

## Terrain Consideration as a Critical Factor in Resolving Insecurity Issues in the Northwest and Parts of Niger State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper reviewed available related literature and consulted maps of the affected areas. Thousands of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been displaced in the northwestern region of Nigeria due to violence between herders and farmers, armed roving bandits and in some cases by insurgent terrorists like Boko Haram and Iswap. Causes of this violence can be attributed to many inter related and complex reasons. There is the competition for resources, inter-tribal issues of domination, population increase due to natural increase in birth rates and climate induced migration into the region. Security agencies have failed to solve the issue of insecurity in the region because of insufficient knowledge of the terrain. The terrain is forested, has many rivers, and is rugged and dissected. Some of the suggestions are that sophisticated surveillance equipment such as drones and satellites be used, that dialogue between aggrieved farmers and herdsmen should be encouraged.

**Keywords:** Bandits, Insecurity, Resources, Surveillance, Terrain.

### Introduction

Thousands of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been displaced in the northwestern region of Nigeria due to violence between herders and farmers, armed criminal gangs in some cases by insurgent terrorists like Boko Haram and ISWAP.

This region is inhabited by Fulani herders, Hausa farmers and other smaller tribal groups of Kambari, Dakarkari, Dukkawa, Kamuku, Kadara Gwari, etc.

Causes of this violence can be attributed to many inter related and complex reasons. There is the competition for resources, inter-tribal issues of domination, population increase due to natural increase in birth rates and climate induced migration into the region. All these have intensified the activities of organized criminal gangs backed by a lucrative business in small arms. These organized criminal gangs engage in cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and collection of levies from the local population.

'The region's security crisis derives from long running competition over land and water resources between predominantly Fulani herders and mainly Hausa farmers' (Darma, 2021).

'The annual animal routes known as Burtali in Hausa language have been encroached by farmers. Herders are then left with no option but to pass through the farmlands, thereby destroying plants and farm produce, making farmers to retaliate by attacking them and their animals' (Darma, 2021). The Hausa farmers mobilized armed groups known as vigilantes a part of which later transformed into a separate group called Yan Sa Kai. The Fulani herders mobilized armed groups for protection who later transformed into Bandits

and violence intensified. 'Violence pitting mainly ethnic Hausa sedentary farmers and vigilantes acting on their behalf against predominantly Fulani roving herders and associated militias called Bandits by the Nigerian authorities' (ICG, 2020). Both the terrain roving armed criminal groups on motorcycles and the vigilantes have autonomy and have no known rules of engagement. Many communities were pillaged and sacked by these roving Bandits. Rural banditry refers to armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation' (Chukwuma, 2019). This violence has continued for many years now. 'The violence, largely occurring in rural areas and has spread from its epicenter in Zamfara state to Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto states in the zone into Niger state in the north central Nigeria' (ICG, 2020).

### Methods

The outcome of this paper was from a review of available literature and consultation of maps of the northwest and Niger state. Discussions were held with victims who volunteered willingly when the author visited some of the affected areas. The author's fore knowledge of the region also helped.

### Statement of Problems

As the security deteriorates in the northwest, jihadist groups are gradually taking over control of key areas in the region. 'The governments at both the Federal and state levels have made efforts towards tackling the present insecurity, but the efforts came with limitations' (Ladan 2019). The state security forces have failed to tackle the menace of Banditry. This failure is as a result of many reasons and chief among the reasons are the limitations imposed by the terrain on which the activities take place.

### Discussions

#### Terrain of the North West and Niger State.

This is the appearance or layout of the land. Terrain includes the natural and manmade features and structures of the Earth. Terrain evaluation 'is the process of analyzing and interpreting manmade and natural features on the Earth surface' (Freebase, 2022). Terrain or topography is an important factor when discussing the security and insecurity of an area. The terrain in the North West and Niger state is forested and rugged with deeply incised stream courses. Bandits exploit the terrain to limit exposure.

'The vast, rugged terrain, sparse population and dense vegetation make surveillance difficult making the forests ideal hiding places and operational bases for the bandits and terror groups, (Oluwole, 2021). The North West region is located within three physiographic areas; the extensive low Hausa plains, the flood plains and dry valleys, and the upland areas. The Hausa plains stretch across the northern part of the North West with an average height of 650 meters and hardly exceeding 700 meters. It is monotonous lowland made up of sandy deposits with isolated flat topped hills. The North West is drained by a complex network of large and small rivers. Most of the rivers belong to the Sokoto and Roma drainage basins.

Major ones include Bunsuru, Gagare and Maradi rivers. In Niger state, most of the rivers flow into river Kaduna. The rivers in the North West and Niger state all rise from the north central high lands. The ' north central high lands lies in the center of Nigeria around parts of Kano, Kaduna, Niger and Zamfara States ' (Tansi, 2022). Some of these rivers have extensive flood plains that are swampy and others have gullies or streams that are deeply incised by erosion. In south of the area and Niger state the land rises up to 3,000ft with conspicuous massive inselbergs and hills of different shapes and sizes. Rivers also cut deep gorges in many places. In the dry season, the many small rivers in the area become dry or contain little water. In the rainy season, they become flooded and flow fast.

The terrain is also forested. The existing large forests reserves have become hiding places for the bandits. The forests provided safe homes for the roving bandits. And from there they plan and attack isolated villages. The forest reserves have been used for decades by nomadic herders as grazing grounds and by hunters. The bandits have knowledge of the layout of the forests. The forests are many and some are large and straddle many states in the region. The Kamuku National Park in Kaduna state criss - crosses five northern states of Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger and Zamfara States with a total landmass of 1,121 square kilometers. In Zamfara, the Kuyanbana forest is extensive and extends into Bena in Kebbi state and Birnin Gwari in Kaduna state. The Ajja forest in Zamfara extends into Katsina state. The popular Sububu forest in Zamfara extends into Sokoto state. The Dajin Rugu in Sokoto state extends into Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States. These are only a few examples of the many forests in the the region.

The ' long stretch of forests has for a decade become the hideouts and bases for bandits from where they come out to the villages and along roads to attack people' (Ladan, 2019). The forests have become ungoverned spaces due to poor management. According to Okoli and Ochim 2016, ' the poor management and poor security given to the Nigerian's forestland contributes a lot in making them vulnerable to criminal habitation and activities'. The terrain especially in the southern part of the North West and Niger state is forested, rugged and dissected by many small and big rivers. This is the reason ' when people tried to reach out for security agencies intervention, it is always negative due to complaints of non-accessible roads to be used by the security in reaching out to the scene of the incident' (Yahaya and Bello, 2021). Even with these limitations, 'the governments at both the Federal and State levels have made efforts towards tackling the present insecurity, but the efforts come with limitations' (Ladan, 2019). Some of these limitations include the nature of the terrain and the insufficient knowledge about its layout by the security forces. The bandits use their knowledge of the terrain to conveniently elude the security forces. Within the forests are found hills of different sizes which the bandits use to their advantage. ' Criminals use mountains in the forests as surveillance towers to monitor activities' (Abdulrahim 2021). Some of the reasons why the security agencies have failed to solve the issues of insecurity in the North West and Niger state include the influence of the physical environmental factors on field operations and insufficient knowledge of the general layout of the area.

Insufficient knowledge limits proper terrain analysis for successful ground operations. The presence of wide swampy submerged flood plains, highly dissected up and lowland areas, deep and narrow gorges, wide and narrow rivers limit the movement of military equipment such as tanks, artillery pieces and military heavy duty trucks. Tanks Borg down delaying movement and leaving the soldiers stranded and open to attack. From the air, forests limit precision of air strikes. The terrain offers a wide range of good places for laying ambush on soldiers and for hiding. The vastness of the forests and ruggedness of the terrain limit effective patrolling.

### Conclusion

The Paper concludes in agreement with the statement of Chukwuma, ( 2019) that ' the federal government's current counter banditry efforts based on military reconnaissance and raids, is good and commendable. But it has failed to bring about the needed respite, owing largely to the operational challenges arising from insufficient knowledge of the terrain' and its physical layout.

### Suggestions

- Involvement of the local community who have knowledge of the layouts of the area.
- Employ more Forest Guards for proper patrol of the reserves.
- Prioritization of boarder security through sustained international security cooperation so as to prevent the illegal smuggling of arms.
- Encourage and emphasize dialogue between aggrieved farmers and herdsmen.
- Use of sophisticated surveillance equipment such as Drones and satellites.
- Establish well secured security outposts at regular intervals.
- Produce plenty up to date maps of the region for military purposes.

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