

GEOPOLITICS OF LAND BORDERS CLOSURE IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract: This article discuss how a border policy of a particular country shaped the economic, political and security of the neighbouring countries. Border in the era of globalization, it is beyond a mere geographical demarcation that separates one country from the other. It occupies a central place in the international, continental and regional economic, political and security discourse. The decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria to close its land borders in August 2019 for economic and security reasons has affected commercial activities and movement of people between the frontiers of Nigeria with Togo, Benin Republic, Cameroon, and Niger Republic. Secondary data were sourced for the analysis and discussion. Hegemonic Stability Theory is adopted as theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon. The results show that the internal affairs of Nigeria become a theme for discussion at the regional economic bloc, Economic Community of West African States. Domestically, Nigerian government has portrayed border closure as one of the best decision to safeguard home industries and farmers from the importation of cheap goods. The paper further found that the border closure has provided Nigeria with an opportunity to compelled its neighbours to set up a joint border security patrol to check the influx of undocumented migrants, illegal selling of weapons, importation contraband products and discontinue the harbouring of terrorist groups in the border communities. However, the border closure led to economic hardship for Nigerians at the border communities and those who engage in cross border trade by rendering them jobless. Therefore, the article concludes that border can be used by an economically strong country to protects its political, economic and security interests. This is evident between Nigeria with its neighbours when Nigeria shut its land borders because it is stronger than all its entire neighbours; economically and politically as well as military strength. Also, with a population of over 280 million people, it is a huge market in which the neighbours takes advantage of, for trading, labour migration and other commercial activities.

Keywords: border closure, geopolitics, Nigeria, West Africa, Hegemonic Stability Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Geopolitics is conceived as the study of statecraft and the divination of patterns of global politics (Atkinson 1995). If geopolitics has intellectual value, it lies in a capacity to uncover the challenges facing the state and empire and display a willingness to use force if necessary to protect vital interests. In 1924 *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, a journal, explored how Germany might recover from the humiliating loss of the First World War and the sorts of geographical strategies need to stimulate revival. Geopolitics, according to Haushofer, should be an accomplice of the state and encourage an expansion of Germany, possibly leading to the leadership of the Euro-Asian landmass in alliance with Russia and Japan. Combining the global strategizing of Mackinder with social Darwinist insights including the state as a living organism, a geopolitical perspective armed with maps and statistics was believed to be an indispensable part of the state and its intellectual armory. As with Fascist Italy, this academic interest was supplemented by popularizing trends with a new generation of school children being instructed on the spatial extent of a Greater Germany and Italy (Atkinson 1995). Under this worldview, the state needed to expand into new territory and acquire new resources to restore itself to health.

An important concept in geopolitics is border, regulating borders security, movement and trade are some of the main focus of policy agenda of governments in international relations, diplomacy and security circle, therefore, attracts the attention of social researchers. For example, the US policy on “building a wall” between the US and Mexico and the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015, resulting in the building of fences along the Hungarian-Serbian-Croatian and German-Austrian border that effectively suspended free movement within Schengen space, constitute re-bordering practices. Furthermore, various border violations across the EU-Russian border in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 have sparked an increasingly heated debate among the public, emphasizing that borders are not only an issue for policy-makers but also an important topic of electoral politics (Koch, 2018).



Similarly, Carter and Poast (2017: 242) opined that borders are demarcations that the populations on both sides recognize and (for the most part) honor. A border is, therefore, unstable if 'its integrity is systematically violated by a non-trivial subset of the population, thereby producing negative externalities for states'. From this perspective, stable borders refer, on the one hand, to secure borders for which effective surveillance and control regimes exist. On the other hand, the impact of economic inequality that may result in cross-border crimes and violate border-crossing regulations, leading to border instability (Carter, Poast 2017: 244).

Therefore, border represents the physical manifestation of a nation's sovereignty. Nations are responsible for managing their internal affairs, which implies that they exercise control the flows of illicit drugs and people who migrate through illegal routes and contraband goods into and out of their countries. Border management is the term used to describe the control exercised at a nation's borders and includes border security preventing unauthorized crossings and the facilitative side of border operations, which seeks to support rapid transit with minimal interference for authorized people and goods. In the exercise of these authorities, the challenge is to expeditiously and accurately determine which category of a potential border crosser is part of and to have the resources necessary to deal with either. It is common in many situations, border communities are vibrant areas where a mix of people live and work and flows of trade in goods and services transit regularly. Many border communities share common languages, tribal affiliations, and family ties (Atler, Davenport, Grill, Kadlec, Young 2018: 4). They may not differ much from one country to another and may have more in common with each other than with the nations to which they belong. In many cases, these communities have their own cultures, reflecting the melding of sub-communities on either side of the internationally recognized border. They are also highly sensitive to changes caused by variations in law enforcement, security postures, and customs requirements (Atler, Davenport, Grill, Kadlec, Young 2018: 4). In other words, attempts to close borders could be met with angry protests. This is similar to

what is obtainable in communities at the boundaries between Nigeria and the Niger Republic, Benin Republic, Chad, and Cameroon. It is difficult to differentiate a Nigerian from non-Nigerian at the boundary communities due to long years of living together before they were separated by European colonialists for administrative convenience, economic and political reasons.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Sovereign countries have rights over their frontiers and in the exercise of such rights, it affects security, political and economic activities of a country or countries in which they share common boundaries. There are several reasons for border closure by a country, it varied from time to time, depending on the prevailing circumstance. Simmons and Shaffer (2019: 2) observed that state territorial integrity and sovereignty are core principles of international law. Border security is an ascending state priority, not only in places like the United States, Europe, and Israel but around the world; and not only for domestic constituents but for international audiences as well. The reasons are complex, depending on the global structural changes. These include rising new security concerns, economic and political uncertainty created by the trans-border movement of people and goods across borders. Some of these conditions can threaten the legitimacy of the state itself. For instance, security walls were erected to serve as border control measures in some countries in the past and in the 21 century, in Israel and the USA. Ponting (2012: 3) recounted that throughout history, walls and fences have served to secure and defend populations by reconfiguring the political-economic sphere. For example, a wall in Israel-Palestine and the USA-Mexico border security wall are classical examples of border control in the world for economic, security and political reasons.

In Africa, South Africa has put up a lethal electrified fence on its border with its neighbours Mozambique and Zimbabwe in 1986. The fence was responsible for hundreds of refugee deaths in the first three years of its existence as mi-

grants who tried to cross the fence got electrocuted, while those who tried to bypass the fence by going through a national park were eaten by lions. Yet many undocumented migrants managed to cross the fence (New Scientist 1990). Modern border control differs greatly in their level of complexity and enforcement, among the most serious borders is Kuwait/Iraq, made of electrified fencing and razor wire, braced by a four-six m-wide and four-six m-deep trench, complete with a 3.0 m-high dirt berm, and guarded by hundreds of soldiers, several patrol boats, and helicopters (Victoria, Klaus 2019: 10). Saudi Arabia/Iraq wall is equipped with ultraviolet night-vision cameras, buried sensor cables, thousands of miles of barbed wire, 50 radars, 78 monitoring towers, eight command centers, ten mobile surveillance vehicles, 38-night vision camera-equipped gates, 32 rapid-response centers, and three rapid intervention squads, all linked by a fiber-optic communications network. Some of the equipment used at the borders can detect a person 19 km away and a vehicle at 39 km. Among relatively porous borders are fences between Malaysia/Thailand, and India/Bangladesh. Both are lightly patrolled and monitored, and thus not effective deterrents for migrants and smugglers who often use fake documents and bribes to cross between the two countries. We estimate that at least 67 international borders are fortified to various degrees with manmade barriers as of 2018, and there are plans to build 10 more in the next few years (Victoria, Klaus 2019: 10).

Morocco's unique geopolitical position give its borders an outsized prominence in regional relations. Three border areas, in particular, have posed unique challenges. The land borders with the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla have been subject to intense pressure from migrants attempting to cross to European soil and from Spanish and European Union desires to see such crossings controlled. Irregular crossings through this Western Mediterranean route peaked in 2011, then dropped off before increasing again in 2014 and generating dramatic photos of migrants "streaming" over the fences (Roman 2014: 10).

Nigeria does not only have a strong economy; its huge population of approximately 280 million people has placed it

in an advantageous position (security, political and economic) than the remaining ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) member States. Officials estimate that in 2013 traders re-exported to Nigeria some CFA 253.2 billion (€386 million) worth of goods originally imported into Benin from elsewhere; of these shipments, only CFA 34.6 billion worth were officially declared as goods in transit to Nigeria when they arrived in Benin (Hoffman, Melly 2015). Undocumented trade between Nigeria and other ECOWAS countries shows that significant volumes of informal imports are allowed through official border crossings, facilitated both by illicit payments and by border officials' inability to thoroughly control the huge volumes of trade that pass through. The task is made harder because traders typically mix local products with goods from outside ECOWAS on the same truck. Additionally, Nigeria's porous border and smuggling of contraband and unbanned goods, has contributed to the collapse of domestic business.

Hoffmann and Melly (2015: 1) observed that large volume of goods from around the world enters Nigeria across these borders. Such trade movements, as well as those in the opposite direction, are mostly unrecorded, untaxed, informal and difficult to regulate, as are the flows of money that finance them. This also have security implication in the fight terrorism in Nigeria, notably Boko Haram insurgents who disguise as traders to engage in trading to get money and supply weapons to their fighters in any of the West African countries. Cantens and Raballand (2017: 7) maintain that terrorist groups may also pay traders for intelligence to enable them to slip across borders. There appear to have been cases in northern Nigeria where Boko Haram paid traders to become informants. This was a result of the failure of the ECOWAS to implement a joint-border patrol in the region to curb the activities of illegal trade and movements of criminals. Barka (2012) stated that Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), intended to establish one-stop and joint control arrangements at borders as key to facilitating trade. This failure is among the reasons which prompted Nigeria to close its borders as part of the measures to curb illegal exports and imports as well as

movement of terrorists with their logistics to and fro Nigeria. Therefore, border closure will mean the country will lose huge amount of revenue from the cross border transactions. Also, the border closure will render people whose job rely on land border import and export jobless hence increase the rate of unemployment in Nigeria and to a large extent in the neighbouring countries that depends on trading with Nigeria.

The objectives of the paper are to examine the politics of the economy of geopolitics in the West African sub-region. Specifically, to assess the political economy of the closure of Nigerian land borders. These objectives were approached through the collection of secondary data and were discussed and analyzed.

The methodology for this study is non-survey where secondary literature was examined for the purpose of the study. Data from Newspapers and published articles and textbooks on geopolitics, border closure politics in various countries and West Africa in particular were collected and analyzed. The study covered Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger Republic, Togo, Benin Republic, Ghana and Chad which are the most affected countries by the Nigeria's decision to shut its borders.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature reviewed in this section focus on boundary studies, border security, trade and migration. This is because boundary studies (where the border is) and border studies (how the border is socially constructed) have in fact grown apart, have become detached from each other to become separate subfields. Both subfields have their own institutional expertise centres, their own journals and their own leading figures (Houtum 2005: 674). Put differently, the attention has moved away from the study of the evolution and changes of the territorial line to the border, more complexly understood as a site at and through which socio-spatial differences are communicated. Hence, border studies can now dominantly be characterised as the study of human practices that constitute and represent differences in space (Houtum 2005: 672).

BORDER CLOSURE

A lot of factors were advanced by countries that adopted the policy for land border closure and restriction. These factors could be economic, security and political depending on the prevailing circumstances. For instance, countries faced with internal security challenges restrict the movement of people along their frontiers to check the activities of trans-border criminals and illegal weapons. This informed the rationale behind the UN Security Council passed Resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1540 (2004). The resolution is part of a broader tapestry of formal and informal mechanisms to prevent global terrorism and proliferation globally. However, it has been observed that the resolutions were seemingly ill-connected to the daily challenges facing the Global South (Finlay, Bergenas, Tessler n.d: 12). In most of East Africa, inadequate national financial systems, porous borders, lack of technical expertise and operative controls over sensitive materials, and occasional reluctance to enact more-rigorous standards for fear of derailing economic and development objectives, have yielded an environment ripe for terrorist groups to flourish and for the nefarious transit of sensitive weapons mass destruction materials and technologies (Finlay, Bergenas, Tessler n.d: 12).

Ullah and Kumpoh (2018: 1) view border as one of the key determinants of geopolitics in Southeast Asia. Border is integral in trade relations, security and migration flow in the areas. Similarly, southeast Asia's heterogeneity politically, ethnically, religiously, economically, demographically and spatially has crucial implications for neighborly relationships, trade, border constructions, migration and refugee flows for all the countries. Ullah and Kumpoh concluded that the type of border determines the level of relationship between neighbouring countries and security challenge, trade, and population mobility. The study shows that a country can adopt a border policy for political, economic and security reasons, depending on the prevailing circumstances. Similarly, in the context of migration or forced displacement, borders are significant because, in some countries, they mark the place where one country ends

and another begins. As is the case for hundreds of thousands of Burmese, borders mark the place that for some, may be a barrier, and for others, a possible step toward protection. Refugee camps are not meant to be permanent solutions, but when they become that by default as in the case of Burmese living in Thailand they can also be seen as temporary barriers that cannot be changed until the countries that control the borders provide options to ensure protection and freedom (Margesson 2011: 207).

As the world becomes globalized, mobility is now characterized by new corridors, camps, and spaces of confinement that funnel migrants toward specific locations and violently restrict the easiest routes to their destinations (Jones et al. 2017). These new geographies shift the movement of migrants to new landscapes and waterscapes that alter the experience for both people en-route and the people they encounter along the way. At the same time, people on the move create their corridors as new technologies enable the rapid dissemination of local knowledge of the conditions along the route through mobile phones, a geographical positioning system (GPS), and social media. As Gabriel Popescu suggests, digital technologies bring together issues of politics and space in ways that change how power is organized and distributed geographically (Popescu in Jones et al. 2017: 4). In addition to the expansion of security practices at borders, many states are externalizing border enforcement through agreements with neighbouring countries. Border externalization means that much of the work of enforcing the border is done by transit states that are not the final destination of people on the move (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, Pickles 2013, 2015; Collyer 2007, 2012; Collyer, King 2015). This shows that the border is not a mere geographical expression but it is also used to advance the country's political, economic and security interests against the neighbours.

A study examined the border policing along the Mediterranean coast shows that instead of being a place for a meeting of differences, the Mediterranean has turned into a permanent, mobile and enveloping border, prevent meetings and separating people, especially the rich from the poor, the white

from the coloured, Europe from Africa. The contemporary Mediterranean looks more like a military zone than a happy place or a lab for new inclusive political practices. Military patrols using live ammunition against unarmed men, women, and children scaling barbed fence, captains dumping their human cargo in the sea after being detected by the navy, left-to-die boats and mass deportations in the seas: these are scenes not from the second World War, but the modern-day Mediterranean region (Gjergji 2015: 155).

Similarly, the influx of migrants from Libya and Syria has led to the closure of the Mediterranean eastern route, the central route has become the relatively most traveled. What worked for the eastern route i.e. subcontracting the closure with Turkey, a strong State capable of efficiently controlling its shore cannot work the same way for the central route. Most migrants arriving by sea in Italy depart from Libya, and exceptionally Egypt and Tunisia. By contrast with Turkey, in Libya, the State failure and proliferation of militias give the smuggling business free rein to operate (Fargues 2017: 20). The closure of the Eastern Mediterranean border was to safeguard the destination countries from the influx of asylum seekers and refugees for security and economic reasons.

Omizzolo and Sodano (2018: 167) observed that policies on blocking migration flows, conventions, national and international regulations, processes and agreements like the Rabat, Khartoum and Malta Processes, have led to creating meta-borders that promote border controls, military monitoring, and increased security and externalization measures on the perimeter of its jurisdiction. This has fostered transferring refugee migration flow management from the European Union (EU) to various third countries that often cannot deal with such complex responsibilities. The EU has also entrusted these procedures to dictatorial regimes such as Eritrea and South Sudan. This implies that border blocking is an integral part of security and multilateral relations between EU and many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The rationale behind the blockade is to protect the economic and security interests of countries that become a destination for refugees and the market for trading illicit drugs.

Mutlu and Leite (2010: 38) examined the operation of security personnel at the Ceuta and Melilla border. The study found that the border security practices in Ceuta and Melilla represent a legal exception to the Spanish and European Union norms on rights and freedoms, the exceptional practices of these border crossings are no exception to the norms of global border management. Securitized practices of indefinite detention, forced removal through deportation, and the right to refuse entry are common practices not only in Ceuta and Melilla but elsewhere in Europe, North America, and Asia. Sovereign presence is clear in the quotidian performativities of border crossing. Borders, as such, represent an exceptional space in the sense that we are vulnerable to the gaze of the state at border crossings, stripped of our most basic rights and freedoms.

In the same vein, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) (2017: 1) gave a detailed description of the nature of border control between Morocco and Spain. the border is characterized by barbed-wire fences; patrols at sea, in the air, and on land; expulsion and return agreements: The European Union goes to great lengths to prevent foreign nationals from crossing its borders. In a process referred to as externalization, EU Member States work closely with non-European partners to outsource their external border control, with the result that individuals seeking international protection are often pushed away from Europe. On the political context of border control between Ceuta and Melilla, the EU, Spain, and Morocco cooperate closely on border control, a partnership that grants political and economic favors to Morocco for assisting the EU with the protection of its borders from irregular entry. Through this partnership, the EU delegates the responsibility for third-country nationals in search of protection to countries at its external borders to Morocco (ECCHR 2017: 2).

The Moroccan-Algerian border has been closed since 1994, following escalating restrictions after a bombing in Marrakech, which Morocco claimed had been carried out with the support of Algerian intelligence services. This border has become increasingly securitized since 2015, including the addition of a barbed-wire mesh fence that is 2.5 meters high, gates



on the Moroccan side, and a reciprocal ditch on the Algerian side, as well as the addition of more checkpoints on both sides (Román 2014). Furthermore, a series of mined and barricaded sand berms running from the southwest to the northeast of disputed Western Sahara consolidated Moroccan gains against Polisarian guerillas in the 1980s and have frozen the conflict in place since then (Rice-Oxley 2013). The berm features 10-foot walls, barbed wire, electric fencing, and sentries every seven miles (Swenson 2014).

For internal security reasons, Congolese authorities temporarily closed the border in 2012 at the height of the M23 (Mouvement du 23 Mars; March 23 Movement) militia crisis but were quickly forced to reopen it due to popular protest (Lamarque 2016). Additionally, in September 2013, Rwandan authorities partially closed the border between Goma and Rubavu following a mortar attack on the Rwandan border town but reopened it almost immediately. (Social Science in Humanitarian Action (2019: 2) stated that contingency planning to mitigate the potentially destabilizing effect of such a closure is required, particularly concerning the supply of foodstuffs to Goma and Bukavu (which rely heavily on local Rwandan imports), the disruption to the ‘survival economy’ for tens of thousands of residents, and the potential to force informal traders to less regulated crossing points outside the major cities on the border.

CROSS BORDER TRANSACTION BETWEEN NIGERIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

The total informal exports (i.e. goods leaving Nigeria through her immediate neighbours to the ultimate destinations other than the neighbouring country) from Nigeria stood at N25, 937.56 million, dominated by transit exports to other countries in Africa (N23, 808.75 million or 91.79 percent), apart from Niger, Cameroon, and Benin. Of the total informal imports of N655, 612.50 million into Nigeria from Benin, Cameroon, and the Niger Republic, N464, 560.12 million were transit imports from these countries. The bulk of these transit

imports (i.e. goods passing through Nigeria with ultimate destinations other than Nigeria) originated from Europe (N200, 864.12 million or 43.2 percent), Asia (N159, 420.80 million or 34.3 percent) and other African countries (N88, 132.69 million or 19.0 percent) (Central Bank of Nigeria 2016: 7-8).

Similarly, another border located at Kamba, Kebbi State, Nigeria was found to be the most active monitoring point in terms of the value of informal exports, as it accounted for about 49.9 percent (N217, 358.27 million) of the total informal exports. This was followed by Belel, with 15.6 percent (N 68, 087.05 million) and Kongolam, in Katsina State with 11.4 percent (N 49, 589.18 million). In terms of informal imports, Kongolam border dominated (27.5 percent or N180, 290.97 million), followed by Zangon Daura, which contributed 23.6 percent (N154, 728.51 million). Overall, the Kamba border emerged as the most active of the 16 selected border sites, as the value of goods traded informally across the site stood at N239, 592.32 million, constituting about 22.0 percent of total informal trade. This was followed by Kongolam (N229, 880.15 million or 21.1 percent) and Zangon Daura (N179, 754.53 million or 16.5 percent) (Central Bank of Nigeria 2016: 7-8). Among other objectives, ECOWAS was established to integrate trade and ease businesses along the West African corridors which the closure of land borders by Nigeria is detrimental to the economy of some member states. Hoffmann and Melly (2015:27) highlighted the importance of ECOWAS in regulating movement of people and goods in the region. They described ECOWAS as a modern geopolitical grouping, has a strong culture of intergovernmental cooperation and a deep sense of shared West African identity, reflected in a readiness among its members to work together in tackling regional and national crises. The idea of regional cooperation is strongly reflected in decisions on the free movement of people and goods, regional food-crisis prevention and management, a common agricultural policy, mining policy, intraregional electricity exchange, regional gas pipelines and common positions on migration and conflict prevention.

However, Hoffmann and Melly (2015: 29) observed that one of the challenges faced by ECOWAS as a regional eco-

conomic bloc is to persuade governments in the region to stop using national technical standards as a form of protectionism for their local industries, and to convince them that in the long term a harmonized and liberalized regional approach will generate trade opportunities, boost productivity and create jobs. When a country adopted national standards to regulate border movement, for example, branded pharmaceuticals that are already available in another ECOWAS state, this offers little protection in reality but merely creates an opportunity for smugglers and rent seeking officials. This was evident when Nigeria closed its land borders, it has created additional opportunities for existing smugglers to import and export goods which prior to the ban, were not contraband. Illegal routes were discovered by the smugglers to bypass security personnel in Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, Yobe and Borno States which share boundaries with Niger Republic. Same happened in States which boundaries with Benin Republic, Togo, Chad and Cameroon in Nigeria. Despite the seeming benefits which Nigerian derive from the cross border transactions and movement, Nigeria was compelled to close its borders because of some failures of regional economic organization (ECOWAS) to protect the movement of illegal goods and weapons in the region. Specifically, ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework which emphasizes cross-border initiatives as a means of reducing tensions, fighting cross-border crime and enhancing community welfare, among other concerns has not been able to curb cross border crime especially the heightened insecurity in the West African corridors caused by Boko Haram and other splinter groups of Islamist terrorist organizations using the region as a heaven. However, Lamptey (2013: 3) observed that there is a lack of a common approach in terms of policy formulation, especially at the national and sub-regional levels among the ECOWAS member states.

GEOPOLITICS IN WEST AFRICA: NIGERIA'S INFLUENCE IN THE REGION

Nigeria has the strongest economy and is the most populous country in the West African sub-region. This gives the country economic and political influence over its neighbours: Cameroon, Niger Republic, Togo, Benin Republic, and Sao Tome and Principe. These neighbours take advantage of the economic strength and population of Nigeria for importation of goods and other commercial transactions. Apart from business transactions, there is an age-long relationship between Nigerians living at the border communities and people at the other side of the divide. Despite the trade benefits that Nigeria derived from its land borders and social relationships among nationals of the affected countries, in August 2019, Nigeria closed its borders to imported goods, declared that the time had come to end rampant smuggling across the porous frontiers. This decision has not only affected the economic activities but also social relations with its neighbours. This is because Nigerians living at the borders with Cameroon, Niger Republic, Togo, Benin, and Chad have linguistic and ethnic similarities as well as filial relationship. Some of these communities were once a single entity before they were divided by the European colonialists as separate countries. International Office for Migration (IOM 2017: 25) stated that for many generations, regional trades have been following a North-South axis between Niger and Nigeria. Cereals, fuel, clothing and manufactured products from Nigeria are sold in Niger, while Nigerians buy livestock, dairy, and red peppers. Many Nigeriens also spend a few months per year working in Nigeria, where salaries are higher.

What is considered as domestic affairs of Nigeria, which aimed to protect local manufacturers, farmers and curb the influx of illegal weapons into the country, which exacerbates security challenges. The border closure has become an issue for political discourse among political leaders in West Africa. The President of Benin Republic, one of the most affected countries by the closure of the Nigerian borders, Patrice Talon, discussed the issue with the Nigerian border on the mar-

gins of the Seventh Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD7), in Yokohama, Japan in 2019. He expressed concerns as a result of the severe impact the closure of the Nigerian border have on his people. But the Nigerian President stated that the partial closure of Nigeria's border with the Benin Republic, was due to the massive smuggling activities, especially of rice, taking place on that corridor. This informed the rationale behind the establishment of exercise, code-named, 'Ex-Swift Response', jointly conducted by the customs, immigration, police and military personnel and coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser. The restriction at Seme Border followed the joint border security exercise ordered by the government and aimed at securing Nigeria's land and maritime borders (Punch Newspaper 2019).

Similarly, Ghana is also affected by the border closure, especially between Nigeria and the Benin Republic which is the Ghanaians' route to Nigeria. Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, Ms. Shirley Botchwey, traveled to Abuja and discussed the issue with Nigeria's Foreign Affairs in 2019. The border closure had severely affected Ghanaian traders, and it could lead to political tension in countries impacted by the decision. Truckloads of goods from Ghana had been detained at the Seme Border between Benin and Nigeria for weeks, returning such to the seaports would be a major loss for Ghanaian traders. Additionally, the closure of the borders has had considerable disruptions to trade in the sub-region, with grave consequential economic effects on Ghanaian traders (Sahara Reporters 2019).

Therefore, to persuade Nigeria to reopen its border, a meeting was held on 14th November 2019 in Nigeria under the auspices of the regional economic bloc, ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). At the end of the meeting, an agreement was reached by Nigeria, the Republic of Benin and the Niger Republic to establish joint border police to check the influx of foreign goods into West Africa's largest market. The joint patrol team will comprise the police, customs, immigration, navy and state security services of the three countries (The Guardian Nigeria 2019). In this regard,

ECOWAS at the end of its 56th session on 24th December 2019, observed border closure as the key issue facing the implementation of the protocol of free movement of persons and goods in the region. It urged member-states to remove both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, giving low levels of intra-regional trade.

However, the decision taken by Nigeria to lockdown its borders is in contradicts the policy of ECOWAS as regional organization to regulate trade, regional security issues and border management. ECOWAS has initiated a project to promote economic activities in the member state called West African Trade Integration (WATIP). Among other objectives, WATIP intends to coordinate trade and custom operations across all the member states, the goal is to ensure smooth co-ordination of cross-border movement of people and goods (Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, COMCEC 2016).

Furthermore, the decision of Nigeria to shut its border because the country is aware that it is the major determinant of economic activities in the region with huge population which provide a ready-made market for goods and services, in addition abundant oil reserve and a relatively strong agricultural sector. Therefore, Nigeria use its borders as a cudgel to compel compliance from the neighbouring countries to implement strict measures to protect the economic interests of Nigeria. Okafor (2012) reported a study conducted by German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) which found that informal operators dominate cross-border trade in Ogun state, southwest Nigeria. Ogun, which shares an international border with Benin, is one of 16 federal states in Nigeria that adjoin the country's land borders. According to some estimates, informal cross-border trade constitutes around 75 per cent of Beninois GDP. This is significantly higher than the sub-Saharan average of 43 per cent and further underscores the fundamental informality of Nigeria's trade partnerships in the region (Afrika, Ajumbo 2012: 8).

Similarly, in 2010 World Bank study estimated that imports worth \$5 billion are smuggled through Cotonou alone into Nigeria, and that textile products account for 50 per cent

of the value of the smuggled goods. Many importers in northern Nigeria still find it quicker and easier to have a container unloaded at Cotonou, trucked through Benin and on to Maradi in south-central Niger, and then brought back south down to Kano through borders with Katsina (Hoffmann, Melly 2015: 14). This means that the closure of Nigerian borders has definitely affected the people in Cotonou, Maradi and Jibia in Nigeria whose source of income rely heavily on importation of goods via the routes. Also, the closure affects the revenue that government of those countries collects from people crossing to Nigeria.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

Hardi and Uszkai (2017: 9-27), the role of borders has constantly changed over time, depending on the historical, political, geographical and other characteristics of the given region. There were times when a given border was easily permeable and at other times it was difficult to cross. Therefore, the depth of integration is also changeable. Hardi and Uszkai (2017: 9-27) developed some models but none of the models is suitable to explain the land borders closure by Nigeria and its implication on geopolitics in West African. The models developed are: A model of the development of cross-border movements, Discontinuity in interaction between border regions, Conceptual framework of cross-border space production, Spatial cognition in a border region.

Therefore, this study adopted Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST), the major proponents George Modelski, Robert Gilpin, Robert Keohane, and Stephen Krasner. The theory is suitable in explaining the decision of the Nigerian government to close all the land borders in order to achieve its domestic economic, security and political interests. The central proposition of the HST is that strong or powerful states use their influence and other resources at their disposal to compel weaker states to act according to the dictates of the strong state. hegemonic stability theorists stated that states will value order at the cost of some autonomy; benefit that order makes possible

to justify ceding some ability to act unilaterally. In this regard, the strongest state will bear much of the responsibility for articulating and enforcing a specific order, in exchange for getting the type of order it wants. Smaller states will go along, sacrificing autonomy for the material benefits order allows (Prabhakar 2010: 2). The HST is to maintain order and stability whereas the function of borders is to define the area to be used when calculating relative gains. Trade and immigration policies depends on the nature of the hegemony. In this paper, the hegemony of Nigeria in the West African sub-region where it is the strongest economy, populous and with the strongest military. This gave Nigeria the confidence to shut its land border to compel obedience from the weaker neighbour which Nigeria blame for illegal migration, importation of contraband goods through illegal routes and harbouring of insurgents.

DISCUSSION

The border is not a mere geographical expression that shows where one country end and other begins. At the age of globalization characterized by treaties and agreements for trade, movement of goods and people, it could be an instrument to wield political and economic influence over weak neighbours that relied on the economically and politically country. The study also shows border restriction can be used to compel the neighbouring countries to implement economic and security measures and strategies when the need arises. The decision of Nigeria to shut down its border has metamorphosed from internal affairs to West African economic, diplomatic and political issues because of the strategic influence of Nigeria in the sub-region. The affected countries are worried about the economic impact of the Nigerian border on their economy; excluding Nigeria, which advanced security reasons in addition to the protection of domestic farmers, manufacturers, and industries. This is in line with the submission of Minghi (1963: 407) that boundaries touch the heart of

the political geographical discipline: boundaries ‘are perhaps the most palpable political geographic phenomena.

However, domestically, the closure of the borders led to harsh economic conditions for Nigerian communities at the frontiers. The Federal Government of Nigeria banned the sale of petroleum products in Filling Stations, 20 kilometers away from the border led to the increase in the price of goods, food items, and transport fare. The findings show that the restriction has affected the economy of communities on the side of the Nigerian border. Many of these communities sourced their income from formal and informal trade and other commercial activities carried out by the importers and exporters at the borders. Furthermore, social interaction has also been affected by border closure because people are restricted from crossing the boundary to visit their relatives on the other side of the divide, particularly the Niger Republic which is a landlocked country, which can only be entered by air or land border. Nigeria's major concern with the Niger Republic is, proliferations of splinter terrorist groups in Libya, Algeria, Mali, and Mauritania as well as Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb. Many of these terrorist groups have a link with the Boko Haram insurgents which has been a major security challenge in the country since 2009. The Islamist insurgents in North and West Africa found the desert areas of Niger Republic a safe and easy route to Northern Nigeria which bedeviled with insecurity to carry out their activities in conjunction with Boko Haram fighters.

In Nigeria, the border has affected import and export businesses in Nigeria which could affect food security and employment in the country. With regard to food security management, one of the most intense West African trade corridors, the cross-border corridor from Kano in Northern Nigeria to Maradi in Southern Niger passing through Katsina (Northern Nigeria), has been included in the cross-border integration process implemented by the CIP (The ECOWAS Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP) (Cross Border Diaries, 2008: 4). This portrays the impact of border between Niger Republic and Nigeria (Maradi border) which the closure means the trade would be stopped and the traders become jobless. This implies that the border closure by the Nigeria's

government has dual effects: for Nigeria and for the neighbouring countries. Most of the border communities and Nigerians who are into cross border commerce were into deep economic crises since the closure of the border in August 2019. Import and export were strictly through seaports and airports which only billionaire business people with huge capital can afford them. Apart from economic impact, the closure of the border has enabled the border security personnel to concentrate on movement of people via seaports and airport to check the movement of illegal weapons and terrorists in the region. Additionally, in the international relations sphere, Nigeria has demonstrated that it can implement its economic, political and security policy even it would affect other countries in Africa generally or West Africa.

However, the unilateral decision taken by Nigeria to shutdown its land border signify the weakness of the regional economic bloc ECOWAS. As the regional economic bloc, ECOWAS is aware of the adverse effects of the border closure by Nigeria on poor countries that surrounded it. Nigeria to its neighbours are like economic, political and security oxygen, without trading with and movement into Nigeria, the countries would be in economic comatose. In fact, the closure negates the basic tenets of ECOWAS or rationale for its formation which is to foster economic relations among the member states and accelerate development. Conversely, from the point of view of Hegemonic Stability Theory, Nigeria being the strongest country in West Africa, economically, politically and militarily took the decision to close the land border in order to ensure stability at home in the face of security challenges and diversification of the economy to the non-oil sector.

CONCLUSION

Mutual interdependence among countries for economic, security and political benefits has made a border to occupy a strategic place in global, continental and regional politics. This is because in the era of globalization and trade liberalization, bilateral and multilateral agreements are reached and

treaties signed for fewer restrictions and barriers has increased movement of people and flow of goods from one country to the other. The decision of the Nigerian government to close its land borders has portrayed how border policy in one country shapes the politics, economy, and security of many countries in a sub-region. The leaders of the Niger Republic, Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, Benin Republic, and Chad explores diplomatic and political measures to persuade Nigeria to reopen the borders for economic and political reasons. This is because Nigeria is their largest market for export and import of goods. Similarly, Nigeria is the closest destination for unskilled labour from neighbouring countries. Therefore, the border closure in Nigeria affects the remittance migrants in Nigeria send to their home countries and balance of trade hence affects the national budgets of Nigeria's neighbours.

In this regard, this article shows that border is a veritable tool which Nigeria explored to asserts its political and economic influence and superiority in West Africa on one hand and forced the neighbouring countries of Niger Republic, Togo, Benin Republic, and Cameroon. It has compelled the affected neighbours to tighten security measures at their frontiers with Nigeria which it is alleged that terrorists' groups and other criminals are using such routes to import weapons, illicit drugs, and banned goods into Nigeria. Nigerian government believed that the border closure has tremendously boosted farming in the country and it is a step towards reviving closed industries in the country. However, what has not been proven is, whether the border closure has reduced the influx of illegal weapons and terrorists into Nigeria, especially in the Northwest and Northeast where the country is fighting with cattle rustlers, armed bandits, and Boko Haram insurgents. Nonetheless, the closure of land borders in Nigeria has depicted the strategic importance of border in geopolitics and how it is used to secure a country and achieve political-economic interests. This has far reaching implications on the neighbouring countries that rely on the strong economy country for trade, security and political support.

The border closure in Nigeria has depicted that border is beyond a mere geographical demarcation that separates coun-

tries drawn by the colonialists in Africa but it also serves as an economic, security and political tool that countries use to press home their demands from the neighbours or to pursue foreign and domestic policies whenever the need arises most often by an influential country. In this regard, glocal event or policy in Nigeria which necessitates the political leaders to take stringent measures to protect Nigeria's economic, security and political interests has been transformed to one of the topical issue in the continental (Africa) and regional (West Africa) political, economic and security discourse. This is also a political, economic and security change in the customary border dispute, conflict and violence in Africa. Without recourse to violence, Nigeria has forced some of its neighbours to roundtable discussion to take measures at their borders with Nigeria to safeguard the internal interest of Nigeria.

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