

**COUNTER TERRORISM: AN ASSESSMENT OF
MULTINATIONAL JOINT TASK FORCE (MNJTF) IN
COMBATING BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN THE LAKE
CHAD REGION**

Emmanuel Ogueri Ibekwe^{1*} & Uzoma D. Nosiri²

¹Department of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

²Department of General Studies, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria

*emmanuelibekwe@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The devastating impact of terrorism (Boko Haram) in the Lake Chad region had led to several counter terrorism measures among states within the region. One of the key measures is the setting up of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) for ease of cooperation and collaboration against this common enemy. This paper seemed to assess the operations of this Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) so far. Specifically, the paper aimed to evaluate the role of MNJTF in combating Boko Haram insurgency; identify the challenges of MNJTF towards combating the operation of Boko Haram insurgency and proffer solutions on how to effectively tackle the spread and operations of the insurgents. The regional security complex theory was adopted as framework for analysis. The documentary method as secondary source was adopted to gather data and content and logic reasoning were used for analysing the data. It was discovered that the MNJTF had helped to stifle the operations of Boko Haram insurgents within the region which is evident in the reported number of recaptured territories, downgrading of the terrorists' capability, freeing of abductees, facilitation of return of IDPs and refugees and facilitation of humanitarian assistance. However, it is faced with the challenge of further dismantling the grip of the insurgents in more locations in the region, as they keep changing their operational strategies to avoid detection by security operatives. Secondly, it was revealed that trust issue; challenge of finance, problem of effective collaboration and cooperation, human right challenge, poor border security, limited police capability and inadequate military equipment are some of the notable challenges to the effective operation of the MNJTF. The paper recommended deepened collaboration, building or development of police capability or component, rejig of current border security strategies in place within the region, enhanced funding, adequate and sustainable training, elicit stronger support from international organizations, intelligent gathering etc.

Keywords: Multinational Joint Task Force, Lake-Chad Region, Terrorism, Insurgency, Counter terrorism, Boko Haram

INTRODUCTION

The continuous rise of armed conflict and terrorist activities in particular and the spread of some terrorist group from one state or region to another have posed strong threat to global peace and security. This requires collaboration or cooperation of states towards formation of collective defence or military alliance arrangement to ensure effective counter-terrorism. The

fight against insecurity at regional level needs the cooperation of nation-states which requires effective sub-regional or regional security arrangements.

In this contemporary time, terrorism is the major threat to the stability, peace, and security of the international system which has brought long-lasting emotional, physical, and psychological trauma to the victims and targets (Mazer, Koldas & Aksit, 2020). In addition, Horne (cited in Alao, Olusegun & Alao, 2012) posits that terrorism and other form of transitional political violence are in many ways more threatening today than ever before.

The attacks on the World Trade Centre in the United States on September 11, 2001 proved that terrorism has no border and the continuous rise of terrorist activities (attacks) at the global level had led to several responses or strategies and organization of conferences like International Counter-Terrorism Conference (ICTC), the establishment of United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC) within the office of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), African Union (AU) plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) of 2011 in Nigeria, Terrorism Prevention Amendment Act (TPAA) of 2013 in Nigeria, Nigeria National Security Strategy (NNSS) of 2014, reactivation and deployment of Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2015 (Ajah, 2018).

The Boko Haram known as the Islamic State of West African or the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWA or ISWAP) is jihadist terrorist/insurgent terrorist organization mainly based in the Northeast of Nigeria and in other Lake Chad region. The formation of the group (Boko Haram) was in 2002 founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Borno State which was seen as an advocacy group for Islamic Puritanism Northern Nigeria to creation of Islamic State in West Africa (Onuoha & Oyewole, 2018). After the death of Yusuf, Boko Haram became a violent and terrorist group in 2009 which has graduated into several phases, namely: the period of clandestine/Islamic insurgency from 2009 to 2013. The second phase was period of full confrontation with Nigerian state marked by occupation and seizure of territories from 2013 to 2015. The last phase is marked by regional or transnational regional or transnational spread (regionalization or internationalization) from 2015 to present (Saliu & Saka, 2019).

The internationalization of Boko Haram terrorist operations has not only necessitated national response but included sub-regional or regional response which has led to the formation of a regional security arrangement in the Lake Chad region known as Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The Multination Joint Task Force is a collective defense arrangement or combined multinational security arrangement or formation which comprises countries like the Benin Republic and Countries of the Lake Chad region namely: Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The MNTJF is created mainly to combat Boko Haram insurgency and other insurgency groups in the Lake Chad region.

Originally, MNTJF was established in 1994 known as Multinational Joint Security Force as solely a Nigerian force to combat banditry activities and ensure cross border control of criminal activities in the Lake Chad Basin. The MNJTF was later expanded in 1998 to involve units from neighbouring Chad and Niger with the main aim to deal with common cross-border security issues in the Lake Chad region (Multinational Joint Task Force, 2020; Ajah, 2018; Ismail & Kefile, 2018). In 2012, the MNJTF was extended to include counter-terrorism

operation. Its current structured was determined by Lake Chad Basin Commission heads of States and Government in 2014 extraordinary summit of the LCBC member states and the same year received full endorsement for operation by the African Union (AU) peace and security council (PSC) while on January 29, 2015, the MNJTF was formally authorized for deployment in the region by the AU Peace and Security Council with strength of up to 7,500 military personnel which was later increased to 10,000 (Kerins & Monaha-Bell, 2018; Ismail & Kijle, 2018; Ajah, 2018). The MNJTF comprised of three components – military, police and civilian. “However, as of 2018, only the military component had been completely activated” (Kerins & Monaha-Bell, 2018, p. 45).

The Multinational Joint Task Force is mandated to create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups; facilitate the implementation of overall stabilization programmes in the Lake Chad Region and ensure the facilitation of humanitarian operations and provision of assistance to the affected people (Ewi, 2015; Assanvo et al, 2016; Ismail & Kifle, 2018; Onuoha, Tchie & Zabala, 2023). So within the mandate, the MNJTF is expected to perform certain functions or roles which include the conduction of military operations, facilitation of operational coordination among affected countries, encouragement and facilitation of joint and coordinated patrol, prevention of all forms of transfer of weapons and logistics to terrorist groups, ensuring the protection of civilians, undertake effective psychological operations to encourage defection from Boko Haram, searching and freeing all abductees, contributing to the improvement and institutionalization of civil-military coordination, ensuring the protection of MNJTF personnel, facilities and equipment etc (Peace and Security Council 484 Meeting...., 2015; Tar & Sunday, 2017; Ismail & Kifle, 2018; Onuoha et al, 2023).

The MNJTF is divided into four sectors namely: sector one – located in Mara (Cameroon), sector two – located in town of Baga-Sola (Chad), sector three – located at Monguno (Nigeria) and sector four – located in the town of Diffa (Niger).

The Boko Haram operations had continued to pose a strong challenge to national security in the Lake Chad region most especially in Northeastern Nigeria despite measures adopted. Records or evidence indicated that Boko Haram has killed about tens of thousands of citizens/people and displaced about 2.3 million from their homes and was at one time referred as the world’s deadliest terrorist group by the Global Terrorism Index (Boko Haram, 2020; Institute of Economics & Peace, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2022). In addition, the activities of Boko Haram have contributed/led to loss of government revenue, destruction of public infrastructures, closure of commercial business, discouragement and closure of FDI, frustration of school activities (leading to poor quality of education), reduction of social gathering, violation of fundamental human rights, food insecurity, promotion of psychological fear to the people and undermining of state sovereignty.

So, the spread of Boko Haram from Nigeria to other neighbouring countries necessitates the reactivation of MNJTF to combat it in the Lake Chad region. However, despite the effort of MNJTF, the Boko Haram is still carrying out good number of operations or attacks still today. Based on the above challenge or threat, this paper is set to critically assess the role of MNJTF towards combating the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region and identify the challenges of MNJTF in achieving effective counter terrorism operation in the Lake Chad

region. Also, this paper will proffer suitable measures on how the MNJTF can effectively combat the Boko Haram operations in the Lake Chad region.

Conceptual Clarification

Terrorism

The concept, terrorism has different meaning or interpretation and it has no universally accepted definition. The league of Nations (1937 as cited in Ibenwa, Okolie & Mbaegbu, 2018, p. 136) see terrorism as “criminal acts directed against a state and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of a particular persons or the general public.” According to Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism, terrorism is:

Any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occur in the advancement of an individual or collective criminal agenda and seeking to sow panic among people, causing fear by harming them or placing their lives; liberty or security in danger, or seeking to cause damage to the environment or to public or private installations or property or to occupying or seizing them, or seeking to jeopardize national resources (cited in Ezirim & Okoye, 2018, p.34)

Furthermore, Article 1 of European Convention on Suppression on Terrorism adopted by Council of Europe on 27 January 1977 sees terrorism as

a serious offensive involving an attack against the life, physical integrity or liberty of internationally protected persons, including diplomatic agents; an offence involving kidnapping, the taking of hostage or serious unlawful detention, an offence involving the use of a bomb, grenade rocket, automotive firearm of letter or parcel bomb if this use endangers persons, among others. (cited in Ibenwa et al, 2018, p. 136)

Piller (2001) argued that terrorism must involve five elements: (i) it is a premeditated act. It is an act that is planned. It does not happen by mistake or accident. It is based on coordinated plan or decisions. (ii) Terrorism is purposeful. It is based to achieve a particular objective (political, economic, religious, etc) (iii) Terrorism mainly based on direct target on non-combatant/ civilian population. (4) Terrorism is mainly carried out by sub-national groups or clandestine agents and (5) Terrorism involves the threat or use of violence. Another element of terrorism is that it is based on four generation warfare/unconventional warfare that is alien to the military. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as

Violent acts that: appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping and occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States

or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum” (cited in Mbaegbu, 2018).

In this paper, we see terrorism as a deliberate use of force, violence or threat of use of violent attack by certain group mainly against non-combatants or civilian population which causes injuries, loss of lives, properties and psychological fears with the aim to mount pressure on the government to respond to its political and ideological demands or objectives. In some instances, such threats tend to change the orientation of the citizen, and turn them against the state through radicalization. Terrorism uses the tactics of suicide bombing, hostage taking, destruction of infrastructure, attacks on institutions and religious institutions, assassination, armed assaults, kidnapping, hijackers, environmental degradation, poisoning food stuff, seizure of territories etc.

Counter-Terrorism

Counter-terrorism means the practice, military tactics, techniques, and strategy that government, military, law enforcement, business, and intelligence agencies use to combat or prevent terrorism. It also involves the strategies attempted to counter financing of terrorism (Counter-Terrorism, 2018). According to Cortright (2011 as cited in Ezirim & Okoye, 2018, p. 36)

Counter-terrorism requires not only improved security but better effort to address the underlying conditions that give rise to terrorism resolving conflicts, ending foreign occupations, overcoming oppression, eradicating poverty, supporting sustainable development, empowering the marginalized, defending human rights, promoting good governance – all are vital to the struggle against terrorism, yet addressing these challenges is made more difficult by repressive counterterrorism policies.

Counter-terrorism involves a broader or comprehensive military and civilian strategies or response towards combating, eradicating or eliminating terrorist activities in a state. Counter-terrorism/counter-insurgency involves political, security, economic and informational components that reinforce governmental legitimacy and effectiveness in combating the activities or influence of terrorists group over the population (Ilo & Chilaka, 2019). In this paper, we refer to counter-terrorism as the action or strategies adopted towards preventing or eradicating terrorism or controlling the escalation of terrorist attack within the affected areas.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopted the Regional Security Complex Theory as the framework for analysis

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

This theory was developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver and advanced in their 2003 work titled: *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Regional Security Complex Theory, 2021). Security complex theory was first sketched out by Buzan in his book “People, States and Fear” in 1983, followed by Väyrynen in 1988 and Wriggins in 1992 which they applied in several regional cases. While Wæver in 1989, Buzan et al in 1990, Buzan and Wæver in 1992 and Wæver et al in 1993 applied the theory to study the post-Cold War transformation in Europe, Asia and Middle-east (Ajah, 2018).

RSCT viewed that international security should be examined from a regional perspective, and it addresses the level of security interdependence located between individual states, region and the international system as a whole (Ajah, 2018). The theory viewed that security threat in one state will more likely affect its neighbours than other states that are outside the region. Therefore, states in the same region will experience the same security threat than states outside the region and which requires the cooperation or collaboration of the states in the same region to combat such threat. According to Ajah (2018, p. 56)

The essential logic of this theory is rooted in the fact that all the states in the region are enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence. Security interdependence is markedly more intense between the states inside such region than with states outside it. Regional security is about the relative intensity of inter-state security relations that lead to distinctive regional partnership and collaboration on security matters.

RSCT posits that an actor’s security concerns are primarily generated in their immediate neighbourhood and most security concerns do not travel well over distances, and threats within an actor’s immediate neighbourhood are therefore most likely felt the strongest (Regional Security Complex Theory, 2021). This theory has the following assumptions or tenets:

- i. Security concerns do not travel well over distances and threats are therefore most likely to occur in the region.
- ii. The security of each actor in a region interacts with the security of the other actors. There is often intense security interdependence within a region, but not between regions.
- iii. The security is both a national, regional and global phenomenon and the best way of approaching security problems is through cooperation and integration of various security architectures within the region.
- iv. Approaching security problems holistically must take into consideration both the traditional military and non-military strategies
- v. Regional framework is necessary for effective counter-terrorism (Ajah, 2018, pp. 56-57).

Relevance/Application of the Theory

This theory is relevant for the study because it will help us to explain that the extent security and counter-terrorism is realized in a region is determined by the regional security arrangement. To effectively counter terrorist activities requires the interaction and interdependency among states in the same region. Therefore, it will help us to explain if the capability of MNJTF to combat Boko Haram insurgency is based on the level of harmonization and interaction of states in the Lake Chad Regions.

The activities of Boko Haram have not only brought a security threat to Nigeria but its immediate neighbours most especially in the Lake Chad region. This security threat in the region necessitated the need for the revitalization of MNJTF as a regional security arrangement to effectively combat it. MNJTF came to solve the problem of common security threat in the Lake Chad region by countering terrorist activities like Boko Haram. Its success requires the cooperation and interdependency among the member state. Therefore, the success of MNJTF towards combating the operation of Boko Haram is determined by the response and interactions among the states in the Lake Chad region. Effective combating the terrorist activities do not directly need the security arrangement by states outside the affected regions rather it must require the actions and interactions of states or actors within a region. Based on this theory, effective combating of the Boko Haram insurgency must require the actions of states and cooperation of states within the Lake Chad regions (not from other regions) which justified the need for MNJTF to solve this common security concern.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the expository research design because it set to show the role of MNJTF towards countering terrorism and the challenges of MNJTF. Data were gathered through documentary method using secondary sources of data from journals, research projects/thesis, textbooks, newspapers/magazines etc. The analysis was done qualitatively with content analysis and logical reasoning. The paper is limited to the activities of MNJTF towards combating the Boko Haram terrorism from 2016 to 2022.

Role of MNJTF towards Combating the Boko Haram Terrorism in Lake Chad Region

The MNJTF has played crucial role in combating the Boko Haram terrorist activities in the Lake Chad region. The role of MNJTF in combating the Boko Haram terrorism in the region can be observed in area of capturing of territory, freeing of abductees, undermining of terrorist operations, surrendering of Boko Haram members, rehabilitation/humanitarian activities.

i. Capturing/Reclaiming of Territories

In area of recapturing of territory, the MNJTF has been able to reclaimed good number of territories that were previously occupied by the Boko Haram insurgent (International Crisis Group, ICG, 2020; Doukhan, 2020, Kerins & Monaha-Bell, 2018; Ajah, 2018; Abada et al, 2020). The study of International Crisis Group (2018) indicated that the “three operations, with added several thousand troops to larger national responses from Nigeria and Cameroon helped weaken Boko Haram and reducing its ability to hold territory.” (p. 8). Furthermore, the Institute

for Security Studies (ISS) noted that “the multinational force is succeeding in its operations and occupying territories from Boko Haram, despite budgetary constraints, political problems, technical and logistical difficulties. Through operations like, operation GAMA AIKI 1 and 2, or operation RUWAN KADA which involves air strikes and manoeuvres helped to clear Boko Haram’s strongholds in the Lake Chad regions (Kerins & Monaha-Bell, 2018). Also, the study conducted by Ajah (2018) revealed that some of the most important contributions of the MNJTF include securing the borders between Lake Chad Basin countries and ensuring that Boko Haram does not have access to the use of the borders for launching attacks.” (p. 90). It is noted that the operations of MNJTF have limited the Boko Haram terrorist activities to the Sambisa Forest and continued to dislodge the terrorist from their hideouts and flushed them out of a vast majority territories under their control (Ajah, 2018). The study of Ajah (2018) indicated that before the deployment of MNJTF, Boko Haram occupied up to 20 local governments in Borno State, which comprises of 35,868 square meters, 7 local governments in Adamawa State and 4 local governments in Yobe State. The study revealed that MNJTF has recaptured most of the territories in the North East Nigeria. In 2015, MNJTF recovered 6 local government areas, 10 local governments were recovered in 2016, while 2017 MNJTF recaptured 10 local governments as against 5 local government areas were recovered by the MNJTF. From 2015 to 2018, the estimated size of territories recovered include: 7,567.81Km² in 2015, 13,732.08Km² in 2016, 11,490.54Km² in 2017 while in 2018 4,723.23Km² were recovered. From 2015 to 2018, more than 29 local governments and 120 villages in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon have been recovered from the Boko Haram insurgency (Ajah, 2018). Furthermore, in March 2022, the Operation Lake Sanity launched by the MNJTF has contributed to clearing some Boko Haram strongholds which have not been penetrated by MNJTF before (Onuoha et al, 2023).

ii. Undermining or Downgrading of Boko Haram Terrorist attacks/capabilities:

The MNJTF had contributed in downgrading or undermining the capabilities of Boko Haram insurgency in carrying out successful attacks in the Lake Chad region. Therefore, MNJTF has helped to reduce the number of attacks by Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region (Ajah, 2018; ICG, 2020; Alufoge & Duruji, 2020; Ismail & Kifle, 2018). With three operations carried out by the MNJTF such as the operation Gama Aiki (finish the job) in 2016, Gama Aiki II in 2017 and Amni Faka (Peace at All Cost) in 2018 (which each lasted about three months) helped weaken the Boko Haram terrorists to carry out successful attacks in towns, villages and large military installations (ICG, 2020). According to the research conducted by Alufoge and Duruji (2020) “achievement of the Task Force is visible in the case that incidence of bombing has largely reduced, this is a result of tightening the flow of weapons, information and financial supply” (p.798). Furthermore, research indicated that MNJTF has been able to weaken the capabilities of Boko Haram’s ability to inflict sufferings on civilians (Alufoge & Duruji, 2020). Ismail and Kyle (2018) stated that

Even with such limitations, the MNJTF has registered some significant successes ... the capacity of Boko Haram to launch high-value audacious attacks has been neutralized, there has less internal and cross-border displacement and many displaced persons and communities have returned since September 2016; agriculture, trade and other social services are gradually

returning to normal; and the scourge of land mapping and hostage taking by Boko Haram has been reduced. In short, the frequency and scale of Boko Haram attacks has been reduced to isolated soft targets especially in outlying communities (pp. 25-26).

The above is supported by Ajah (2018) study that the routine support lines of across the borders of the insurgent have been cut off to the extent it lacks the necessary logistics to carry out large scale operations in the Lake Chad regions leading to reduction of coordinated multiple attacks. The emergence of MNJTF has recorded fewer Boko Haram attacks on not only in Nigeria but also in the neighbouring countries (Cameroon, Chad and Niger). In 2017 and the first quarter of 2018 witnessed more than 61% fewer attacks which brought 80% fewer deaths as compared with Boko Haram previous attacks in 2014 and 2015 (Ajah, 2018). The undermining/downgrading of the Boko Haram capabilities by MNJTF operations was made possible as a result of assistance from international organizations and western powers, sophistication of military equipment, adequate training of personnel, and military blockade of Boko Haram's supply lines and routes (Ajah, 2018, ICG, 2020). The three-phase joint operation named Operation Sharan Fage from 2 to 24 December 2021, led to killing of 22 Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorists, arrest of several suspects, and destruction of five terrorists gun trucks, five motorcycles and recovery of 8 AK47 rifles while in March 2022, the MNJTF embarked on operation named Operation Lake Sanity which led to the killing of top commanders of Boko Haram/ISWAP and destruction and captured of good number of weapons including 105 mm artillery piece, several canoes or boats, bicycles, motorcycles etc (Onuoha et al, 2023).

iii. Freeing of Abductees:

Another area MNJTF made good observable efforts is the area of freeing a number of abductees. MNJTF contributed to freeing a good number of people from the hostage of Boko Haram terrorist groups (ICG, 2020; Ajah, 2018; Doukhan, 2020; Dze-Ngwa, 2018). The study conducted by Kerins and Monaha-Bell (2018) indicated that from May 10 to 16, 2016, the MNJTF operation helped to secure the release of hundreds of civilian hostages and MNJTF freed about 4,690 civilian abductees. To Ajah (2018) the offensive of MNJTF operations has freed hundreds of thousands of hostages and people under siege. The report of Human Rights Watchdog noted that over 150,000 people have been freed starting from the emergence of MNJTF offensives against Boko Haram while other military reports argued that the troops of Operation Lafiya Dole had succeeded in rescuing or freed about 300,000 abductees from 2015 to 2017 (Ajah, 2018). In addition, the research conducted by Ajah (2018) revealed that in 2015, the MNJTF freed about 36,588 people, 68,496 in 2016, 61,532 in 2017, and in 2018 about 58,449 people were freed. Therefore, the above, it proved that from 2015 to 2018, the MNJTF helped to free about 225,065 people.

iv. Surrendering of Boko Haram Members:

The role of MNJTF has helped to force the surrender of Boko Haram members. The MNJTF offensive operations did not only led to recapturing of territories, down grading of Boko Haram capabilities and freeing of abductees but has been able to ensure the surrender of good number

of Boko Haram members. (Ajah, 2018; Kerins & Monaha-Bell, 2018; Dze-Ngwa, 2018). A report proved that from 11 to 14 February 2016, a combined military offensive known as operation Arrow Fire has forced some Boko Haram members to surrender to MNJTF (Kerins & Monaha-Bell, 2018). It also shows that in early November 2015, the offensive carried out by the MNJTF sector 2 forced about 250 Boko Haram members to surrender (Dze-Ngwa, 2018). The study of Ajah (2018) indicated that from 2016 to 2018, about 4,657 Boko Haram members have surrendered to the MNJTF. It proved that 693 members surrendered in 2016, 2717 in 2017 and 1247 in 2018. In 2021, 1711 terrorist surrendered to the MNJTF and 2225 surrendered in 2022 (Onuoha et al, 2023).

v. Facilitation of the Return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):

The activities of MNJTF have since 2016 enable many internally displaced persons to return safely to their communities and homes and start normal business (Ismail & Kifle, 2018; Ajah, 2018). “The return of the IDPs can be traced to the success recorded by the military which recently launched Operation Last Hold in the area” (Ajah, 2018, p. 140). Most of the IDPs in the North East had successfully returned in local government areas like Guzamala; Nganzai; Kala/Balge, Gubio, Gujba, Abadam; Kukuwa; Damboa Potiskum; etc (Ajah, 2018). The MNJTF has been able to ensure that the returnees were often able to rebuild and restart life by rebuilding of schools, hospitals, community centre and reestablishment of businesses that were shattered (Onuoha et al, 2023). The launch of Operation Amni Fakat in July 2018 brought the rescue of 4000 civilians. Furthermore, the three-phase joint operation along named Operation Sharan Fage, River Kamadougou in the Yobe axis was able to ensure safe return of IDPs and refugees to Mallam Fatori which succeeded in return of about 500 civilians (Onuoha et al, 2023).

vi. Facilitation of Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance: The MNJTF has not only contributed towards recapturing of territories and return of IDPs or refugees, but has also significantly played role in the facilitation of humanitarian assistance despite its limited capacity (Onuoha et al, 2023). To Onuoha et al (2023, p. 25) “MNJTF has been able to provide a platform for mobilizing the necessary force for the stabilization process to begin.” The MNJTF has enabled the NGOs or humanitarian agencies to move safely for effective delivery of services. Also, the MNJTF ensures that the civilians are protected and extend humanitarian help in order to ensure success in the fight against terrorism. For instance, the humanitarian support includes assisting and protecting the IDPOs camps, protection of civilians and NGOs to successfully and safely take or deliver humanitarian materials to the affected population.

Challenges of MNJTF for Combating Boko Haram Insurgency

Despite the success of MNJTF in combating the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad regions, it is still confronted with challenges that have undermined its capabilities. The achievements of MNJTF have been on low extent starting from 2019 which can be associated with the resurgence of Boko Haram attacks. Therefore, this paper discussed or identified the factors that currently posed a challenge to MNJTF operation in the Lake Chad region.

i. Funding: The problem of funding for adequate logistics and provision of equipment has posed a challenge to the effective operation of MNJTF in the Lake Chad region (ICG, 2020;

Nwachukwu et al, 2019; Alufoge & Duruji, 2020). Dze-Ngwa (2018) revealed that the contribution from the four-member countries were insufficient and could not meet up the estimated budget of US\$700 million. According to Albert (2017, p.13) “it is observed that while the arrangement for the approval of the draft concept of operations (CONOPS) for the MNJTF was ready for the approval of the Peace and Security Council of the AU, funding remained the core outstanding issue to be addressed by the mission.” In addition, Feltman (2016, as cited in Tar & Sunday, 2017) reported that “MNJTF’s main challenge remains a severe lack of funding. The 1 February, African Union donor conference aimed to mobilize \$750 million, of which only \$250 million was pledged, even less was disbursed.” (p. 9). The issue of poor funding has resulted to sourcing of finance by the Lake Chad region countries from external partners which also did not meet up the target fund of US\$700-750 million (Alufoge & Duruji, 2020). It was observed that the MNJTF barely recorded around \$42.4 million out of the estimated \$700 million take-off fund towards combating terrorist activities in the Lake Chad region (Nwachukwu et al, 2019). According to the International Crisis Group (2020)

When Lake Chad states revived the MNJTF in 2015, it confronted an immediate funding problem, with promised commitments bogged down in complicated bureaucracy that showed procurement... Financing has been a constant source of tension throughout the MNJTF’s five years. Shortfalls and delays have led participating states to pin blame for the MNJTF’s failure – and indeed those of efforts against other jihadists in West Africa – on what they see as the West broken promises of financial support.

The above issue of poor funding to MNJTF can be as a result of delay in release of funds, disagreement on how funds should be allocated and the economic realities (hardship) of the Lake Chad region countries. This had undermined effective counter terrorist operation and training of personnel and process of carrying out humanitarian services to the population (ICG, 2020). According to Onuoha et al (2023, p. 32) “the funding that the MNJTF gets through the AU is not enough and that the AU should be doing more to ensure these transfers are mobilized more consistently and sufficiently.” In addition, in 2021, the shift of funding from European Union’s African Peace Facility to the European Peace Fund has led to two direct implications: First, AU now has little say over how European funds are disbursed and spent which made AU to be in difficult situation in securing adequate fund. Secondly, this shift has helped EU to divert its defence funds to the war in Ukraine which makes MNJTF unable to determine the actual amount of fund get and this undermines its operational capability (Onuoha et al, 2023).

ii. Poor Intelligence Gathering: Poor intelligence gathering and information sharing as regards the movement of Boko Haram insurgency is another challenge to MNJTF in the Lake Chad region (ICG, 2020; Nwachukwu et al, 2019; Dze-Ngwa, 2018). That is why Nwachukwu et al (2019, p. 23) noted that “the frustration of uncoordinated reprisals is often predicated on insufficient or poor intelligence.” The report of International Crisis Group (ICG) (2020) states that despite the presence of a regional intelligence fusion unit (which was funded by UK, US and France) intelligence sharing between MNJTF components is poor and this led to force

commander request in early 2019 for AU support in persuading Lake Chad states to provide the MNJTF with intelligence gathering capacity which AU denied such request.

iii. Rivalry/Mistrust: The challenge of MNJTF in combating the spread of Boko Haram has been hampered by issue of rivalry and mistrust among Lake Chad states. It has been observed that the “trust among national forces on which the MNJTF ultimately relies, remain weak” (ICG, 2020, p.16). This is why the study of Alufoge and Duruji (2020, p. 799) states that “rivalry between the francophone countries and Nigeria have been reflected in the operations of MNJTF, for instance the Chad sector of the MNJTF deployed troops to Nigeria without a prior notice to the Nigerian division of the task force. In the case of Niger and Nigeria, Nigerien soldiers referred to Nigerian soldiers as cowards, while the later responded by calling the former serial looters” Albert (2017, p. 128) added that “the old suspicions between the countries are still there despite the existence of the MNJTF. Nigeria does not trust either Cameroon or Chad; the countries too do not trust Nigeria.” This issue of rivalry and mistrust can be as a result of conflict in national interest of the member states. That is why the study of Abada et al (2020) revealed that conflicts in national interest have significantly hampered the collaborative efforts of member countries and undermined MNJTF capability/capacity to counter terrorist attacks in the Lake Chad region.

iv. Poor Border Security: The problem of realizing effective border security in Nigeria, Lake Chad regions and West African region has been an advantage to Boko Haram terrorist group. Mainly through unofficial route, the Boko Haram has been able to smuggle weapons and ammunitions and other necessary things needed for successful operations (Nosiri & Anekwe, 2017; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016). The porous nature of our border, had been an advantage to the Boko Haram at the expense of MNJTF. Despite the fact that MNJTF has helped to block some of the line of communications and supplies of the Boko Haram insurgency, the terrorist group still find their ways to smuggle and traffick goods and move from one area or country to another with ease (Nwachukwu et al, 2019; Olu-Adeyemi & Shaibu, 2020). The study conducted by Olu-Adeyemi and Shaibu (2020) proved the porous nature of our border had made it very difficult for MNJTF to operate. This is because there is a link between the threat of Boko Haram insurgency and the porous nature of borders in the Lake Chad region. They equally revealed that the overlapping patterns in community settlements on the border land creates big problem for MNJTF towards countering insurgency. Also, the porous nature of the border has favoured illegal arms trafficking, serves as shelter and factory base of the Boko Haram insurgent and border land ecological factor has strengthened the membership and operation of the insurgent (Olu-Adeyemi & Shaibu, 2020).

v. Issue of Poor Coordination: As a result of the issue of mistrust and rivalry among the member countries of MNJTF, realizing effective coordination towards carrying out offensive attack against the Boko Haram is becoming difficult (Doukhan, 2020; Nwachukwu et al, 2019). Doukhan (2020) revealed that the MNJTF from inception suffers from structural limitations because the chain of command is weak. Kerins and Monaha-Bell (2018) noted that the successful attacks by Boko Haram against the population and MNJTF was due to poor planning and lack coordination between the regional states.

vi. Human Rights Challenges: Observing the fundamental human rights of the population is another challenge to MNJTF (ICG, 2020; Dze-Ngwa, 2018). The MNJTF has been accused of

not respecting the civilians and prisoners and the use of force without distinguishing between combatants and civilians. This has attracted a lot of criticism from many human right movements (Dze-Ngwa, 2018). The report of International Crisis Group (2020) indicated that the MNJTF's security forces abuses have angered communities and made the communities to support the insurgent. It noted that despite the existence of human rights compliance office, its effectiveness is limited which has made it unable to carry out its mandate of improving human rights compliance, including monitoring treatment of captured Boko Haram members (ICG, 2020). This is supported by the view of Alufoge and Duruji (2020, p. 799) that:

The Task Force in their attempts to curb insurgency has also inflicted pain on noncombatants, which has fed into the rhetoric of the Boko Haram. The extra judicial execution of Mohammed Yusuf in custody made him a martyr and his death was a powerful tool to bring sympathizers together. In the same vein, citizens who have experienced the brutality of the MNJTF first hand are likely to believe the message of the insurgent group, which limits the effectiveness of the Task Force.

vii. Problem of inadequate Equipment: Another serious challenge of the MNJTF operation is the problem of adequate equipment and operational material for effective and safety operations. The study of Onuoha et al (2023, p. 33) shows that a respondent viewed that “the force should have at least 70 per cent – ideally 90 per cent – of the operational equipment to be combat-ready; however, it has access to about 65 per cent of its requirement.” Evidence has shown that there are lack of equipment like counter-IED equipment, surveillance equipment, amphibious platform and equipment, communication devices etc (Onuoha et al, 2023). In terms of lack of appropriate counter-IED equipment, it observed that the movement and operation of personnel of MNJTF has been undermined as a result of IED planted on the main supply routes by Boko Haram which has led to 60% of the military casualties and 50% of civilian casualties in 2021. In terms of surveillance equipment, it noted that the inadequate surveillance has been preventing the MNJTF from effective detection of terrorists which aided the terrorists to launch surprise attack on the MNJTF and the affected community (Onuoha et al, 2023).

viii. Training Gap: Apart from the issue of availability and funding, another serious issue for the Taskforce, is the problem of effective utilization of available equipment which requires sustained and effective training of personnel. According to Onuoha et al (2023, p. 34) “MNJTF has received sophisticated equipment such as the ISR device and drones, but there is a significant gap between this relative availability and efficient utilization.” It has observed that the issue of training gap can be identified by two issues: Firstly, the experts that trains personnel of MNJTF are only hired for short-term basis and the trainees or personnel at both headquarters and sectoral level are often rotated which makes them to be posted out of the MNJTF (Onuoha et al, 2023). There is need to recruit experts for training personnel for long term basis and trainees or beneficiaries of the training should not be quickly posted out from the Task force, but to remain in the MNJTF in order to train others. This will ensure sustainability of training. In addition, it was revealed that other two areas MNJTF is lacking in training are training at the headquarter level and training on humanitarian rights (HR) and international humanitarian law (IHL) compliance (Onuoha et al, 2023).

ix. Limited Policing Capability/Lack of Police Component: The lack of police capability has significantly affected the effective operation of MNJTF. It is evident that the MNJTF is yet to develop and deploy a police component. After recapturing and securing the territories under the control of terrorists; the MNJTF lack the police capability to ensure a smooth and successful stabilization process. This enabled the terrorists to be able to come back to the territories they previously captured to carry out more dangerous attacks. Therefore, the inability to hold and protect areas once cleared by the MNJTF for stabilization activities/programmes to take place can also be explained as a result of the lack of police component (Onuoha et al, 2023). According to Onuoha et al (2023, p. 30)

Thus, due to the lack of an intermediary police force that can hold the cleared areas and allow the safe return of civil authorities, this type of instance has often forced the military to remain present in some areas once security has been restored to conduct policing tasks and ensure the safe entry and performance of stabilisation and humanitarian activities. However, the military does not have sufficient capacity to operate at this level as it causes the exhaustion of its already limited resources that could be used in further offensive operations elsewhere.

They further stated that without a mobile and highly adaptable armed police component, neither can the MNJTF continuously or effectively carry out offensive operations, nor can the actors involve in the stabilization and humanitarian process operate safely in the recaptured and cleared localities towards rebuilding the communities (Onuoha et al, 2023).

Conclusion

Regional security arrangement is relevant for combating the Boko Haram insurgency and its transnational spread. Therefore, adequate counter-terrorist activities across borders require the question on how to establish a functional regional security arrangement to combat it. This paper looked at the contribution of MNJTF towards combating the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Regions and the challenges that limits its effective operations in the region. We observed that the MNJTF has helped or contributed towards pressuring militants/ Boko Haram, stemming Boko Haram's expansion and leading it to fracture on some occasions. (ICG, 2020). The MNJTF has contributed in recapturing of some territories, downgrading the capability of the insurgent to conduct attacks, freed several abductees, ensured successful return of internally displaced persons (IDP) and facilitation of delivery of humanitarian assistance. However, it indicated that from 2019, the Boko Haram's attacks are beginning to increase which can be as a result of certain challenges like: poor funding, issue of equipment, issue of mistrust, lack of coordination, poor border security, poor intelligent and information sharing among member states, issue of training gaps and limited police capability. Therefore, adequate steps must be taken to strengthen MNJTF towards combating the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region. There is need for adequate and timely provision of funds, effective intelligence gathering and information sharing, effective coordination, trust among member states etc.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. There is urgent need for timely and adequate allocation or provision of funds to the MNJTF to carry out successful offensive against the Boko Haram insurgency. The member countries should endeavour to fulfil their pledge and facilitate support of international organizations and some western countries. In addition, there is need for the MNJTF explore other alternative source of funding in order to complement the existing source of power.
- ii. There is urgent need to develop or build effective police capacity or component in the MNJTF. This will enable the task force to possess the capability to hold recaptured territories over a long period. This will help the military to be able to successfully engage in offensive operation towards recovering other captured areas.
- iii. The MNJTF should adhere strictly to human rights compliance standard. Efforts should be made to adequately monitor the activities of security officials in order to prevent abuse of human rights and appropriate punishment should be given to any officials of MNJTF that violates human rights against the population.
- iv. Adequate steps are needed to ensure effective border security in the region. This will help to prevent the inflow or trafficking of humans, weapons and movement of the insurgent form one area to another. This can be done more successfully by use of modern technology and curtailing of corruption among security agencies in the border areas.
- v. Proper civil-military coordination and relations is necessary for strengthening the MNJTF and gain the support of the population. This will ensure adequate delivery of services or livelihood support of the affected areas which will need proper engagement with local populations in the conflict affected areas.
- vi. The member countries should show the commitment towards imbibing the spirit of trust among each other which will help to prevent issue of rivalry.
- vii. There is need for the Lake Chad states, the AU and the EU to reach a consensus on the international support framework. This will go a long way to prevent tensions among the member countries and external bodies. There is need to decide how funds should be allocated and who should manage it. Also there is need to agree on the terms of delivery of intelligence capacity, air support, procurement of equipment.
- viii. Effective mechanism or framework is needed to ensure adequate intelligence gathering and coordination among the members of MNJTF. This will help to identify operations of the terrorist operation, terrorists' sources of funding and access to funds.
- ix. Adequate and sustainable training and development of military personnel as a core priority is necessary to enhance their capacity, skills or knowledge on the utilization of modern equipment, intelligence gathering etc.

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