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THE MULTINATIONAL JOINT TASK FORCE AND NIGERIAN COUNTER-TERRORISM OPERATIONS IN THE LAKE CHAD REGION

ABSTRACT

The dynamics of terrorism and its transnational implications in the Lake Chad region necessitated a regional security engagement between Nigeria and its immediate neighbors. This led to the formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The operation of this regional military force has been attracting attention due to cases of terrorist attacks in the region. Relying on secondary sources of data and using desk review method, this study examines the impact of counter-terrorism operations of the MNJTF in the Lake Chad region and assesses the challenges the force faces during counter-terrorism operations in Nigeria. The study found that the MNJTF counter-terrorism operation has been largely focused on coordinating national contingents, which operate following different rules and report to respective member states. As a result, counter-terrorism operations in the Lake Chad region remain uncoordinated. Considering the split of the main terrorist forces into different factions, as well as the fact that inter-agency coordination and cooperation between the Nigerian military and

other security forces has been poor, the study established that terrorist groups usually seek refuge along the Cameroon and Chad borders, creating an environment for resilience along the Nigerian borders with its neighbors in the Lake Chad region. The study concluded that terrorist groups adapt to the nature of MNJTF counter-terrorism operations, while terrorists' knowledge of the area and ties to the local population make it necessary for MNJTF to also recruit help from the local communities in order to curb terrorism in the Lake Chad region.

Key words

MNJTF, Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, Lake Chad Region, Regional Military Force

Introduction

There are many factors conducive to terrorism in the Lake Chad region: socio-economic conditions, marginalization, limited presence of the state, environmental pressure caused by the receding of the lake waters, desertification of the vegetation in the area, and a history of Islamic conservatism (Antimbom, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2017; Mahmood & Ani, 2018). Another pressing issue that has contributed to the increase of terrorism in the region is border crime. Marked with dead trees, oil drums and tire rims, the national borders in this area are porous, disorganized, poorly managed and unsecured (Bassey & Osita, 2010; Isyaku, 2017; Mobolaji & Alabi, 2017).

The history of human settlement around the lake helps to explain the emergence of terrorism and organized crime in the region. The lake islands are places where populations insubordinate to political authorities live permanently or take refuge, including groups such as the Kouri and the Buduma (Yédina), who account for the majority of residents (Bouquet, 1991; Magrin, Lemoalle & Pourtier, 2015). The Lake Chad region is characterized by population mixing as it accommodates economic migrants from Chad, Niger and the Nigerian states of Borno and Yobe. Sometimes these populations forcibly take control of the local economy through armed insurrections (International Crisis Group, 2017). These factors have been compounded by the cases of community raids and organized attacks by Boko Haram (Galeazzi et al., 2017; International Crisis Group, 2016b).

The transnational nature of terrorism in the region motivated the states of the Lake Chad Basin to establish in the 1990s a joint security force, known as the Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF). This inter-state security force conducted military operations in the Lake Chad region to check banditry and promote free movement of persons and goods across the common border

(Musa, 2013). The rise and aftermath of the 2009 Boko Haram terrorist attacks and the need to respond to the insurgency led to the reactivation and renaming of MNJSF as Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2012 (Galeazzi et al., 2017; Zamfir, 2017). This move was caused by the realization that terrorist activities did not necessarily originate on Nigerian soil, as it was initially perceived by the neighboring states (Akinrinde, 2020). The MNJTF was reorganized on a counter-terrorism mandate, which included the need to focus more on preventing Boko Haram from being able to freely launch attacks along the borders of the member states (Albert, 2017; Kindzeka, 2014). With the borders secured, member states have been expected to deal with terrorism in their respective territories.

The (in)effectiveness of the MNJTF in curbing terrorism in the Lake Chad region has been documented in the literature. Studies by Ebohon and Ifeadi (2012); Akinyemi (2013) and Isyaku (2017) show that border control is flawed, particularly along the Niger, Chad and Cameroon borders, which makes weapon smuggling and terrorist attacks relatively easy. The security force has also been criticized for taking a heavy-handed, military approach in their operations; the accusations include claims of extrajudicial killings, detentions and extortion of civilians. Meanwhile, Boko Haram has been exploiting these claims in order to recruit and solicit support from the natives (LeVan, 2013; Solomon, 2012). What Boko Haram is today is the result of endogenous and exogenous factors, largely related to the MNJTF's response to terrorism (Suberu, 2009). In essence, the intensity and changing patterns of counter-terrorist operations may have heightened the level of terrorist activity along the Nigerian border in the Lake Chad region. This study examines the impact of counter-terrorism operations of the MNJTF in the Lake Chad region and assesses challenges faced by MNJTF during counter-terrorism operations in Nigeria. The text is divided into five sections. After the introduction, the study conceptualizes terrorism and counter-terrorism operations, reviews the literature on terrorism in the Lake Chad region and examines the formation and operation of MNJTF. The subsequent sections present the study area, research approach adopted, findings and discussion, followed by conclusions.

1. Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Operation

The concept of terrorism has been often discussed in the literature, where it is presented in different aspects. Scholars tend to provide varying definitions of terrorism, suitable to the specific event under discussion. For the purpose of

this study, terrorism is considered to be an asymmetrical conflict designed to induce terror and fear through violent victimization of citizens and government formations. It is a calculated use of unlawful violence or threat in order to instill fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate the government or the society, in the pursuit of goals that generally are political, religious, or ideological (Olaniyan & Asuelime, 2014; Omotola, 2008). The purpose of the use of threats and violence in terrorism is to cause deaths among the population and compel the government to abstain from performing a particular act, or to cause a major disruption to political, social or constitutional order. According to the United Nations definition (1992), terrorism is a method of repeated violent action used by individuals or groups for criminal or political reasons, where the direct objects of the violence are not the main target. The civilian population or any segment thereof are a target in achieving the political or social objectives. Terrorism is a violence aimed largely at influencing a target audience to achieve essentially political goals and render the state ungovernable (Victoroff, 2005). This approach is largely shared by a group of movements with common elements of identity, which rebel against the existing political or societal order through the application of coercion (Kilcullen, 2007).

Terrorism is a protracted conflict with the state by a resentment group that employs irregular military forces (Underhill, 2014). Demands made by terrorist groups never take the form of diplomacy, peaceful protest or negotiation. Terrorist groups are noted for aggressive and fierce violence against the state, perpetrated in belief that their objectives will not be attained unless violent means are employed (Obamamoye, 2016). By implication, violence that may be appropriately termed terrorism must incorporate the use of unconventional warfare to challenge the legitimate authority of a sovereign state. The starting point of any movement that may be considered a terrorist group is the existence of a revolt that intensifies over time as a result of socioeconomic, religious, or political dissatisfaction (Osumah, 2013). The emergence of terrorism may be sudden or gradual and manifests with conspicuous disturbances against public order. Another aspect of terrorism is the intention to overthrow the state and desire for territorial control. Terrorism that gradually grows into insurgency shifts away from indirectly attacking noncombatants to invading and looting military bases to the declaration of political control over a geographical area (Obamamoye, 2016). An outbreak of terrorist attacks usually involves political violence that includes deployment of physical force against the state with the aim of ousting the government and carving out a section of jurisdictional administration for the terrorist forces (Oyetunbi & Akinrinde, 2021; Ünal, 2016; Underhill, 2014).

Counter-terrorism operations within the context of this study could be explained as military operations carried out by conventional military units against non-conventional armed groups. It has been referred to as Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), guerrilla warfare, hybrid warfare, stability operations, irregular warfare or counter insurgency involving military, paramilitary and civil personnel against armed groups (Osakwe & Audu, 2017). Fighting this type of war is complex because of the combination of tactics involved and frequent changes in the strategic and operational environment during actions against terrorist groups. Counter-terrorism operations are also described as asymmetric warfare. The nature of such operations involves a non-traditional approach aiming to circumvent or undermine terrorists' strength and exploiting their weakness through the use of technologies or innovative means (Osakwe & Audu, 2015). Operations of this kind often involve strategies and tactics whose goal is to make use of terrorist deficiencies.

The specific form of a counter-terrorism operation depends on the model applied by decision-makers; the policy adopted is always a compromise between the use of hard and soft power. Crelinsten (2009) describes hard power as the state's use of its monopoly in the fight against terrorism through the engagement of the military, the police and the judiciary. The use of soft power revolves around persuasive methods of addressing the roots of terrorism, such as improving socioeconomic development in the affected areas and initiatives aimed at deradicalization which e.g. encourage defection from a terrorist group. Such persuasive strategies are implemented through economic reforms, public education, communication, advocacy and diplomatic initiatives (Kielsgard, 2006). Thus, a counter-terrorism operation is a comprehensive approach which may assume myriad forms pursued by the political, legal, economic and military institutions (Sandler, 2015; Stepanova, 2003).

Demand for counter-terrorism operations involves a specific level of cooperation among the state security forces (including intelligence gathering and sharing) as well as advances in technology that are needed to produce new and unique means of dealing with terrorism. Intelligence gathering, collective security strategies and coordinated response by the security apparatus are the bedrock of a viable counter-terrorism strategy which could deter terrorist groups from continuing in the act of terror (Bolaji, 2010; Ogbonnaya, 2013; Omilusi, 2016). Counter-terrorism operations require timely and accurate response from the state armed forces to carry out assigned missions and forestall terrorist actions that threaten territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of the state. The ability to respond to the threats with appropriate skill and

expertise, combined with advancements in technology, reduces the occurrence and scale of terrorism (Nwagboso, 2012; Otto & Ukpere, 2012).

2. Terrorism in the Lake Chad Region

The areas where terrorists have been active in the Lake Chad region include local administrative units and communities in the northeast of Borno, the western region of Niger, the northern province of Cameroon and the southeastern part of Chad (see Table 1). These communities provide a suitable environment and serve as a base for terrorist groups to challenge state authority. The combination of shared issues such as limited presence of the state, ethnic and religious affiliation of the population and the fact that many areas remain outside governmental supervision lend credence to the susceptibility of some inhabitants to radical movements that employ terrorism in the region (Magrin & de Montclos, 2018; Marama, 2017). Terrorist groups have also taken advantage of the historical, geographical and socioeconomic conditions in the region. Terrorist groups draw on support among local communities, using the existing rivalries (Omitola, Akinrinde, Omodunbi, Adegboye & Adedire, 2021). The populations of this area know little about the nature of the countries they belong to and have a history of resistance to external imposition of political authority and tax collection (Antimbom, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2017; Seignobos, 2015).

Table 1. Specific Areas Affected with Terrorism in the Lake Chad Region

Country	Region	Security Risk Area
Nigeria	Northeast Borno	Baga Kawa, Malam-Fatori, Woulgo, Monguno, Gambaru, Damasak, Kummbaza, Madai, Gamboru-Ngala, Gwoza, Bama, Konduga, Magumeri, Dikwa, Damboa
Chad	Western Chad	Liwa, Mao, Bohoma Lac, Baga Solar, Ngouri, Kaiga-Kindjiria, Kaiga-Ngouboua, Bol, N'Djamena, Guitte, Litri, Tchoukoutalia, Nguelea, Kaoudiram, Ngouboua
Niger	Southeast Niger	Diffa, Komadougou, Boso
Cameroon	Northern Cameroon	Mora, Fotokol, Maltam, Maroua, Kolofata

Adapted and modified from International Group Crisis (2017); Mahmmod and Ani (2018); Magin and de Montclos (2018); Sahara Reporters (2019).

Before the emergence of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), which can be translated to a "group committed to propagating the prophet's teachings and jihad", successive armed opposition groups had chosen the Lake

Chad region as their base. For example, part of the National Liberation Front of Chad (NLFC) and the Movement for the Liberation of Chad (MLC) had already established contacts in the area with relative support from the Islamic Salafist movement in Borno and Yobe states (Debos, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2016). These former Chadian rebels became highway bandits before making their skills available to Boko Haram (International Crisis Group, 2017; Mahmood & Ani, 2018). The unrest in southern Libya and the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) have continued to drive the proliferation of military-grade weapons in the region. Lake Chad topography and the difficulty of navigating the routes there encourage arms smuggling by rebel forces from Libya, Darfur and Central African Republic who provide such sophisticated weapons to Boko Haram groups in the region (Galeazzi et al., 2017; Ibrahim & Bala, 2018; Zenn, 2014).

The ideological roots of Boko Haram can be traced to the conservative Salafist movement in northeast Nigeria that has been ongoing since the country gained independence. The spread of the movement to Niger, Chad and northern Cameroon created further links among the natives of these neighboring states who came to Nigeria for religious studies called the Tsangaya (Quranic) schooling system (Herbert & Husaini 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017). Tsangaya is an Islamic schooling system that prioritizes memorization of the Quran, with little or no attention paid to the requirements of the Nigerian education system. In the 1960s, Abubakar Gumi advocated for the development of Salafist strains of thought or what he considered as innovations beyond the word of the Quran. On the order hand, Ja'afar Mahmud Adam became popular by advocating for the movement taking a political role in the 2000s, an approach publicly disagreed with by his student Muhammad Yusuf who specifically opted for resistance to such matters as Western education and democratic participation, and expressed his desire to overthrow the social order through jihad (Mahmood & Ani, 2018). After the death of Yusuf, Abubakar Shekau took over the movement, later transforming it into an organized terrorist and insurgent group. This trend affected other parts of the Lake Chad region due to cross-border connections, historical factors and association with Islamic conservative movements (Galeazzi et al., 2017), and has continued after the split of the group into several groups that included the factions of Abu Musab Al-Barnawi, Ansaru, and Mamman Nur.

The stronghold of the Shekau group is the Sambisa Forest, close to the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. The group has launched coordinated attacks on civilians with the use of such methods as suicide bombings, guerrilla warfare, kidnappings and assassinations. Its connections to and relationships with

Al-Shabab in Somalia, Al-Qaeda in Maghreb and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) make the group an even more dangerous force in the Lake Chad region, particularly in the areas where the group strives to gain control, e.g. in northeast Borno (Adetula, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2014; Zamfir, 2017). The activities of the Al-Barnawi faction of Boko Haram have attracted greater attention in the far north of the Lake Chad region. This group imposed its influence in the area of the lake and on the Chadian shore. The faction attacks churches and Christians, and has been responsible for kidnappings of foreigners and offensive asymmetric attacks on military targets and security force convoys in an attempt to capture equipment and weapons (International Crisis Group, 2016a; Zenn, 2013). The group seems to maintain relations with the Ansaru faction of Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. This led to the renaming of the group in 2015 as the Islamic State of West Africa Province (IS-WAP) (Herbert & Husaini, 2018).

Abu Usamatul Ansar is the leader of the Ansaru faction of Boko Haram, based in Chad border territory. The group has relationships with Al-Qaeda, through which they have received new tactics and increased funding, but has frequently clashed with the Shekau faction (International Crisis Group, 2014; Zenn, 2013). Ansaru's emergence was partly due to their displeasure with Shekau's strategy of promoting violence against Muslims. The group claim that they are a humane alternative to Boko Haram as they attack only the Nigerian government and Christians in self-defense (Zenn, 2014). However, Ansaru's ideology also extends to opposing the West. The faction concentrates their attacks on foreign targets, with emphasis on international jihadist agenda in response to Western operations against Islam in Mali and Afghanistan. The Mamman Nur faction of the Boko Haram does not necessarily belong to any larger group, but has been able to collaborate with different factions such as the Ansaru, Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab for the purpose of offensive operations (Omitola, Adedire, Akinrinde, Omodunbi & Sackflame, 2021). This faction operates in the northwestern part of Nigeria, where their attacks focus on international targets, churches, security forces as well as kidnapping of foreigners for ransom (Zenn, 2016). It was responsible for the introduction of suicide bombings in Nigeria following the attacks on the police and United Nations headquarters in Abuja in June and August 2011 respectively (Zenn, 2014).

With persistent pressure from the MNJTF in the region, these groups have retreated; nonetheless, suicide bombings, kidnappings of civilians and attacks on military formations still continue. Over time, these groups declared their control over some territories in Nigeria and neighboring countries. In Borno

State, reportedly 11 local governments were overtaken by Boko Haram before 2015. Those groups collected taxes and controlled internally generated revenue, borders and markets in the Lake Chad region (Bappah, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2017; Onapajo 2017). The presence of these groups has not only threatened the security and peace in northeast Nigeria, but has also crippled the socioeconomic development of communities and villages in the border areas.

3. The Multinational Joint Task Force: Formation and Operation

The Multinational Joint Task force (MNJTF) is a military force consisting of personnel from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and the Republic of Benin (the latter joined as a non-member state under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC)). In 1994, the Commission established the Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF), which was solely a Nigerian affair (Galeazzi et al., 2017; Mahmood & Ani, 2018). The mandate of the MNJSF was to police the northeastern region against armed banditry which resulted from the Chadian civil war, and to promote free movement of persons and goods across the borders (Albert, 2017). In 1998, the force became multinational in nature, incorporating military units from Chad and Niger, while Cameroon joined in 2012. Its mandate was to deal with shared cross-border security problems and conduct military operations against arms dealers and terrorist groups in the region (Kindzeka, 2014; Musa, 2013). Though the force was established in 1994, it assumed an active role in the management of the Boko Haram crisis only in 2012, when the neighboring states became involved as well.

The reaction to Boko Haram's capture of territories in Borno State as well as the threat of their further expansion in the Lake Chad region made it necessary for the member states to revisit the mandate of the force in order to focus on the insurgency. Hence, in 2014 the MNJSF was reactivated and renamed the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). This was determined by the LCBC heads of state and governments at the extraordinary summit of the member states and the Republic of Benin in Niamey, Niger. The mandate of the MNJTF is to create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected with insurgency, full restoration of state authority, and the return of internally displaced people and refugees (African Union, 2015). Recognizing the complexity of the MNJTF mission, three components made up of the military, police and civilian personnel were established, and four sector commands were defined. Sector 1 command is located in Mora (northern Cameroon), sector 2 command in the town

of Baga-Sola (western Chad), sector 3 command in Baga (northeast Borno, Nigeria) and sector 4 command in the town of Diffa (southeastern Niger) (Assanvo, Abatan & Sawadogo, 2016).

Since the inception of the MNJTF, Nigeria has continued to take the leading role in security and military endeavors in the Lake Chad region. The reorganization of the force led to an increase in the operational capacity of the MNJTF to an estimated 10,000 troops, initially provided by Nigeria; its commanders came from the Nigerian army as well (Galeazzi et al., 2017; Zamfir, 2017). After the MNJTF military headquarters based in Baga, Nigeria were attacked by Boko Haram in 2015, the military base was subsequently moved to N'Djamena, Chad. While the Nigerian military has carried out several offensive operations to halt Boko Haram's territorial gains and retake the local governments under its control, member states have sought to contain Boko Haram expansion by adopting either offensive or defensive positions (Assanvo et al., 2016).

The MNJTF is financed through contribution pledges and support from member states and other international donors, while the disbursement of the fund is primarily administrative, which follows an audit of African Union procedures (Reuters, 2016). The financial support of the MNJTF is not directed at the procurement of military equipment but aims to meet logistical and material needs as well as cover part of human resources costs such as transportation, communications, intelligence and bonuses for the troops (Zamfir, 2017). The number of troops of the MNJTF is not fixed. For instance, on 29 January 2015, LCBC recommended a total staff number of 7,500 military personnel, police and civilians. This figure was later adjusted multiple times (see Table 2). The actual deployment of troops to MNJTF by member states also varies.

Table 2. Recommended Number of Staff for the MNJTF

Staff	Recommended by	Date
7,500	African Union	January 2015
8,700	Meeting of Experts	February 2015
10,000	African Union	March 2015
11,150	Announcement by LCBC Countries and Benin	August 2015
8,500	Announcement by Nigerian President Buhari	May 2016

Adapted and modified from Galeazzi et al. (2017); Assanvo et al. (2016)

Throughout the year 2015, terrorist groups staged repeated raids in communities in the Lake Chad region. Suicide attacks were carried out in N'Djamena, killing several soldiers and civilians, while many people were abducted in Litri and Kaoudjiram (International Crisis Group, 2017). After Boko Haram's attack on Bosso Niger in 2016, a military operation *Gama Aiki* (Finish the Job) was launched by the MNJTF. It affected the flow of supplies to the insurgents; offensives were mounted along the bank of the river, which led to the release of some civilians remaining in the hands of Boko Haram (International Crisis Group, 2016b). Operation *Rawan Kada* (Crocodile Dance) launched in 2017 resulted in the arrest of Boko Haram members in the town of Liwa and curbed arms smuggling in Daboua, Chad (Mahmood & Ani, 2018). As a follow up, the MNJTF announced the operation *Anmi Fakat* (Peace at All Costs), which led to killing of terrorists and suicide bombers as well as destruction of gun trucks belonging to terrorist groups in Gashigar, Arege and Metele communities (African Union, 2017; Oshoko, 2018). However, despite these counter-terrorism operations, terrorists' presence in Borno State continued, with frequent incursions across the Chad and Niger borders, which implies limited achievements and the need for sustained military operation in the region.

The predominant focus of the MNJTF operations in the Lake Chad region suggests that the force had been dealing with the Abu Musab al-Barnawi faction of the Boko Haram. Incidents of terrorism perpetrated by the group have persisted, and it retained its stronghold in Borno and other parts of the Lake Chad region (Carsten & Lanre, 2017). While the MNJTF operations are ongoing, counter-terrorism operations by the Nigerian military reflect greater involvement of this country. Military operations conducted in Nigeria constitute the formation of the Joint Task Force (JTF) comprising personnel drawn from the Nigerian Armed Forces, Nigerian Police Force, Department of State Security, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Defence Intelligence Agency and civilian vigilante groups. Major operations carried out by the JTF include Restore Order I, II and III, Thunder 1, II and III, Deep Punch 1 and II, *Lafiya Dole* (Peace by Force) and *Ruwan Wuta* I, II and III (Rain of Fire). These are offensive operations particularly against the Abubakar Shekau's faction of Boko Haram, occupying the Sambisa Forest in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria (Mahmood & Ani, 2018). Although the JTF may have achieved relative success in recapturing the territory from Boko Haram, the fact that their offensive operations have a limited scope, particularly in rural areas, translates to largely unfavorable conditions for gradual return of civilians and reintroduction of state's administrative authority to some local governments in Borno State.

This continues to increase the terrorist groups' capacity to maintain prominence, which has raised the concern that the JTF only focuses on offensive operations in towns, neglecting border communities and villages in Lake Chad area (Carsten & Lanre, 2017).

5. Study Area and Research Method

The Lake Chad Basin (LCB) covers 2,434,000 km², shared by the neighboring states of Chad, Niger, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Algeria, Sudan, Cameroon and Libya (Galeazzi et al., 2017). The Lake Chad region considered in this study covers Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. In 1964 these countries established the Lake Chad Basin Commission (CLBC) to promote the shared, sustainable management and use of Lake Chad and other resources in the area. Recently, particularly in the last decade, the region has experienced insecurity due to the heightened violence perpetrated by various terrorist groups. Therefore, the rationale for the CLBC states is based on common experiences of insurgency, which led to the formation of MNJTF. The Republic of Benin joined the force as a non-member state. The CLBC states' decision to include Benin as a non-member state is predicated on the proximity of the latter and the need to expand counter-insurgency operations to the contiguous states.

The study relies on secondary data sources and uses desk review method, which includes analysis of reports from official documents, civil society organizations and newspapers. The data were purposively selected to suit the requirements of the study, with a view to expanding the relevant findings and discussion on the subject matter.

6.1 The Impact of MNJTF Counter-Terrorism Operation in the Lake Chad Region

The MNJTF troops are deployed within national boundaries of the member states and operate within those boundaries as a matter of priority. Under specific circumstances the troops may operate within a limited perimeter on the territory of the neighboring states (Albert, 2017). However, this form of restricted military cooperation has been conducive to continued resilience and adaptability of terrorist groups as well as their ability to sustain insurgency, which could weaken the MNJTF counter-terrorism operations. By relying on the natives in the Lake Chad region, Boko Haram adjusts to the nature of MNJTF response, alternating asymmetric combat, suicide attacks and larger scale assaults, since

the regional force is deployed within the countries' own national boundaries and there is no permanent deployment of troops. The MNJTF counter-terrorism operations largely focus on coordinating national contingents, which operate following different rules and report to respective military forces of the member states (Zamfir, 2017). Cooperation has generally been restricted to this sphere and mainly amounts to joint military operations around border locations. Boko Haram's continued expansion apparently demonstrates the interconnectedness of insurgent groups across the borders in the Lake Chad region and the difficulties of containing dynamics that affect one area.

The financial costs of running MNJTF are to be borne by the member states of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) involved in counter-terrorism operations. Nigeria has channeled more financial resources to the MNJTF than any of the other member states, who claim to be financially incapacitated; however, they provide troops and logistics support such as transport, personnel and equipment (Galeazzi et al., 2017). The highest donation received by the MNJTF since its formation results from its official approval by the African Union (AU), which attracted 50 million euro from the European Union (EU) through the African Peace Facility in 2016 (Assanvo et al., 2016). This raises questions as to the MNJTF's capability to maintain such involvement in the long run, considering that any slowing or halting of operations caused by lack of financial resources can jeopardize the MNJTF's counter-terrorism agenda.

Terrorism in the Lake Chad region creates complex emergencies, which are the focus of not only military operations but also humanitarian and socio-economic interventions. Much of the regional response focuses on military operations and little on non-military interventions. Economic and social development indicators in the region are considerably poor. Dilapidated and inadequate infrastructure, limited governance and historical precedents are some of the symbiotic challenges that have facilitated Boko Haram's cooperation with the communities in the region (Mahmood & Ani, 2018). With the introduction of the state of emergency by member states, MNJTF counter-terrorism operation led to restrictions in trade, which had a negative impact on the socio-economic condition of the population, which depends on cross border trade for survival. Restricting such aspects as movement, transport or trade while focusing solely on military operations can limit socioeconomic development and create tensions in the region (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

6.2 MNJTF Counter-Terrorism Operations and Nigeria's Security Challenges

Part of the military operations of the JTF includes the establishment and use of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in many villages and communities in northeast Nigeria. With their knowledge of the terrain, the CJTF members provide intelligence to the military and fight the insurgents with weapons such as daggers, cutlasses, bows and arrows. The CJTF comprises community vigilantes, which are usually involved in searches at the entrances to markets and mosques, and inform the authorities about the presence of suspected individuals. This community-based approach to security and safety vigilance may help reduce terrorism, yet is not without long term risks. For example, the CJTF members set up barriers at the entrances to villages and markets to impose levies when their stipends are delayed by the government, and are sometimes suspected of facilitating cattle theft. Members of the CJTF have also been accused of abuses including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, revenge attacks, intimidation, and the recruitment and use of children (Akinrinde, 2020). Therefore, using CJTF can increase communal tensions and contribute to the emergence of local militias and criminal activities in the region.

Nigerian JTF has demonstrated poor intelligence cooperation during counter-terrorism operations. For example, after the seizure of Baga Kawa (a Nigerian border settlement) by Boko Haram in 2015, intervention of the Chadian troops combined with securing additional international donors from France and the US allowed an increased offensive against the Boko Haram sect. However, the inability of the Nigerian JTF to provide civil authority in the liberated areas, as well as the lack of intelligence cooperation, strengthened the terrorist offensive in Borno State. When the military recapture a community, by law the police and other security forces are to occupy this territory and provide civil order. However, the police are not always present or are entirely left out of the planning, so by the time the army advances to another community, Boko Haram has already overrun and reclaimed the initially liberated area (Bappah, 2016). In essence, the inter-agency cooperation is poor and there are rivalries within the Nigerian JTF, which disrupts information sharing and reduces the capacity of the JTF to sustain counter-terrorism operations in northeast Borno.

Prior to the creation of the MNJTF, Nigeria's neighboring states in the Lake Chad region – Chad, Niger and Cameroon – were not ready to join in the fight against terrorism in the Lake Chad region because France was not committed to provide support for Nigeria (Albert, 2017; Obamamoye, 2016). As a former

colonial state, the influence of France remains so significant that it dictates what information reaches Nigeria and its immediate neighbors in West Africa (Bappah, 2016). These states seemed to be unconcerned even considering the fact that the insurgents were using their territories to commit terrorist attacks in Nigeria. The relationships between Nigeria and her neighboring states such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon became cordial when the change of government in Nigeria brought in the Buhari administration; this was followed by several attacks by terrorist groups in Chad, Niger and Cameroon. For instance, the insurgents kidnapped the wife of the Vice Prime Minister of Cameroon and attacked different military formations in the country. On Chadian islands and lakeshore, the resilience of insurgency has been well visible with attacks on soft targets, especially on civilians, mostly women and children (United States Department of State Publication, 2016). In other words, MNJTF counter-terrorism operations have not necessarily helped Nigeria and other states in the lake chad region in combating terrorism as the regional force (MNJTF) has only served as a catalyst for security collaboration by member states to defend themselves against common security threats posed by the activities of Boko Haram and other forms of insurgencies.

Another strain in the relationship between Nigeria and its neighbors has re-emerged as a result of persistently uncoordinated military operations and claims of victory against Boko Haram made by member states. Over time, the military forces of Cameroon, Niger and Chad have accused the Nigerian army of crossing over their borders during counter-terrorism operations against the insurgents, who retreat to the neighboring states (International Crisis Group, 2017). Therefore, counter-terrorism operations by the Nigerian army may have compelled terrorist groups to seek refuge along the Cameroon and Chad borders, creating an environment for terrorism resilience and building transnational ties among different networks of terrorist groups in the region. Indeed, since Nigeria and its neighbors are contiguous, what affects one state naturally spills over to the others. The presence of terrorist camps has been noted in northern Cameroon and Chad: they have carried out attacks, smuggled arms and invaded Nigerian villages and communities, particularly on market days, in order to acquire food, materials and equipment they need (Sahara Reporters, 2019).

While the JTF has undertaken a series of offensive operations aimed at curbing terrorism, counter-terrorism operations of the force have not taken advantage of the Boko Haram split, nor did they incorporate the factional divide into operational planning, given the distinct tactics pursued by different JTF groups. Regardless, none of the factions appears to have been diminished significantly,

and there are concerns that the JTF military operations in the Sambisa Forest only target the Shekau faction and displace rather than degrade the militants (Zenn, 2014). Moreover, the emphasis on counter-terrorism operation against the Shekau faction apparently increases the adaptability of the Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Ansaru factions. For most part, these groups are consistent in their attacks against military targets and claim to administer territories more than the Boko Haram faction did (Zenn, 2016). The dynamics with which different factions operate is indicative of their continued capabilities, despite frequent pronouncements that Boko Haram has been defeated.

Conclusion

Insofar as the counter-terrorism operation run by the MNJTF has relatively curbed the ability of terrorist groups to carry out attacks, terrorism continues to shape the life in the Lake Chad region. The threat posed by terrorism in this area is largely connected to structural problems among the member states and the MNJTF. Counter-terrorism operations by the MNJTF should be instrumental in coordinating military actions and facilitating cooperation among the member states. It is necessary to extend operations beyond locations near countries' own borders, which can amount to free flow of personnel and joint operations that capture member states' communities in the Lake Chad basin. Member states need to strengthen the MNJTF's capacity to assume an institutional role so that the regional force can directly give situational reports on counter-terrorism operations in the Lake Chad region to the established structure of the LCBC rather than to respective member states. This can enhance effective coordination and functionality of the MNJTF.

In addition, Nigerian military operation against terrorism needs reorganization and should strengthen its presence outside towns and cities in northeast Nigeria. Villages and communities located along borders should also be included in offensive operations. Building on this counter-terrorism operation, local authorities should be actively involved in strategic decision-making. The presence of state administration should also be stronger in order to rebuild social services and ensure that civilian needs are taken into account. This will help to implement policies that adequately balance security operations and socio-economic interventions that meet local needs.

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