilian populations as recruits, converts to their ideology, or objects of persecution and plunder of land, manpower, and resources. Whether or not a government has the ability to properly protect its vulnerable citizens is crucial to prevent a takeover from radicalized groups and prevent violent conflicts.

The hypothesis advanced in this thesis is that climate change is increasingly contributing to fragility in Western Africa by strengthening conflicts surrounding natural resources and livelihood insecurity through food insecurity or water and land scarcities. Such factors create a situation in which population groups are more vulnerable to negative climate impacts and at the same time to recruitment by violent non-state actors who fill in the gaps left by ill-equipped national militaries that often times fail to secure regions at risk.

Background: The Literature on Climate-Related Violence

In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that the planet is warmer than it was in 1860 by approximately 0.75°C, and most of the warming over the last 50 years is due to human activity.²¹ As fossil fuels consumption and deforestation increase greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, warming the oceans causing ice sheets to melt rapidly and existing seawater to expand, sea levels could rise a further thirteen to sixteen feet, which would flood small island states, coastal cities, and low-lying countries.²² More importantly, climate change will alter the location and availability of the world's freshwater resources, affecting global food supply as crop yields and food production will likely decrease.²³

In the past 10 years, climate change was responsible for triggering devastating weather events across the world, amongst which are prolonged droughts, flash floods and wildfires. Certain regions of Africa have experienced erratic harvests, heavy storms and the worst drought in the past 900 years.²⁴

Since the end of the 20th century, a multitude of scholars have argued that detrimental human effects on the environment pose a significant threat to human security,

²¹ Pachauri, R.K., and A. Reisinger, eds. *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2007. Ser. 4.

²² Spain, Anna. "Beyond Adjudication: Resolving International Resource Disputes in an Era of Climate Change." *Stanford Environmental Law Journal* 30 (2011): 343-90.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ NASA. *NASA Finds Drought in Eastern Mediterranean Worst of Past 900 Years* (Washington DC: NASA, 1 March 2016); Gerretsen, Isabelle. "How climate change is fueling extremism," *CNN* (10 March 2019).

issuing alarming claims about the prospective of violent conflict.²⁵ Historically, Anna Spain explains, competition over natural resources has contributed to the onset of international conflict. States resort to armed conflict over threats to their sovereignty, territory, and national security, which sometimes involve underlying disputes about the use or ownership of natural resources.²⁶ In response to such a scenario, the international community has begun to explore the security risks of climate change, making the issue a priority on their national security agenda.²⁷

The study of the interactions between environmental issues and peace and security concerns – known as environmental security – is far from a monolithic undertaking.²⁸ According to the *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict* report, there are four broad categories of research on environmental security. The first examines “whether and how environmental change impacts conflict formation, violent as well as non-violent.”²⁹ The main concern of this approach is environmental scarcity, caused either by an increasing consumption, decreasing supply, inequity access, or a combination of the three.³⁰ The second category establishes a link between resources, wealth and conflict,

²⁵ Nardulli, Peter F., and Kalev H. Leetaru. “Climate Change, Social Stability, and the SID Project.” *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict*. By Scheffran, Jürgen, Michael Brzoska, Hans Günter Brauch, P. Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling, eds. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace 8 (2012): 57-76.

²⁶ Spain. “Beyond Adjudication.” *Op. cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Thiesen, Ole Magnus, and Janpeter Schilling. “On Environmental Change and Armed Conflict.” *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict*. By Scheffran, Jürgen, Michael Brzoska, Hans Günter Brauch, P. Michael Link, and Janpeter Schilling, eds. Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Security and Peace 8 (2012): 43-55. 43.

³⁰ Homer-Dixon, Thomas. “On the Threshold. Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict.” *International Security* 16, no. 2 (1991): 76-116.

focusing on the environmental consequences of extensive, industrialized resource extraction, and unfair distribution of benefits and income.³¹ The third scenario includes the impacts of armed conflict, and finally the fourth covers environmental peacemaking.³² A large majority of contemporary academic discussions on environmental security relate to the first category, thus limiting the assessment of theoretical and empirical work to that focusing on security implications of environmental scarcity and change.³³

Several scholars have questioned the relevancy of the security implications of climate change. They argue that extant studies provide “mostly inconclusive insights, with contradictory or weak demonstrated effects of climate variability and change on armed conflict.”³⁴ Moreover, they are keen to point out that the IPCC – the primary source of scientific information on the causes and consequences of climate change – has not made the security implications a priority issue thus far.³⁵

These studies examine three effects of climate change – fluctuations in precipitation and temperature, rising sea levels, and natural disasters – and generally exclude the literature on resource scarcities and violence since it tends to see interstate conflicts over these issues as a remote possibility.³⁶ Their results fail to uncover a systematic relationship between the three aforementioned effects and higher risk of violent conflict.³⁷ Despite such

³¹ Thiesen et al. “Is Climate Change a Driver of Armed Conflict?” *Op. cit.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* 613.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Homer-Dixon, Thomas. *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999.

³⁷ Thiesen and Schilling. “On Environmental Change and Armed Conflict.” *Op. cit.*

findings, however, it would be premature to conclude that there is no linkage between renewable resources shortages and violent conflicts.

The vast majority of contemporary empirical studies deal with large-scale state-based violence. While the effects of short-term resource scarcities on such conflicts may be of little significance, there is enough evidence to claim that less severe forms of violence might be more closely related to environmental factors.³⁸ In “The Rationality and Irrationality of Violence in Western Africa,” Suliman Mohamed claims that in areas such as Darfur, where there are no free ecozones to migrate, local conflicts opposing factions competing over scarce renewable resources such as freshwater and land are the most relevant in a scarcity-conflict framework.³⁹ As Scheffran et al. explain, “Unlike national conflicts over state power or regional warlord competition, these conflicts take the form of local violent resource competition between marginalized groups.”⁴⁰

Hence, the environmental security literature seems very divided about whether environmental change primarily contributes to increasing the underlying violent conflict risk, acting as a ‘threat multiplier,’⁴¹ pointing to indirect, long-term security implications of climate change.⁴² Resource scarcity, Homer-Dixon argues, is the driving force behind much unsustainable development and today is resulting in violence in developing

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Mohamed, Suliman. “The Rationality and Irrationality of Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Ecology, Politics, and Violent Conflict*. Ed. Suliman Mohamed. London: Zed, 1999. 25-44.

⁴⁰ Thiesen and Schilling. “On Environmental Change and Armed Conflict.” *Op. cit.*

⁴¹ CNA Corporation. *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*. Alexandria, VA: CNA Corporation, 2007.

⁴² *Ibid.*

countries.⁴³ However, there is a considerable challenge ahead for future research since many of the claimed long-term effects of resource scarcity are thought to be indirect, impacting conflict risk through a combination of economic hindrance, increasing socio-economic inequalities, and institutional failure.⁴⁴

According to Scheffran et al., the “balance between political and social factors and climate change could shift when the global temperature reaches levels that have been unprecedented in human history,” which might “overwhelm adaptive capacities and response mechanisms of both social and natural systems and thus lead to ‘tipping point’ towards societal instability and an increased likelihood of violent conflict.”⁴⁵

The relationship between climate change and violent conflicts, as it has been demonstrated thus far, is sustained by little direct empirical evidence. More recently, however, apprehensions over climate change have led to developments in the literature of an alternative approach to the destabilizing effects of some natural disasters caused by civil unrest.⁴⁶ It was made possible thanks to the data from the Societal Stability Protocol (SSP) of the Social, Political and Economic Events Database (SPEED) project, which provides the basis for fresh insights in the field of civil unrest.⁴⁷

To begin with, SSP data extracts rich, event-specific data on a wide range of destabilizing events, providing a more comprehensive analysis of civil unrest than civil war

⁴³ Homer-Dixon. “Environment, Scarcity, and Violence.” *Op. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Scheffran et al. “Climate Change and Violent Conflict.” *Op. cit.* 871.

⁴⁶ Nardulli, Peter F., Buddy Peyton, and Joseph Bajjalieh. “Climate Change and Civil Unrest: The Impact of Rapid-onset Disasters.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 2 (2015): 310-335.

⁴⁷ Nardulli and Leetaru. “Climate Change, Social Stability, and the SID Project.” *Op. cit.*

events.⁴⁸ Second, sophisticated classification algorithms are used to identify destabilizing events within an archive of tens of millions of digitalized news reports.⁴⁹ Third, it includes an extensive range of event-specific attributes, providing much richer data than the event counts used by other methods.⁵⁰

There are two alternative theories on the emotional and behavioral consequences of rapid-onset disasters. The conflictual perspective, which stems from the adverse effects of cataclysmic events on human welfare, supports that environmental disasters can damage physical infrastructure, homes, crops, food/water supplies, and factories, leading to concerns about scarcities and stimulating competitiveness that could turn conflictual.⁵¹ The fear, uncertainty, and competitiveness produced by looming scarcities and the paralysis of public institutions can result in various forms of antisocial behavior which, combined with the weakening of social control and dispute resolution mechanisms, enhance the likelihood and intensity of violent conflict.⁵²

Contrastingly, the cooperative perspective highlights the integrative effects of disasters, either by producing a ‘community of sufferers,’⁵³ which can lead to spontaneous communitarian behaviors which facilitate reconstructive efforts that fill the void created by

⁴⁸ Nardulli et al. “Climate Change and Civil Unrest.” *Op. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Fritz, Charles E. “Disasters and Mental Health: Therapeutic Principles Drawn from Disaster Studies.” *Historical and Comparative Disaster Series #10*. University of Delaware Disaster Research Center. Newark, DE. 1996.

overextended institutions, or increase the marginal benefits of alliance-preserving behavior, which means that individuals are more likely to engage in sustaining activities.⁵⁴

The empirical results reported by SSP data are consistent with that of the quantitative, broadly based research conducted on the destabilizing effects of rapid-onset disasters, concluding that the average effects are somewhat insignificant.⁵⁵ However, Nardulli, Peyton and Bajjalieh argue that characterizing them as such would be highly misleading since their most important finding is that “these disasters have a highly variable effect on civil unrest, particularly violent unrest.”⁵⁶ Their multivariate analysis of violent responses to disasters showed that, on average, levels of political violence in the sixty days following a disaster are greater than benchmark levels, in accordance with the conflictual perspective. Yet, such violence is not a simple reflection of anxiety generated by deprivation or threats thereof, but an amalgam of other variables such as conflict entrepreneurs, social networks, and communication processes, that transforms discontent into violent acts in post-disaster settings.⁵⁷

Consequently, Nardulli et al. assert that future research should focus on identifying the factors that affect the destabilizing impact of disasters. The importance of advancing research in this increasingly important field through well-designed future research is underscored by the results of their study, which demonstrates that violent unrest takes time to foster but is difficult to curtail once it begins.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Nardulli et al. “Climate Change and Civil Unrest.” *Op. cit.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 330.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The *Report on Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate* of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany highlights that violent non-state actors “proliferate and can operate more easily in these fragile and conflict-affected environments where the state has little to no authority [‘ungoverned space’] and is lacking legitimacy” and sometimes “try to fill the gap left by the state by providing basic services in order to gain legitimacy and secure trust and support amongst the local population.”⁵⁹

Such findings are the driving force behind this research, which endeavors to fathom the relationship between climate-related environmental instability and the proliferation of violent non-state actors in order to propose effective policies to counteract the dramatic effects of climate change in Western Africa.

⁵⁹ Nett and Rüttinger. “Climate Report.” *Op. cit.* 46.

Violent Non-State Actors: Terrorism and Insurgency

One of the most challenging yet crucial elements of making a compelling argument is to build a contextualized research framework that encompasses the multitude of repercussions of climate change on the spur of violence in Western Africa. Despite the term *terrorism* being very appealing amongst contemporary political leaders, relying solely on its technical definition as the unique frame of reference to understand the nature of this proliferation of violence can potentially harm policy-making efforts.⁶⁰ Indeed, many studies of terrorist groups fail to properly define the term and when they do, the definitions will vary considerably, leading to confusion affecting the inferences that can be made about them.⁶¹

The literature broadly defines terrorism as a phenomenon distinct from other types of political violence. Its main distinguishable features are the targeting of unarmed civilians, the resort to extraordinary violence, the desire to instill fear in the target population, or the commitment to influence a wider audience beyond the immediate victims of the attack.⁶² More precisely, leading terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman states that terrorists “do not function in the open as armed units, generally do not attempt to seize or hold territory, deliberately avoid engaging enemy military forces in combat, are constrained both numerically and logistically from undertaking concerted mass political

⁶⁰ Moghadam, Assaf, Ronit Berger, and Polina Beliakova. “Say Terrorist, Think Insurgent: Labeling and Analyzing Contemporary Terrorist Actors.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 5 (2014): 2-17.

⁶¹ Phillips, Brian J. “What is a Terrorist Group? Conceptual Issues and Empirical Implications.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27 (2015): 225-242.

⁶² Moghadam et al. “Say Terrorists, Think Insurgent.” *Op. cit.*

mobilization efforts, and exercise no direct control or governance over a populace at either the local or the national level.”⁶³

Consequentially, a more comprehensive perspective of violence than a purely classical definition of terrorism is required in order to understand how climate change affects the spur of violent non-state actors. This statement is reinforced by recent studies that have opted for cross-fertilization between terrorism studies, the study of insurgency and counter-insurgency, as well as the literature on civil wars to propose an enhanced conceptualization of these groups and the full extent of their activities.⁶⁴ Focusing on terrorism alone would forgo such a vast array of the consequences of climate-related violence in a world where the line between terror and insurgency and more blurred than ever.

As far as differentiating between terrorism and insurgency goes, common definitions of insurgency describe it as a strategy adopted by a weak organization against a more prevailing power structure and the organizations which dominate it, seeking specific political objectives or, in certain instances, control and a total transformation of the power structure.⁶⁵ More precisely, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) pamphlet *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* [2012] describes the strategy as follows:

Insurgency is a protracted political-military struggle directed towards subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of ^[1]_{SEP} a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. The common denominator for most insurgent groups is ^[1]_{SEP} their objective of gaining control of a population or a particular territory,

⁶³ Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006. 35.

⁶⁴ Moghadam et al. “Say Terrorists, Think Insurgent.” *Op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Metz, Steven. “Rethinking Insurgency.” *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*. Ed. Paul B. Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn. London: Routledge, 2012. 32-44.

including its resources. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations.⁶⁶

There is no consensus within the scientific community as to which of the aforementioned features of terrorism and insurgency should prevail when establishing a group's true nature. Accordingly, "a group can simultaneously be categorized as a terrorist group based, for example, on the scale of violence it uses, and as an insurgent group based, for instance, on its ability to capture and hold territory."⁶⁷ Yet, the overlap between both strategies has critical implications for the implementation of successful political and military measures.⁶⁸

Aware of the challenge of discerning between terrorism and insurgency, several scholars in conflict studies have adopted the alternative moniker of violent non-state actors.⁶⁹ Generally speaking, violent non-state actors are defined as "distinctive organizations that are (i) willing and capable to use violence for pursuing their objectives and (ii) not integrated into formalized state institutions such as regular armies, presidential guards, police, or special forces. They, therefore, (iii) possess a certain degree of autonomy with regards to politics, military operations, resources, and infrastructure."⁷⁰

In the context of the proliferation of violent groups in Africa, whether they are purely terrorist organizations or insurgent groups using terror as a means to their ends, the

⁶⁶ US Government. *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*. 2012. Central Intelligence Agency. Web. 15 October 2019.

⁶⁷ Moghadam et al. "Say Terrorists, Think Insurgent." *Op. cit.* 4.

⁶⁸ Byman, Daniel. "Understanding Proto-Insurgencies." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 165-200.

⁶⁹ Moghadam et al. "Say Terrorists, Think Insurgent." *Op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Hofmann, Claudia and Ulrich Schneckener. "Engaging non-state armed actors in state- and peace-building: options and strategies." *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 883 (2011): 603-621. 604.

term violent non-state actors allows us to build a more complex and comprehensive narrative of the challenges these groups represent for Western African countries. This is due to the multidimensional nature of violent non-state actors.

Fundamentally, they differ in their motivation and purpose, strength and scope, the way they obtain funding or access to resources, in their organizational structure, in the role of violence, in their relationship between them and state authorities and the functions they fulfill for their supporters.⁷¹ This analytical framework is helpful in considering the five different types of violent non-state actors: warlords, militias, paramilitary forces, insurgencies and terrorist organizations.⁷²

Studying violent non-state actors thus allows us to broaden the picture of the proliferation of violence and eliminates some of the inaccuracies engendered by a study focused solely on the classical definitions terrorism or insurgency. It acknowledges the fundamental differences between these groups without discarding any of them on the basis that they do not correspond to the traditional definition of either terrorism or insurgency.

Dealing with these groups as being violent non-state actors doesn't prevent us from making context-specific policy recommendations for either type of actors. One prominent attempt to systematize strategies for dealing with violent non-state actors, put forward by Stephen Stedman, distinguishes three so-called 'spoiler management strategies': positive propositions or inducements to counter demands made by violent non-state actors; socialization in order to bring about situational or normative changes of behavior; and arbitrary measures to weaken armed actors or force them to accept certain terms.⁷³

⁷¹ Williams, Phil. "Violent Non-State Actors and National and International Security." *International relations and Security Network* 25 (2011): 1-21.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Stedman, Stephen. "Spoiler problems in peace processes." *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5-53.

However, such an approach lacks theoretical substantiation and does not cover the complete range of options available.⁷⁴

My assumption is that these groups resort to violence to cope with their lack of political legitimacy in regions where resource depletion and poor government oversight are leaving civilians with little choice but to join or die. The message they are conveying is not one of hope and growth but one of hate and revenge. Violence, especially terrorism and guerilla tactics, has allowed them to gain virtually unrivaled control over vast areas of land and forcibly impose their own form of proto-state.

⁷⁴ Williams. “Violent Non-State Actors and National and International Security.” *Op. cit.*

Chapter II: Nigeria and Chad

Having laid down the theoretical framework of our research, the next chapters delve into the core of our analysis and present the different violent non-state actors that have proliferated in West Africa in areas affected by the byproduct of climate change. We shall then propose concrete policy options for governments in West Africa and the international community to tackle them properly and allow for a peaceful and stable development of the continent.

Hell's Bells and a Bucket of Blood: Nigeria's Jihadist Problem

This In Mai 2014, a Twitter campaign the scale of which had rarely been seen before took the world by storm. At its forefront, countless political figures and celebrities including First Lady Michelle Obama could be seen across the social media holding signs bearing the hashtag 'BringBackOurGirls.' The roots of the movement had begun a few weeks prior in Nigeria, where on the night of April 14, Boko Haram militants raided a government secondary boarding school in Chibok, Borno State, where girls from the region had gone to write exams.⁷⁵ Bursting in town late at night in a blaze of gunfire, Boko Haram militants headed straight to the dormitories where 276 girls were loaded on lorries. Although some managed to escape by jumping out and running in the bushes, 219 of those girls were effectively abducted.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Nigeria Chibok Abductions: What We Know." *BBC* (8 May 2017).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

The campaign introduced the international community to a dramatic conflict that had been pitting neighbors against neighbors for almost five years in Northern Nigeria, costing more than 4,000 lives and displacing half a million.⁷⁷ Since the abduction of the Chibok girls, things have only gotten worse. In a decade, more than 37,500 people have died at the hands of Boko Haram and an estimated 2.5 million are displaced in the Lake Chad Basin.⁷⁸ The Twitter campaign that brought the conflict into the spotlight, conversely, drew its last breath years ago.

Boko Haram was founded by influential Borno State Islamic cleric Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the state's capital, Maiduguri. Beginning as an offshoot of the Salafi movement, a branch of Sunni Islam, the group's overarching objective is to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state and impose Sharia Law.⁷⁹ Its followers, named Yusuffiya after their movement's founder, are believed to consist of Northern Islamic students and clerics, as well as professionals, many of whom struggle to find work.⁸⁰

Originally named *Jamā'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da'awah wa al-Jihād* (in Arabic, translated as "People Committed to the Prophet's Teaching for Propagation and Jihad"), the group inherited the nickname Boko Haram from locals, a combination of the Hausa word "boko," which literally means "Western education" and the Arabic word "haram" which figuratively means "sin."⁸¹ The group claims it is opposed not only to Western

⁷⁷ Mantzikos, Ioannis. "Boko Haram Attacks in Nigeria and Neighbouring Countries: A Chronology of Attacks." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 6 (2014).

⁷⁸ "Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Global Conflict Tracker*. Council on Foreign Relations. Web. 4 December 2019.

⁷⁹ Felter, Claire. "Nigeria's Battle With Boko Haram." Council on Foreign Relations (4 December 2019).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Adibe, Jidefor. "Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram." *Africa in Focus*. Brookings Institute (6 May 2014).

civilization (including Western education) but also to the secularization of the Nigerian state.⁸²

Throughout northern Nigeria, “Western education continues to be associated with attempts by evangelical Christians to convert Muslims, and fears of southern economic and political domination.”⁸³ As Muhammad Isa notes, the name Boko Haram entails a sense of rejection and “resistance to imposition of Western education and its system of colonial social organization, which replaced and degraded the earlier Islamic order of the *jihadist* state.”⁸⁴

The emergence of a jihadist group the likes of Boko Haram in Nigeria is not a coincidence. Many analysts suggest that it results from deep-rooted religious and ethnic cleavages that have troubled Nigeria since the British colonial era. Throughout half a century of rule over the country, the colonial power has merged various territories and peoples that had nothing in common but geographic proximity.⁸⁵ Nearly 350 ethnic groups can be found on the Nigerian territory, including the Hausa and Fulani (29 percent), the Yoruba (21 percent), the Igbo (18 percent), the Ijaw (10 percent), and the Kanuri (4 percent).⁸⁶ Moreover, the division between the Muslim-dominated north and Christian-dominated south is also very palpable. Despite the fact that the two largest religious groups

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Agbiboa, Daniel Egiegba. “Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.” *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2013). 146.

⁸⁴ Isa, Mohammad K. “Militant Islamist Groups in Northern Nigeria” in: Okumu, Wafula and Augustine Ikelegbe (Ed.): *Militias, Rebels and Islamist Militants: Human Security and State Crises in Africa* (2010): 313-340. Institute for Security Studies. 332.

⁸⁵ Adibe. “Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram.” *Op. cit.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

in the country have abided by an informal power-rotation agreement for the presidency, rampant political friction remains a significant factor in ongoing unrest.⁸⁷

At its inception, Boko Haram was not the murderous organization it is known as nowadays. There is a fair consensus that, prior to 2009, the group conducted its operations in a more or less peaceful manner.⁸⁸ In its formative years, Yusuf mainly criticized northern Muslims for participating in what he viewed as an illegitimate, non-Islamic state.⁸⁹ Although radical in the northern Nigeria context, Yusuf's teachings were not unrecognizable since in various ways, numerous northern Muslims shared the belief that Islam provides a framework that should shape public life.⁹⁰

However, tensions began rising between Muslims and Christians in the mid-2000s. Boko Haram began to radicalize amid episodic clashes between the two groups and as Nigerian security forces adopted harsher tactics against suspected militants.⁹¹ The buildup led to an attack by Boko Haram on July 26, 2009, in the city of Bauchi that killed 50 and led to over 100 arrests.⁹² Over the next five days, a government clampdown in Maiduguri killed more than 800 people, including many suspected Boko Haram members and led to the brutal death of Yusuf at the hands of the Nigerian police while in custody.⁹³

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Adibe. "Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Felter. "Nigeria's Battle With Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Thurston, Alexander. *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

⁹¹ Felter. "Nigeria's Battle With Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

⁹² "Timeline: Tensions in Nigeria." *Aljazeera News* (26 December 2010).

⁹³ Adibe. "Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau, vowed to exact revenge on the Nigerian government and launched a violent campaign against the state. A year later, in 2010, Shekau announced that the campaign was to become a jihad against Christians.⁹⁴ In a message broadcast via Internet in July 2010, Shekau was reported as saying:

This is a message to President Goodluck Jonathan and all who represent the Christians. We are declaring a holy war! We will fight the Christians, because everyone knows what they have done to the Muslims!⁹⁵

Under Shekau's control, Boko Haram initiated a merciless 'holy war' and moved its activities underground; its terrorism entered in a new dimension.⁹⁶ Since then, the group has spearheaded countless violent attacks in Nigeria, all of which testified of its increasing sophistication and coordination, which was now strategically targeting Nigeria's ethnoreligious fault lines and national security forces in an effort to hinder the nation's stability.⁹⁷

Individual killings, large-scale attacks and suicide bombings against state and civilian targets alike became the hallmark of what was now known as the Boko Haram insurgency.⁹⁸ Whereas it was running operations with no apparent strategies under Yusuf, the group started resorting to bombs and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on strategic locations, especially in the run-up to the 2011 presidential elections.⁹⁹ Amongst

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Adibe. "Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

⁹⁶ Cascais, Antonio. "10 years of radicalization: Boko Haram." *DW* (29 July 2019).

⁹⁷ Agbiboa. "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective." *Op. cit.*

⁹⁸ Falode, Adewunmi J. "The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015 A Strategic Analysis." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 1 (February 2016): 41-52.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

the list of notable successful attacks figures an August 2011 suicide car bombing in Nigeria's capital directed against the United Nations that killed 21 and injured 73 others.¹⁰⁰

More determined than ever, Boko Haram conducted terrorist attacks on religious and political groups, local police and the military, as well as indiscriminately attacking civilians in busy markets and villages.¹⁰¹ Aware of the importance of disseminating its ideology and reach a wider audience, the group began to make effective use of the Internet, where readily accessible platforms such as YouTube are particularly effective in showcasing their exploits and confrontations with the Nigerian army.¹⁰²

According to various sources, Boko Haram's arsenal had become very sophisticated at this point in time, comprising AK-47 rifles, hand grenades, rocket propelled grenades, automatic rifles, surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft guns mounted on Toyota pickup trucks, T-55 tanks, Panhard ERC-90 'Sagaie' armored trucks and explosives such as Semtex.¹⁰³ Combined with Shekau's tactics of extreme brutality, the group's terror campaign was leaving Nigerian citizens tremendously vulnerable.

Understandably, the escalating onslaught of civilians began creating divisions within Boko Haram, which, even before Yusuf's death, was far from a monolithic organization.¹⁰⁴ In 2012, shortly after an attack in the city of Kano that killed approximately 150 residents, most of them Muslims, a breakaway faction of Boko Haram

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ "Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Op. cit.*

¹⁰² Falode. "The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015 A Strategic Analysis." *Op. cit.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Zenn, Jacob. "Making sense of Boko Haram's different factions: Who, how and why?" *African Afruments* (20 September 2016).

began distributing fliers in the city to publicly announce its existence.¹⁰⁵ Ansaru, whose Arabic name is *Jamā'atu Anṣāril Muslimīna fī Bilādis Sūdān* (which translates to “Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa”), emerged in reaction to the loss of innocent Muslim lives.¹⁰⁶

The Boko Haram offshoot claims to be fighting to reclaim “the lost dignity of Muslims of black Africa and the creation of an Islamic caliphate from Niger to Cameroon and northern Nigeria.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, Ansaru should not be regarded as an opponent of Boko Haram but rather a more ‘humane’ alternative jihadist group that refrains from killing innocent Nigerians through bombings and assassinations.¹⁰⁸ The group, based in the state of Kano, openly supports the operations of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and has carried out attacks on non-Nigerian civilians living or working in Nigeria, most of which were Westerners, as well as on peacekeeping forces.¹⁰⁹ Both Boko Haram and Ansaru were designated as foreign terrorist organisations by the United States on November 13, 2013.¹¹⁰

Labeling Boko Haram a terrorist organization would not stop its killing spree the slightest. Despite the worldwide condemnation generated by the abduction of the Chibok girls in April 2014 and the sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council a

¹⁰⁵ Adibe. “Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Chothia, Farouk. “Profile: Who are Nigeria’s Ansaru Islamists?” *BBC* (11 March 2013).

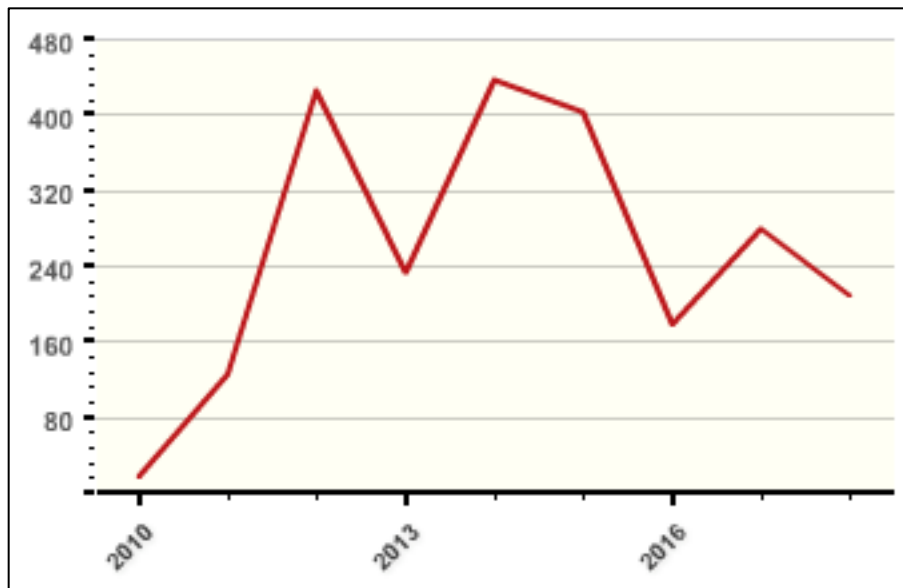
¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ “Ansarul Mulsimina Fi Biladis-Sudan.” *United Nations Security Council* (26 June 2014).

¹¹⁰ “US Names Nigeria’s Boko Haram and Ansaru ‘terrorists’.” *BBC* (13 November 2013).

month later¹¹¹, by August the group had seized several towns and villages in northeastern Nigeria and declared itself a caliphate.¹¹² In 2014 alone, Boko Haram was responsible for 6,644 deaths, an increase of 317% from the previous year, effectively surpassed ISIS as the world’s deadliest terrorist group, and expanded its activities to neighboring countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroon.¹¹³

Figure 1: Incidents involving Boko Haram in Nigeria between 2010 & 2018



Source: Global Terrorism Database

In early 2015, Boko Haram controlled about 20 local government areas, a territory the size of Belgium.¹¹⁴ In March of that year, it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in

¹¹¹ “Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Boko Haram to Its Sanctions List.” *United Nations* (22 May 2014).

¹¹² “Boko Haram declares ‘Islamic state’ in northern Nigeria.” *BBC* (25 August 2014).

¹¹³ Pisa, Katie and Tim Hume. “Boko Haram overtakes ISIS as world’s deadliest terror group, report says.” *CNN* (19 November 2015).

¹¹⁴ Adibe. “Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram.” *Op. cit.*

Iraq and Syria (ISIS).¹¹⁵ However, following the peak of violence in 2014 and 2015, the number of casualties attributed to the group fell dramatically. The pushback of the Nigerian military, helped by a coalition of the neighboring countries of Benin, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, would succeed in pushing back Boko Haram and liberate large portions of northeastern Nigeria under the jihadists' control, but the group would retain some villages and pockets of territory and continue to launch deadly suicide attacks and abduct civilians, mostly women and children.¹¹⁶ In December, the newly elected government of Muhammadu Buhari would declare in December that it had "technically defeated" the group, despite the fact that the group had killed over 1,000 in the previous two months.¹¹⁷

In 2016, following an internal rift, Boko Haram would split into at least two factions. Rebranded Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the newly formed faction handed control to ISIS-backed Abu Musab al-Barwani.¹¹⁸ The other faction has continued to be referred to as Boko Haram and is still under Shekau's control.¹¹⁹ According to John Campbell, the fundamental difference between the two, and which ostensibly led to the split, is the treatment of civilians: "ISWAP tends to target the Nigerian military and others perceived as agents of the secular Nigerian government. Shekau's faction apparently

¹¹⁵ Alkshali, Hamdi and Steve Almasy. "ISIS leader purportedly accepts Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance." *CNN* (12 March 2015).

¹¹⁶ "Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ "Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants 'technically defeated' – Buhari." *BBC* (24 December 2015).

¹¹⁸ Zenn. "Making sense of Boko Haram's different factions: Who, how and why?" *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁹ Campbell, John. "Understanding the Threat Posed by ISWA in Nigeria." *Council on Foreign Relations* (14 August 2019).

views any Muslims who do not follow him – civilian and military – as legitimate targets.”¹²⁰

Since its emergence, ISWAP has been waging a guerilla war across northeastern Nigeria and elsewhere on Lake Chad’s periphery. Its strategy includes filling gaps in governance and deliver services to the local population, which allows the group to cultivate a level of support amongst local civilians that Boko Haram has never enjoyed, thus effectively turning neglected communities in the Lake Chad area into a source of economic support.¹²¹ Since 2016, ISWAP has dug wells, policed cattle rustling, provided some degrees of health care and even disciplined some of its personnel who have unacceptably abused civilians.¹²²

This approach seems to have paid dividends in terms of recruitment and support. As of 2019, ISWAP has bolstered its ranks to an estimated 3,500-5,000 members according to the Crisis Group’s sources, overshadowing Boko Haram’s 1,500-2000, and seems to have gained the military upper hand over the latter.¹²³ Targeting primarily military objectives, the group has overrun dozens of army bases and killed hundreds of soldiers in the last year alone.¹²⁴

Nigeria’s jihadist problem is far from being settled. The largest country in Africa has suffered massively at the hands of the various violent non-state actors that are actively plaguing the country and crippling its economy. An estimated 37,500 have perished since

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ “Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province.” *Africa Report n.273*. International Crisis Group (Brussels: May 2019).

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

the beginning the Boko Haram insurgency, and around 2.5 million Lake Chad Basin residents are displaced.¹²⁵ The insurgency remains highly active in the Bama and Gwoza areas of Borno, where some 80 percent of former residents remain in internally displaced person camps.¹²⁶ Deeply rooted in Nigeria's social structure and reinforced by climate-related emergencies, this issue requires much more than mere tactics of conventional warfare to eradicate these groups that have caused mayhem in the region.

Surviving in Dangerous Territory: Chad's Successful Bid in Fighting Terrorism

In the aftermath the reelection of Idriss Déby as president in April 2016, Chad became a central player in the struggle against terrorism in Africa. With the election of the country's former foreign minister, Moussa Faki, as head of the African Union Commission in early 2017, the Chadian regime is reaping the benefits of its active military diplomacy which has spearheaded operations in neighboring countries and notably, since early 2015, against Boko Haram.¹²⁷ Yet, Chad has been – and remains – in a very precarious position as the country borders Nigeria, Niger, Libya, Sudan, the Central African Republic and Cameroon, all of which have been plagued with violent non-state actors of their own.

As a result, Chad has encountered massive challenges: a major economic and financial crisis prompted by the decline of oil prices and the disruption of trade with Nigeria

¹²⁵ "Boko Haram in Nigeria." *Op. cit.*

¹²⁶ Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "Nigeria's Troubling Counterinsurgency Strategy Against Boko Haram." *Foreign Affairs* (30 March 2018).

¹²⁷ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

and Cameroon; the absence of any change in power and the risk of a future succession crisis; and resurgent security threats beyond its borders such as the prevailing anarchy in southern Libya that led Chadian authorities to close their northern frontier, while conditions are worsening in the Central African Republic and Darfur.¹²⁸

Moreover, interventions of the Chadian army against Boko Haram have exposed the country to attacks by the jihadist group on its own soil, causing several civilian deaths both in the capital N'Djamena and on the islands and shore of Lake Chad, alongside large-scale displacements of its population in the region. Although the frequency of Boko Haram attacks slumped sharply in 2016, the threat posed by violent non-state actors is continually evolving and will persist on the long run.¹²⁹ To understand how Chad was involved in the fight against Boko Haram, it helps to understand the history of human settlement in the region.

Chad's modern history is intrinsically linked to its namesake lake. In the eighteenth century, European explorers arrived at the marshy banks of the vast body of freshwater, which was referred to by locals as *chad*. They called the wetland Lake Chad and drew it on maps. However, *Chad* wasn't referring to a kingdom or population, but simply meant "lake" in the local dialect.¹³⁰ Spanning across the lands of modern day Chad, on the eastern banks of the lake, was a swath of sparsely populated territory home to several African kingdoms and more than a hundred and fifty ethnic groups. France conquered the area in the nineteenth century, called it Chad, and declared it part of French Equatorial Africa.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹³⁰ Taub, Ben. "Lake Chad: The World's Most Complex Humanitarian Disaster." *The New Yorker* (27 November 2017).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

Historically, the Lake Chad Basin has sustained various invasions, motivated by a combination of religious ambitions, desire to impose political authority and forcibly take control of the local economy. In light of this situation, the islands inside Lake Chad became a home and refuge for populations insubordinate to political authorities who, although they were willing to accept the arrival of new population groups, persistently resisted influence of pre-colonial empires.¹³²

Throughout the twentieth century, the lake's resources attracted new settlers who, on the one hand, contributed to the economic growth, but on the other hand, sparked competition for control of the islands and the areas subject to seasonal flooding, a tendency that has been exacerbated by the current conflict.¹³³ Yet, starting from the great drought of the 1970s and the process of contraction into what is now known as the "small lake", lower water levels allowed new islands to appear and seasonal fishing camps were transformed into villages, inhabited at the same time by locals but also government officials and soldiers.¹³⁴

In Chad's lake region, successive armed opposition groups have established camp, despite the area being barely politicized and having little history of dissent. In 1978, the *Forces armées occidentales*, a strand of the National Liberation Front of Chad and later the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Chad established itself in the area, supported by rear bases on the Nigerian shore.¹³⁵ Some of the group's senior figures, native to the area, used their position to recruit numerous fighters from lakeside communities and contributed

¹³² "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹³³ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*; Debos, Marielle. *Le métier des armes au Tchad: le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres*. Paris: Karthala, 2013.

to the militarization of the region. Following Déby's election to the presidency in 1990, supporters of former president Hissène Habré, who formed the Movement for the Defence of Democracy also tried to lay base in the marshy areas of the lake. Defeated by the Chadian army in the mid-1990s, some of its fighters integrated the army ranks, while others fled to neighboring Nigeria.¹³⁶

Around the same period of time, the dynamism of the economy and the limited local presence of the state fostered an increasingly potent trafficking network of fuel, medicines, drugs, weapons and identity documents, as well as people. Customs officials, often complicit with the traffickers, allowed the emergence of alternative illicit sources of authority. The lake's peculiar topography, its distinctive vegetation and the difficulty of navigating through its labyrinth of islands enabled smuggling to flourish.¹³⁷

Security issues are just one of many concerns for the local population, as Lake Chad is ever since in a dire state. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the entire region was stricken with drought and famine. The rivers feeding into Lake Chad dried up and led to a permanent decline in the size and quantity of fish. In the meantime, a plague of tsetse flies descended on the islands, feasted on the cows and transmitting a disease that made them sickly, infertile and incapable of producing milk.¹³⁸ By the beginning of the 21st century, the lake, once the size of New Jersey, had shrunk by roughly 95%, with much of its northern basin lost to the desert. People started dying of hunger.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹³⁷ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹³⁸ Taub. "Lake Chad: The World's Most Complex Humanitarian Disaster." *Op. cit.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

Additionally, the region as witnessed a sharp increase in the activity of highway robbers throughout the past 30 years, reflecting the struggles of a population of pastoralists that has become poorer due to the drought, while successive Chadian civil wars have flooded the region with weapons. Several former Chadian rebels or soldiers converted to highway bandits before making their skills available to Boko Haram.¹⁴⁰

Despite its plethora of problems, the so-called “race to the lake” has generated a positive net migration rate in the region, its population growing from 700,000 inhabitants in 1976 to roughly 2.2 million today, a number that should rise up to 3 million by 2025. An additional 13 million people are living in the surrounding countryside of the lake, an indication of the great significance of the lake on the livelihood of the lake’s neighboring countries.¹⁴¹ It is also the center stage of the world’s most complex humanitarian disaster.

Starting from the mid-2000s, the redrawing of the boundaries of Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria by the colonial administrators began to have important impacts on the lake population. Indeed, the boundaries were drawn to cut across small aggregations of huts within the islands, isolating them from long-standing trade routes. Amongst others, the population of Bougourmi, a village on Chad’s side of the lake, was cut off from the lake’s biggest market, located in Baga Kawa, on the Nigerian shoreline.¹⁴² Hungry and despaired, they turned to foraging in the bush for fruits and nuts, before eventually running out of food.

Chad had barely begun to get back on its feet, following investment projects fueled by petrol revenues and international aid, when the conflict raging in Nigeria extended north

¹⁴⁰ “Fighting Boko Haram in Chad.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁴¹ “Fighting Boko Haram in Chad.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁴² Taub. “Lake Chad: The World’s Most Complex Humanitarian Disaster.” *Op. cit.*

of the lake. As Boko Haram's incursions on the shores of Lake Chad multiplied under Shekau's leadership, the response of the Nigerian army was increasingly dividing the lake's population, which was already despaired.¹⁴³

Around this time, Chad's President Idriss Déby has warned of the insecurity in the Lake Chad region based on what he describes as "the permanent threat" posed by Boko Haram in and al-Qaïda in the Islamic Maghreb, and has called for the creation of a joint deterrence force comprised of military forces from Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon and the Central African Republic.¹⁴⁴ In an attempt to prevent cross-border activities of Boko Haram militants and roving bands of Chadian deserters and former rebels who have made the region south of Chad their base of operations January 2012, the Nigerian government ordered the temporary closure of its borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger in January 2012.¹⁴⁵

Yet, the closure of the porous border between Nigeria and Chad was little more than a desperate attempt to easy off things in northern Nigeria. It was only a question of time before things would go horribly wrong. In April 2013, after Boko Haram killed a Nigerian soldier near Baga Kawa, government troops stormed the village, lit huts on fire and massacred fleeing villagers as they attempted to escape.¹⁴⁶ Some of them tried to swim to the islands and drowned. Accounts of the massacre indicate that roughly two hundred people died and more than two thousand structures were burned.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Karmon, Ely. "Boko Haram's International Reach." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 1 (February 2014): 74-83.

¹⁴⁵ Karmon. "Boko Haram's International Reach." *Op. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ Taub. "Lake Chad: The World's Most Complex Humanitarian Disaster." *Op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Boko Haram returned to Baga Kawa on January 3, 2015, and attacked a local military base. Caught by surprise, the soldiers took off their uniforms and fled into the bush, leaving behind weapons, vehicles, and ammunition.¹⁴⁸ Throughout the following four days, Boko Haram slaughtered the civilians of Baga Kawa and surrounding villages. According to a survivor of the events interviewed by *The New Yorker*, “It was impossible to know how many people they killed [...] I just saw bodies in the streets. Everyone was running.”¹⁴⁹ Thousands made their way to the islands of Lake Chad, and Boko Haram followed them.¹⁵⁰

Many islanders in the Chadian areas of the lake were open to Boko Haram. A considerable number of the island population of Chad uses Nigerian currency, and for decades those who could afford to have been sending their children to Quranic schools in northern Nigeria. When the Boko Haram upsurge gained traction, many of these students called to their brothers and sisters to leave the islands and join Boko Haram.¹⁵¹

With tension building at its border, Chad obtained a right of pursuit in Nigeria and intervened on January 16, 2015. By the end of March, Boko Haram fighters had suffered consequential losses, prompting the group to change its tactics. Boko Haram fighters began infiltrating villages nearby military facilities, identifying various defense mechanisms and harass locals before fleeing on motorbikes.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Taub. “Lake Chad: The World’s Most Complex Humanitarian Disaster.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Chad had not been specifically targeted until the country waged war against Boko Haram in Nigeria. The arrival of the group in Chad is often dated back to February 12, 2015, when they attacked Ngouboua, a village located on the shore of Lake Chad. Boko Haram had established itself on Lake Chad for at least two years, and its fighters had been moving around the lake using Baga Kawa as a support base, helped out by outboard motorboat operators familiar with the lake waters.¹⁵³

The Chadian army, with its large columns of Toyota Land Cruisers, was thought to be the undisputed master of movement warfare. Yet, its soldiers are unable to catch up with Boko Haram bikers who disappear in the bush, riding along sinuous paths, or fleeing on motorboats throughout the islands. As a result, the army has undertaken a systematic destruction of motorized two-wheelers suspected of being used by Boko Haram, with little results.¹⁵⁴

Accustomed to rebellions fueled by ethno-regional factors, Chad now had to confront a new kind of security threat on its own soil. The first jihadist attacks in Chad took place only days after the Chadian army launched its intervention against Boko Haram in Nigeria.¹⁵⁵ Throughout 2015, they've staged repeated raids on lakeshore villages, carried out suicide attacks in N'Djamena in June and July 2015 and in Baga Sola in October 2015, killing hundreds of defenseless civilians. Many islanders were abducted, such as the residents of Litri and Kaoudjiram in September 2015. Moreover, around 100 soldiers were killed in ambushes while fighting Boko Haram in the Lake region.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹⁵⁴ Taub. "Lake Chad: The World's Most Complex Humanitarian Disaster." *Op. cit.*

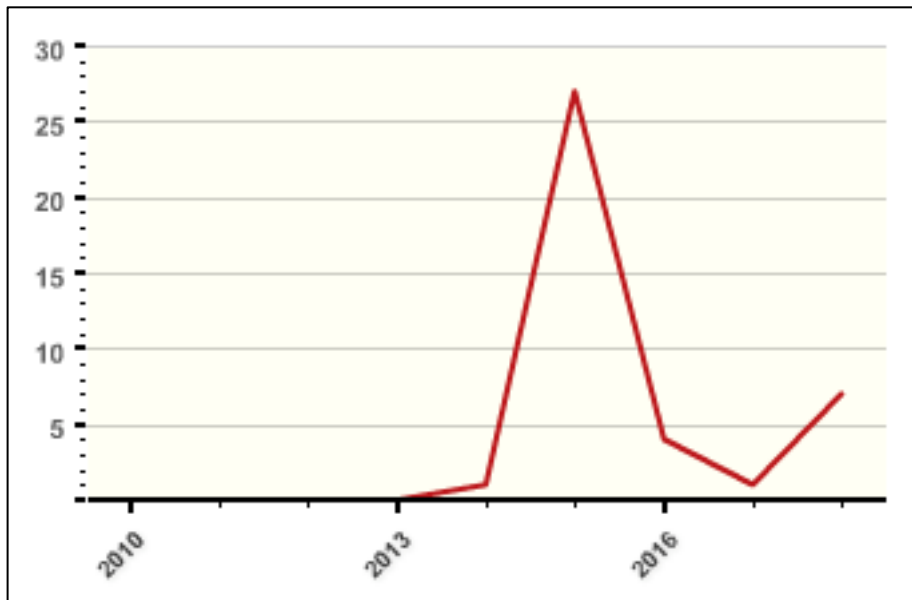
¹⁵⁵ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Effective counter-terrorism measures and a strategy on containment led to major improvements in the security situation on the Chadian shore of the lake by 2016. The group had lost most of its influence on local society in Chad, and failed to control any territory in the country nor could it establish a genuine social base. It hasn't carried out any spectacular attacks on civilians since early 2016.¹⁵⁷

These results can be attributed to the deployment of both substantial military assets from the Chadian contingent of the Multinational Joint Task Force – a combined multinational formation comprising units from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – near the frontiers in the lake area, and the Chadian National Army on the lakeshore significantly curbed the expansion of the conflict.¹⁵⁸

Figure 2: Incidents involving Boko Haram in Chad between 2010 & 2018



Source: Global Terrorism Database

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite the sharp decrease in the frequency of attacks, the closing of the border with Nigeria, alongside the implementation of the state of emergency, has greatly restricted trade in the lake area and its population was severely impacted. It has disrupted seasonal employment patterns for Chadian migrants and decreased the lucrative value of the cattle trade.¹⁵⁹ As a result, livestock thefts increased sharply, as several thousand heads of cattle were stolen and later sold in Nigeria and Niger, where prices are higher. Boko Haram was mostly responsible for these thefts.¹⁶⁰

Additionally, the state of emergency has other disruptive effects, such as the prohibition on trade in vegetables and fish, believed to be taxed by Boko Haram insurgents. Forced resettlements in the region have left tens of thousands without livelihoods, and given that 80 percent of the population depends on subsistence farming, Boko Haram remains one of the last local employers.¹⁶¹

In early January 2020, Chad has ended its mission in Nigeria and withdrawn its 1,200 troops across their common border. According to spokesman Colonel Azem Bermandoa, no Chadian soldiers remains in Nigeria, without specifying whether they might be replaced. However, Chad's general chief of staff General Tahir Erda Tahiro said that if countries in the region that have contributed to the multinational task force were in agreement, more troops will likely be sent in.¹⁶² These troops have been deployed in the Lake Chad region to strengthen security along the border.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Gorman, Zoë. "Pursuing elusive stability in the Sahel." *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (26 March 2019).

¹⁶⁰ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad." *Op. cit.*

¹⁶¹ Gorman. "Pursuing elusive stability in the Sahel." *Op. cit.*

¹⁶² "Chad troops leave Nigeria with Boko Haram mission over." *France24* (5 January 2020).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

The withdrawal of Chadian troops should not be interpreted as a sign that the jihadist threat is no longer significant. Since 2018, Boko Haram and ISWAP attacks in Chad have increased, raising questions over the effectiveness of national military responses to counter violent extremism.¹⁶⁴ At least 12 deadly Boko Haram attacks in Chad were reported between March 2018 and April 2019. The nature of these attacks reflects an apparent change in their *modus operandi*, from relying mainly on suicide attacks to direct assaults on villages and pastoral camps to kill and loot as many goods as possible, or raids against army positions. This comeback shows not only the group's resilience, but highlights the limitations of security responses to terrorist activities.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Hoinathy, Remadji. "Boko Haram's resurgence in Chad." *Institute for Security Studies* (6 May 2019).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Chapter III

Poverty, Illiteracy and Poor Governance: Understanding the Effect of Climate Change on Preexisting Economic, Social and Political Conditions

Radical Islam is not a recent phenomenon in northern Nigeria. In the aftermath of the country's independence from British colonial rulers in October 1960, violent confrontations took place between a sect of Muslim fanatics and the Nigerian Police Force in Kano (December 1980) and Maiduguri (October 1982).¹⁶⁶ Rooted in the deeply conservative practice of Islam, which has been dominant in the region since the successful jihad of Sheik Usman dan Fodio in the first decade of the nineteenth century – known as the Sokoto Caliphate – these popular upheavals began as a search for religious purification but soon evolved into a quest for a political kingdom.¹⁶⁷ Whereas the spiritual underpinnings of northern Nigeria's militant movements have been widely covered by the literature, far less attention was devoted to the socio-economic embeddedness of religious extremism in the region.¹⁶⁸

Northern Nigeria, composed of 12 states that reintroduced Sharia law at the beginning of the century, is home to 53 million people. The large majority of its citizens are Muslim, despite a substantial Christian minority, both indigenous to the area and the product of migration from the southern part of the country.¹⁶⁹ The Sokoto Caliphate (1804-

¹⁶⁶ Agbibo. "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective." *Op. cit.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict." *Africa Report n.168*. International Crisis Group (Brussels: December 2010).

1903) is a reference point for many in the region and a source of great pride amongst the Muslim population.¹⁷⁰ Its defeat by the British in 1903 and subsequent dealings with the colonial and post-colonial states mean the caliphate is somewhat tarnished with the corrupting influence of secular political power, despite the limited level of indirect rule that has been bestowed on traditional authorities.¹⁷¹

The movement spearheaded by Mohammed Yusuf at the beginning of the millennia is not foreign to this ideology. As previously discussed, the Boko Haram insurgency stems from this fact that Western education continues to be associated with attempts by evangelical Christians to convert Muslims, and fears of southern economic and political domination.¹⁷² Yusuf himself has been quoted saying: “Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a *kafir* land. The current system is contrary to true Islamic beliefs.”¹⁷³

Although the religious impetus of Boko Haram and its affiliate groups is unequivocal, religious extremism is not the movement’s only fuel. Other key factors must be taken into account in order to explain its ascendancy within the last decade. In northern Nigeria, poverty, resource scarcity and poor governance come together to form a very dangerous cocktail of antigovernment resentment that has lured countless locals to join the fight against the regime and improve their conditions at all cost.

¹⁷⁰ “Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict.” *Op. cit.*

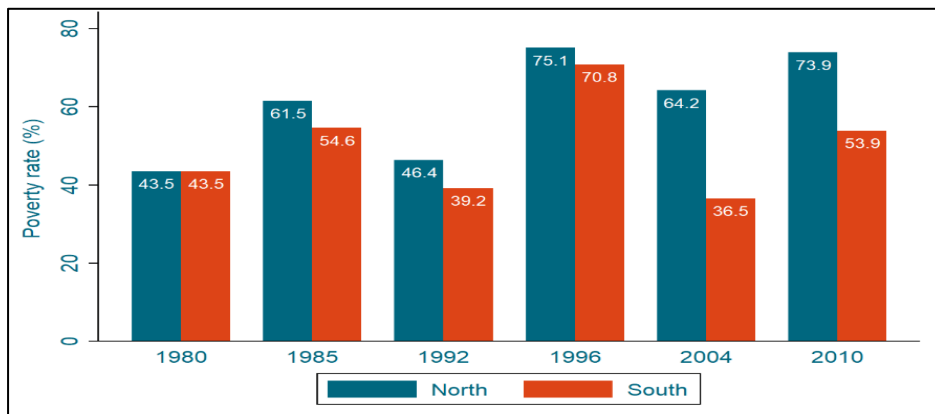
¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Agbiboa. “Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁷³ Kafir refers to an Arabic term used in an Islamic doctrinal sense, usually translated as “unbeliever,” “disbeliever,” or “infidel.” The term refers to a person who rejects Allah or who covers the “truth.”; *Ibid.* 147.

Despite being Africa’s largest economy and lean on an abundance of natural resources, Nigeria is home to one of the continent’s poorest populations.¹⁷⁴ Approximately 70 percent of its citizens live on less than \$1.25 per day, a majority of which is located in the Muslim-majority northern regions.¹⁷⁵ The oil-rich nation, largest producer in Africa, has struggled to translate its wealth into rising living standards. Rather, oil has played a central role in accentuating economic inequality across the country, as a handful of elites has long maintained a tight hold on oil revenues, and corrupt politicians have been accused of embezzling tens of billions of dollars from the sector.¹⁷⁶

Figure 3: Poverty in Nigeria by Region, 1980-2010



Source: Center for Global Development

While there was virtually no gap in poverty rates between the north and south of Nigeria in 1980, the situation massively deteriorated in the next three decades. The general growth of poverty rates in Nigeria is partly due to the 1980s oil crisis, during which the

¹⁷⁴ Felter. “Nigeria’s Battle With Boko Haram.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁷⁵ Dapel, Zuhuman. “Poverty in Nigeria: Understanding and Bridging the Divide between North and South.” *Center for Global Development* (6 April 2018).

¹⁷⁶ Felter. “Nigeria’s Battle With Boko Haram.” *Op. cit.*

price per barrel plummeted and the intrinsically linked Nigerian GDP followed.¹⁷⁷ During that timeframe, the north was politically dominant in the country and the region was likely to benefit from government largesse. Yet, the historical north-south divide was still haunting the Northern elite, which has been reluctant to rely upon market mechanisms or to relinquish control over the distribution of oil revenue, instigating increasing disparities.¹⁷⁸

The divide is not limited to the distribution of oil revenues. Adult literacy rates, widely recognized as a key to raising living standards for upcoming generations and generating a skilled workforce to lure investment, has also widely disadvantaged northern Nigeria.¹⁷⁹ In Borno State, where violent non-state actors have proliferated since the end of British rule, the literacy rate is at a meager 14.5 percent, well below the national average of 56.9 percent.¹⁸⁰ The situation in other jihadist strongholds is just as dire, like in Yobe (26.6 percent), Bauchi (34.1 percent), Gombe (39.3 percent) and Adamawa (40.5 percent).¹⁸¹

Although poverty levels and the lack of education in northern Nigeria are unquestionably appalling, these figures are not, themselves, sufficient to explain the appeal of Boko Haram in the region. Indeed, most countries in the region, including Chad, show similar or sometimes even worse figures than those observed in northern Nigeria. According to a 2005 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development

¹⁷⁷ Dapel. "Poverty in Nigeria: Understanding and Bridging the Divide between North and South." *Op. cit.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ "Reaching the 2015 Literacy Target: Delivering on the promise." *High level International Round Table on Literacy*. UNESCO (Paris: September 2012).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Program (UNDP), conducted during the early stages of Boko Haram’s rise in the public sphere in Nigeria, Chad ranked 173 out of 177 countries on the human development index, with a value of just 0.341, compared to Nigeria’s 0.453 coming in at 158 on the list.¹⁸²

Modern figures for Chad have shown that the situation has not improved ever so slightly. The 2019 Human Development Report of the UNDP ranks the country 187th out of 189, with 66.2 percent of its population living in severe poverty.¹⁸³ Moreover, the Lake Chad region is hosting an estimated 130,000 internally displaced persons and as many as 41,000 Chadian returnees from neighboring countries.¹⁸⁴

Poverty, illiteracy and poor governance have plagued countries of the Sahel for decades on end, yet only a handful of organizations like Boko Haram and its affiliate groups have caused such havoc across the region. Chad and Nigeria have dealt with these concerns in the past, although they have only recently experienced a resurgence of violent non-state actors’ activity on their territory. Although Chad’s experience with these groups is much different from that of Nigeria, both countries are facing similar national security challenges, which goes far beyond economic or religious radicalism concerns.

As a matter of fact, they are constantly threatened by a climate-induced food crisis the likes of which have rarely been seen. A few kilometers outside of Baga Sola, a small Chadian town near the Nigerian border, lies one of the many refugee camps hosting some of the 2,4 million internally displaced people in the region. Named Dar es Salaam (literally,

¹⁸² United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2005* (New York: UNDP, 11 September 2013).

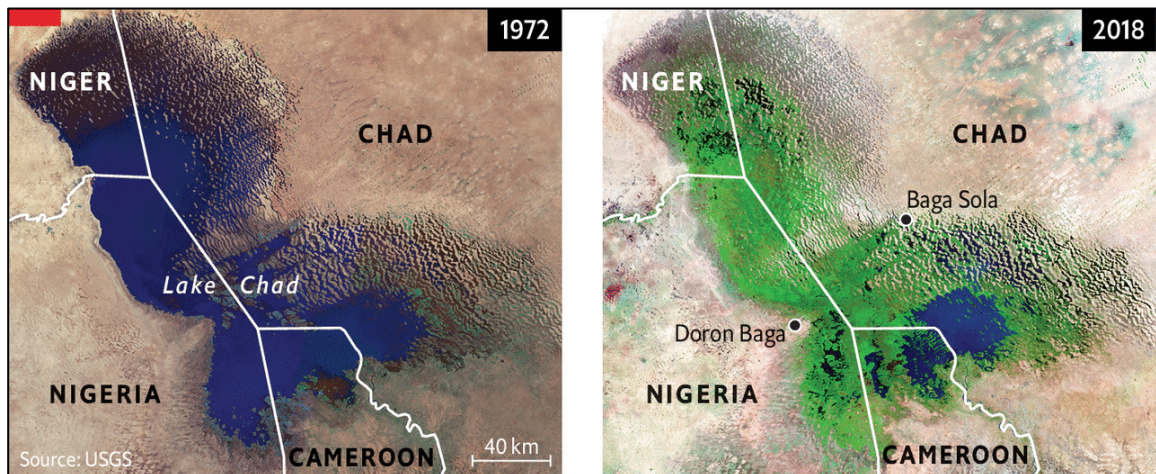
¹⁸³ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2019* (New York: UNDP, 09 December 2019).

¹⁸⁴ “WFP Chad Country Brief.” *World Food Programme* (March 2020).

“haven of peace”), the camp’s location would have been located meters deep under the waters of Lake Chad only 50 years ago.¹⁸⁵

In the 1960s, Lake Chad was the sixth-largest freshwater lake in the world. A true oasis and commercial hub in the middle of the arid Sahel, its water and fertile lands were a source of life for farmers, herders and fishermen alike.¹⁸⁶ Nowadays, Lake Chad has lost almost all of its glory, having shrunk by an estimated 90% since the 1960s due to climate change, an increase in the population and unplanned irrigation.¹⁸⁷

Figure 4: Satellite images of Lake Chad in 1972 & 2018



Source: US Geological Survey

With the desert encroaching further every year, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the local population to make a living through agriculture, livestock farming and fishing, despite 80% to 90% of livelihood in the region relying on these three sectors.¹⁸⁸ As such,

¹⁸⁵ “How climate change can fuel wars.” *The Economist* (23 May, 2019).

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Ross, Will. “Lake Chad: Can the vanishing lake be saved?” *BBC* (31 March, 2018).

¹⁸⁸ Usigbe, Leon. “Drying Lake Chad Basin gives rise to crisis.” *United Nations* (24 December 2019).

tensions between herders and farmers over water and pasture are overwhelming and often lead to violent conflicts, further contributing to the insecurity that plagues the region.¹⁸⁹ In the event that the conflicts with violent non-state actors decrease and people are able to return to their livelihood, there is a risk that said tensions around natural resources could in turn increase even further.¹⁹⁰

For similar reasons, conflicts over natural resources also play a role in tensions between host communities and displaced populations, as the competition over scarcer resources increases.¹⁹¹ Combined with the effects of climate change, the increasing restrictions on access to resources and the massive displacement of an extremely vulnerable population have created an unprecedented food security crisis. Lacking the basis for their livelihood, displaced populations are left with little choices but to rely on humanitarian aid for survival.¹⁹²

The UN estimates that 10.7 million people in the Lake Chad Basin are in need of humanitarian relief in order to survive.¹⁹³ The situation in Northern Nigeria, more particularly in its states bordering Lake Chad, is absolutely dismal. Sustained conflict with violent non-state actors coupled with the Coronavirus pandemic and associated restrictions

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Nagarajan, Chitra, Benjamin Pohl, Lukas Rüttinger, Florence Sylvestre, Janani Vivekananda, Martin Wall and Susanne Wolfmaier. *Climate-Fragility Profile: Lake Chad Basin*. adelphi (Berlin: 2018).

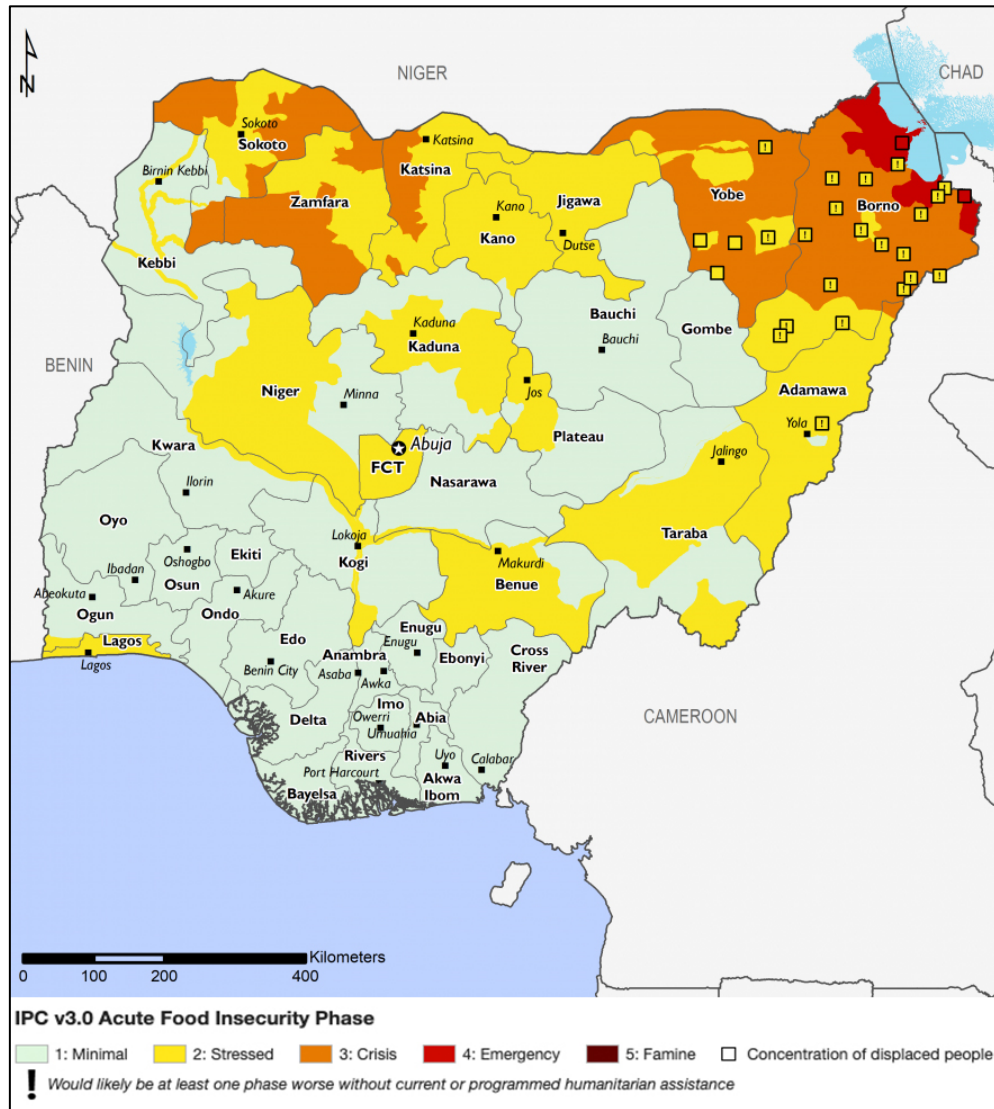
¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Ross. "Lake Chad: Can the vanishing lake be saved?" *Op. cit.*

have deepened a crisis that was already out of control, with food shortages reaching levels of emergency.¹⁹⁴

Figure 5: Food Insecurity in Nigeria, June – September 2020



Source: Famine Early Warning Systems Network

¹⁹⁴ “Food Security Outlook: Nigeria.” *Famine Early Warning Systems Network* (June 2020).

Although food insecurity afflicts the entire Sahel, Nigeria's situation is particularly relevant when studying the correlation between violent non-state actors and climate-induced food shortages as those regions most affected by food insecurity crises and emergencies – namely, Borno and Yobe – are strongholds for Boko Haram and its affiliated groups. At the same time, when overlaid with the maps of the recession of water in Lake Chad between 1972 and 2018, above, the Nigerian portion of Lake Chad has suffered from the greatest decrease in water levels across the entire region, disrupting the livelihood of all its neighboring states.

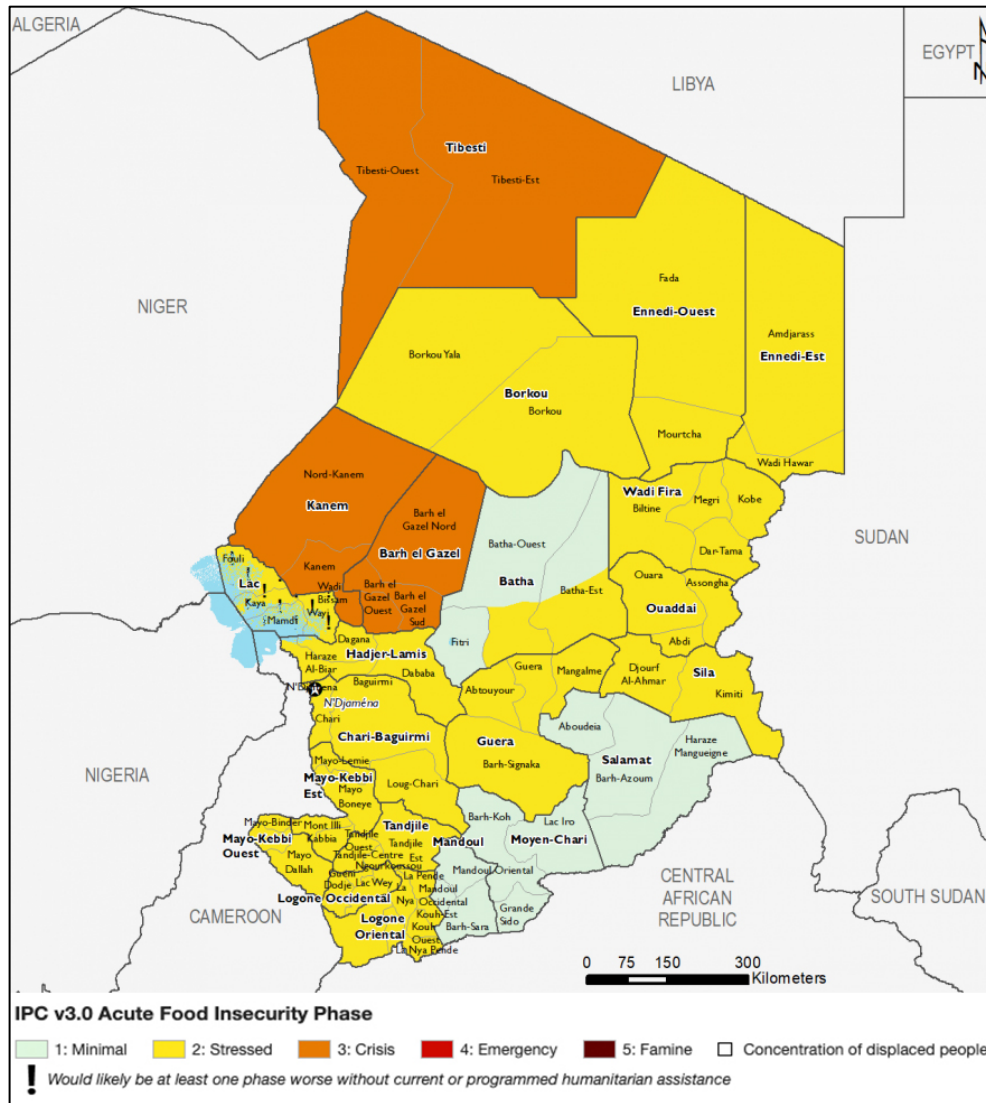
It is estimated that northern Nigeria is currently losing an estimated 1,350 square miles to desertification every year.¹⁹⁵ Insurgent activities play a major part in levels of food insecurity as “increased insurgent activity feed into a negative spiral of increased environmental collapse as agricultural infrastructure is destroyed, environmental management expertise is lost, and the natural environment is further degraded.”¹⁹⁶ In short, climate change influences the rise of violent non-state actors in Northern Nigeria by exacerbating populations already disenfranchised by rampant poverty, illiteracy and poor governance, yet violent non-state actors reinforce the effects of climate change on these populations by accelerating the process of resource depletion.

The situation in Chad is quite different. The same maps comparing water levels in Lake Chad between 1972 and 2018 show that the Chadian portion of the lake has been the least affected of all four neighboring countries. This translates into traditional livelihood being lost at a slower rate, thus creating less food insecurity in the regions neighboring Lake Chad when compared to their Nigerian counterparts.

¹⁹⁵ “Climate Change Could Mean More Terrorism in the Future.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (24 October 2019).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Figure 6: Food Insecurity in Chad, July – September 2020



Source: Famine Early Warning Systems Network

Despite being subjected to similar poverty, illiteracy and poor governance concerns, akin to Nigeria’s, Chad has been spared for the most part from the violence raging in northeastern Nigeria. Although these three variables are necessary factors in setting the stage for violent non-state actors to emerge, they are by themselves insufficient to explain the resurgence of such groups. Rather, a deeply divided population lacking any form of

trust in a government that has failed to respond to climate change-induced crises helps to understand why northeastern Nigeria has been the epicenter of violent non-state actors in the region whereas other Muslim-majority countries such as Chad have not.

Climate change, as it converges and interacts with other political, social, economic and environmental pressures, becomes a vector of instability and conflict.¹⁹⁷ As it can be observed the case of Nigeria, “this threat is particularly virulent in fragile and conflict-affected situations where governments and societal institutions already struggle to achieve security and equitable development.”¹⁹⁸ In turn, conflicts raging in northeastern Nigeria have themselves contributed to further political, social, economic and environmental degradation, thus creating a vicious circle of increasing vulnerability, fragility and violence.¹⁹⁹

Extreme poverty and economic fragility together with climate change-induced phenomena such as drought and environmental degradation are providing fertile ground for violent non-state actors to thrive and contest state authority across the region.²⁰⁰ Social unrest, political grievances and severe lack of economic opportunity “are making young people vulnerable to recruitment by rebel groups and illicit employment, feeding into armed conflict and accelerating massive internal cross-border displacement.”²⁰¹

Climate change is not, in and of itself, a driver of radicalization leading to the emergence of violent non-state actors. Rather, it acts as tinder facilitating the combustion of a socio-economical bonfire made of poverty, illiteracy, ineffective state response,

¹⁹⁷ Nagarajan et al. “Climate-Fragility Profile: Lake Chad Basin.” *Op. cit.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 8.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Nett and Rüttinger. “Climate Report.” *Op. cit.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

marginalization, religious radicalization, identity crisis, and endemic corruption, in a region where governmental authority has lost any legitimacy in the eyes of a population struggling for its own survival.

Violent non-state actors are thriving in situations akin to northeastern Nigeria where livelihood insecurity and the absence of economic opportunities can drive people to join armed groups.²⁰² As climate change accelerates the rate at which opportunities are lost to increasingly frequent natural phenomena and governments fail to respond adequately and provide relief and hope to vulnerable populations, resulting economic and social frustrations “make terrorist ideologies seem increasingly attractive, particularly for young people with few livelihood options and low levels of formal education, as they provide both future perspectives and economic incentives.”²⁰³

Other factors must be accounted for in understanding the resurgence of terrorism in the Lake Chad region and, particularly, why Nigeria’s experience is vastly different from Chad’s. As it has been previously highlighted, Nigeria is divided between Christians in the south and Muslims in the north, the former controlling political and economical institutions leading to a great disenfranchisement of northerners. Chad, on the contrary, is predominantly Muslim and, despite the country’s abysmal living standards, doesn’t boast disparity figures akin to its neighbor. Having retained some form of livelihood in the Lake regions must be accounted for in understanding why Chad has been widely spared from violent non-state actors activities.

Despite the more positive outlook in Chad, climate change is an ongoing process and its effects ought to create greater uncertainty throughout the next decades. In order to

²⁰² Nett and Rüttinger. “Climate Report.” *Op. cit.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.* 17.

prevent violent non-state actors to disrupt even further societies in the Lake Chad region but also all across the Sahel, local leaders as well as the international community must implement short-term and long-term policies in order to hinder the effects of climate change.

Chapter IV:
Policy Recommendations for Addressing the Emergence of
Violent Non-State Actors in a Changing Climate

In the wake of rising suicide bombings, the Nigerian government established in 2011 the Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) to tackle Boko Haram more directly. Nevertheless, the increasing intensity of the conflict pushed Nigeria to mobilize around 100,000 soldiers to confront the security challenge and forced the government to adapt its counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategies.²⁰⁴ Despite these efforts, Boko Haram was able to capture and control at least 10 government areas in the state of Borno by 2013.²⁰⁵ Constrained, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the three northeastern states of Yobe, Adamawa and Borno, strongholds of Boko Haram militants.²⁰⁶ For the locals, it was too little too late.

Many civilians began accusing the government and military of being incapable to guarantee their people's security. While President Jonathan and military leaders were struggling to find a solution, a group of young people from Maiduguri endeavored to take matters into their own hands and set about protecting their community.²⁰⁷ Composed mainly of vigilante groups, hunters and youths in areas devastated by Boko Haram

²⁰⁴ Falode. "The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015 A Strategic Analysis." *Op. cit.*

²⁰⁵ Coleman, Korva. "Nigeria Declares State of Emergency in 3 States." *NPR* (15 May 2013).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Cascais. "10 years of radicalization: Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

activities, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) began complementing the efforts of the military to drive Islamist fighters out of their towns and cities.²⁰⁸

Initially, the CJTF was seen as an effective alternative to the government's SMJTF, often accused of human rights violations and composed of troops from all over Nigeria who may not speak the local languages of northeastern Nigeria or understand the local culture, religion, or geography.²⁰⁹ Contrastingly, the CJTF was comprised of 500 young Muslims from Borno, some of whom joined the force to avenge the deaths of their relatives.²¹⁰

Although the CJTF might have enjoyed a certain degree of success in containing Boko Haram, the militia's achievements came at a hefty price. Between 2013 and 2017, more than 3,500 children were recruited as combatants and non-combatants and used in the fight against Boko Haram and its affiliates.²¹¹ The CJTF signed an action plan with UNICEF in September 2017, committing to put measures in place to end and prevent recruitment and use of children, leading to the release of 1,727 children and young people and the end of child recruitment within the militia.²¹²

Children abductions are endemic in the region. Alongside the thousands of children taken by CJTF, Boko Haram has abducted an estimated 8,000 children and teenagers since the beginning of its crusade in the Lake Chad Basin, in addition to being responsible for

²⁰⁸ Falode. "The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015 A Strategic Analysis." *Op. cit.*

²⁰⁹ Zenn, Jacob. "Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force." *Council on Foreign Relations* (18 July 2013).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ "Nearly 900 children released from armed group in north-east Nigeria." *UNICEF* (10 May 2019).

²¹² *Ibid.*

the murder of almost 4,000 more and having left double that number with serious injuries.²¹³ In addition, up to 2,000 children, mostly boys, have been held in detention camps across Nigeria on suspicion of maintaining ties with Boko Haram, more often than not placed in cells alongside adults.²¹⁴

According to human rights advocates, children escaping the horrors of Boko Haram are detained in conditions so appalling by Nigerian armed forces that it thwarts the military's goal of protecting and deradicalizing young people by breeding resentment of the government even more.²¹⁵ A Human Rights Watch report corroborates accounts of children describing beatings, overwhelming heat, frequent hunger, and being packed tightly in their cells with hundreds of other detainees, sometimes for years.²¹⁶

Beyond the death toll of the ongoing war with Boko Haram, social trauma is menacing to backlash in northeastern Nigeria. An entire generation of young boys and girls, traumatized by the horrors of war and terror, lost its innocence at the hands of violent non-state actors. Some of them were kidnapped by violent non-state actors, others were forcibly enrolled in militias, or even witnessed their entire family being murdered in front of their very eyes.²¹⁷ In light of the above, it is imperative the response to violent non-state actors in the Lake Chad Basin be not limited to military action.

²¹³ Bukarti, Audu Bulama. "Nigeria's Child Veterans Are Still Living a Nightmare." *Foreign Policy* (15 August 2019).

²¹⁴ Bukarti. "Nigeria's Child Veterans Are Still Living a Nightmare." *Op. cit.*

²¹⁵ Paquette, Danielle. "Nigerian children who escaped Boko Haram say they faced another 'prison': Military detention." *The Washington Post* (14 September 2019).

²¹⁶ Becker, Jo. "They Didn't Know if I Was Alive or Dead." *Military Detention of Children for Suspected Boko Haram Involvement in Northeast Nigeria*. Human Rights Watch (New York: September 2019).

²¹⁷ Bukarti. "Nigeria's Child Veterans Are Still Living a Nightmare." *Op. cit.*

While the world's attention is on Boko Haram and its affiliates, an equally important bloodshed, perhaps the deadliest no one has heard of, is taking place in northeastern Nigeria, and is also intrinsically linked to climate change. Throughout the last decade, clashes between the sedentary crop farmers and the nomadic cow herders of Nigeria's middle belt have killed over 10,000 people.²¹⁸ As climate change has brought about desertification, Nigeria's supply of water and arable land diminishes as the country is losing about 350,000 hectares of land per year.²¹⁹

For decades, nomadic herders from the north traveled to Nigeria's middle belt to graze their cattle during the dry season – from November until June – working in relative peace with crop farmers, solving their issues through local mediation.²²⁰ With Lake Chad shrinking and water becoming increasingly scarce, the absence of trust between the two groups or of an effective justice system led to minor disputes to snowball into full-blown crises.²²¹ Herders wandering onto farmlands and accidentally destroying crops often lead to farmers retaliating by killing cattle, for which herders demand compensation or attack farming communities, killing unsuspecting villagers including women and children.²²²

Whether we're talking about radicalization, hunger, mass migrations, social crises or an escalation of violence, these are all insidious indirect effects of climate change posing a major threat to the peace, stability and development of West African countries. Solving climate change, however, is a global endeavor that would require decades to consolidate

²¹⁸ Sotunde, Afolabi. "The Deadliest Conflict You've Never Heard of." *Foreign Affairs* (23 January 2019).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

and thus, constitutes solely a long-term and hypothetical solution to the violent non-state actors problem in West Africa. Nevertheless, its effects can be dampened through a series of measures aimed at reducing the indirect effects of climate change and the initial conditions for the emergence of violent non-state actors, previously analyzed throughout this thesis.

Whereas military action temporarily forced Boko Haram and its affiliates to retreat in the bush and adapt their tactics, military response has been insufficient to degrade the group completely. Beyond military measures, eradicating violent non-state actors in the region requires both short- and long-term socio-economic measures designed to tackle radicalization at the grassroots and address the socio-economic and political grievances of the populations surrounding Lake Chad.²²³

Northeastern Nigeria is the scene of a humanitarian disaster of unprecedented proportions, and requires increasing humanitarian assistance. The situation in Chad is rather different, as the impact of Boko Haram has been less severe than in neighboring countries.²²⁴ Consequently, both countries must adopt measures tailored to respond to their specific condition yet cooperate to diminish violent non-state actors' influence across their borders.

Chad is currently struggling with the coordination of the emergency response through development projects around the lake, aimed at strengthening the long-term resilience of local communities.²²⁵ Numerous international donors, such as the World Bank, the European Union's Trust Fund and the European Commission service for

²²³ dan Suleiman, Muhammad L. "Countering Boko Haram." *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 6 (September 2015): 22-27.

²²⁴ "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures." *Op. cit.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

humanitarian aid (ECHO), the French Development Agency and the African Development Bank, signaled their intention to provide funding for such projects.²²⁶

Large development projects, however, are not without risk. A prior evaluation of the impact of each dollar spent is required in order to avoid unintentionally reinforcing some of the factors fuelling the crisis, such as inequalities between different factions or communities.²²⁷ In this area of high volatility, constant growth of population and fluctuations in the water levels of the lake, mobility is crucial to maintaining the balance between the communities.²²⁸ Moreover, they should have broader objectives than pure ‘deradicalization’ or ‘the prevention of extremist violence’ in order to avoid the risk of local communities portraying development activity and security measures as inextricably linked.²²⁹

The success of development projects is concomitant to the question of Lake Chad’s future. Investments by Chad in the lake region have been largely viewed as a tool used to attract international aid. Yet, whether the region shall remain militarized and whether displaced populations shall be reintegrated to the islands or the lakeshore remain questions to be settled by the Chadian government.²³⁰ Finally, investments in the lake region must not be made at the detriment of other regions, as Chad as a whole is in an economically

²²⁶ “Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures.” *Op. cit.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

precarious situation, as opposed to southern Nigeria.²³¹ Such inequalities could become a fertile ground for violence between the regions.

Chad must also rebuild a positive relationship between its populations surrounding the lake and the state. Relaunching its production economy and trade with neighboring countries and reappropriating a region that has long been in the orbit of Borno State is of the utmost importance.²³² Not only is focusing purely on military measures inefficient at reestablish any form of trust between N'Djamena and this outlying area, but military operations against Boko Haram and its affiliates pose the risk of creating a permanent state of crisis around the lake, subjecting the region to de facto military rule over the long term.²³³

Rebuilding relationships between the communities and the state also require short-term actions. Although there are already awareness campaigns underway, Chadian authorities should invest in support for community radio stations to broadcast public messages about conflict prevention in local languages, alongside talk shows and interviews with local people allowing them to express their views.²³⁴ Chadians of all backgrounds must be aware that the government is working towards improving their quality of life, and the government must prove that it is doing so in collaboration with them.

The situation in Nigeria is much more complex given the outreach of violent non-state actors in the northeast. Although the military campaigns against Boko Haram have allowed Nigeria to recapture former strongholds of the group, they have carried out multiple attacks against civilian targets in the past few months. Recently, on August 20,

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² "Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures." *Op. cit.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

2020, ISWAP militants have taken hundreds of people hostage in Borno, who had just returned to their homes after living in displacement camps for two years.²³⁵

Nevertheless, the ongoing military campaign by Nigeria and its allies has significantly weakened Boko Haram's capabilities and reduced the areas under its control and, as such, a region-wide military campaign should be sustained.²³⁶ Additionally, Nigeria must properly secure international and regional borders, and work together with its allies and international partners on counterterrorism campaigns to dampen cross-border recruitment and assaults carried out by violent non-state actors.²³⁷ Nigeria must capitalize on an opportunity to bolster geostrategic trust with its neighbors in order to deal with the threat from the group within the country and in the Lake Chad region.²³⁸

The policy recommendations made for Chad with regards to long-term development projects apply to Nigeria as well. The government must work towards reducing inequalities and improving the capacity of its population in the lake region to preserve its traditional livelihood. One of these initiatives, the Transaqua Project, is an ambitious project to replenish the waters of Lake Chad that involves building a canal to move around 100 billion cubic meters of water from the River Congo to the lake every year.²³⁹ The project initially launched over 30 years ago, but endemic corruption in Nigeria has stalled its development ever since despite receiving the support of neighboring

²³⁵ "ISWAP terrorists take hundreds hostage in Nigerian town: sources." *The Guardian* (20 August 2020).

²³⁶ dan Suleiman. "Countering Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Ross. "Lake Chad: Can the vanishing lake be saved?" *Op. cit.*

countries and the international community.²⁴⁰ Replenishing the waters of Lake Chad would greatly reduce food insecurity in northeastern Nigeria and attenuate the ongoing crisis between farmers and herders.

At the local level, Nigeria must work towards eliminating Abu Bakar Shekau and Abu Musab al-Barwani. This strategy may yield positive dividends, as there are no clear successors to the leaders of Boko Haram and ISWAP so far.²⁴¹ Since these violent non-state actors have been on the defensive following the successive military interventions in the region, finding a new leader and organizing a successful leadership transition would be a daunting task.²⁴²

Meanwhile, the government must develop amnesty programs for former violent non-state actors' members and concentrate on segregating hard-line unrepentant jihadists from members, especially women and children, who could have been forced into carrying out acts of violence.²⁴³ Amnesty is an effective avenue to encourage members to leave Boko Haram and its affiliated groups and be reintegrated in the society.²⁴⁴

Nigeria must also change its approach towards dealing with violent non-state actors. In order to do so, "broadening the perspective and understanding the hybrid and complex nature of [violent non-state actors], the motivations that drive them and the context in which they thrive is indispensable for adequately responding to the security challenges they pose."²⁴⁵ Whereas economic, social and political factors remain important, the

²⁴⁰ Ross. "Lake Chad: Can the vanishing lake be saved?" *Op. cit.*

²⁴¹ dan Suleiman. "Countering Boko Haram." *Op. cit.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Nett and Rüttinger. "Climate Report." *Op. cit.* 56.

environmental aspects of fragility and conflict cannot be dissociated with the other factors.²⁴⁶

Promoting good governance and strengthening local institution, although not traditionally associated with the adaptation to climate change, must become priorities in reducing the risk that climate change presents and become a core component of adaptation and peacebuilding in the region.²⁴⁷ These factors would allow Nigeria to improve its capacity to reduce the risk of disasters and hinder the ability of violent non-state actors to profit from the weakness of the state.²⁴⁸

Perhaps more importantly, creating sustainable livelihoods through redistribution of wealth, investments in modern technology and the rehabilitation of a functioning market in the lake region is key to both adapting to climate change and preventing the rise and growth of violent non-state actors.²⁴⁹ The government must regain the confidence of northeastern Nigerians by proving its ability to assist them in times of crisis, becoming a beacon of hope for a forsaken population that has nothing else to lose.

Studying and understanding the effects of climate change on the emergence of violent non-state actors is no small task. As the population of Africa is expected to double within the next 30 years, the peace, stability and prosperity of the continent have great implications for international security.²⁵⁰ The conditions that make Lake Chad ideal for violent non-state actors extend across the whole Sahel. The population in the region is

²⁴⁶ Nett and Rüttinger. “Climate Report.” *Op. cit.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ “Africa’s population will double by 2050.” *The Economist* (26 March 2020).

mostly Muslim and vulnerable, ethnic conflicts are rampant, food is scarce, poverty is rife, and most importantly, there is virtually no presence of a government. As such, violent non-state actors have been filling these spaces at a staggering rate.²⁵¹

Ignoring climate change as a threat multiplier is virtually impossible in the context of studying violent non-state actors in Africa. Its indirect effects, although in and of themselves insufficient to induce the emergence of groups such as Boko Haram and its affiliates, galvanize underlying economical, social and political grievances widespread in West African countries that are breeding grounds for violent non-state actors to emerge.

Although this field of study is increasingly gaining attention, the principal challenge for the research in the upcoming years is to build linkages through complexity science in order to extend previous data and experiences into future scenarios that cover different social, economic, and political contexts. Building appropriate frameworks to understand the conditions in which violent non-state actors emerge would allow governments and the international community to better assess risks in a changing climate, address its indirect effects and respond accordingly.

²⁵¹ Ellis. "How Islamist militant groups are gaining strength in Africa." *Op. cit.*

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