



RESEARCH ARTICLE

MULTINATIONAL JOINT TASK FORCE AND INSURGENCY IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN (2014-2025): AN APPRAISAL

DESMOND CHIKAMDINAKA PATRICK

Department of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri

ABSTRACT

The study reviews how the Multinational Joint Task Force operates in addressing insurgency challenges in the Lake Chad Basin between 2014 and 2025. It specifically sought to find out the extent to which the activities of Boko Haram insurgency impacted on socio-economic development in the LCB, also to examine the extent lack of interoperability has mired the operations of the MNJTF in the LCB. The regional security complex theory and the Hard Power Theory were adopted as the theoretical frameworks. The study adopted the descriptive historical design, and data were collected through secondary sources. Data were analysed using Content Analysis. It was discovered that the activities of Boko Haram in the LCB had devastating impacts on the socio-economic development in the region, which caused economic activities to shrink, and the displacements of people living the area. It has also been found that while the MNJTF has achieved notable successes in reducing Boko Haram's operational capacity and combat effectiveness in the region, the force has encountered various difficulties in recent times, including issues with interoperability. The study recommended among other things that there is an urgent need for the force to ensure effective border security by the MNJTF to enable the resurrection of socio-economic activities in the LCB.

Keywords: Boko-Haram, LCB, MNJTF, insurgency, terrorism

Corresponding Author

Desmond Chikamdinaka Patrick

Email Address: desmondzeal267@gmail.com

Telephone Number: +2348035204781

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The Lake Chad Basin (LCB) existed prior to the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). As the largest endorheic basin in Africa, the Chad Basin is centered around Lake Chad and extends across four countries: Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon, with significant portions of the first and third nations included within its boundaries (UNESCO, 2023). Humans have lived in the inner Chad Basin from at least eight thousand years ago, and were engaging in agriculture and livestock management around the lake by 1000 BC. Permanent villages were established to the south of the lake by 500 BC at the start of the Iron Age. The Chad Basin contained significant trade routes extending eastward and northward across the Sahara.

During the Berlin Conference in 1884-85 Africa was divided between the European colonial powers, defining boundaries that are largely intact with the present post-colonial states. On 5 August 1890 the British and French concluded an agreement to define the boundary between French West Africa and what would become Nigeria. A boundary was agreed along a line from Say on the river Niger to Barraua on Lake Chad, but leaving the Sokoto Caliphate in the British sphere. Parfait-Louis Monteil was assigned to lead an expedition to determine the actual location of this boundary. On 9 April 1892 he reached Kukawa on the shore of the lake. During the next twenty years a large part of the Chad Basin was incorporated by treaty or by force into French West Africa. On June 2, 1909, French forces occupied Abéché, the capital of Wadai. The rest of the basin was subsequently divided between the British in Nigeria, who took control of Kano in 1903, and the Germans in Kameroun. The countries of the basin regained their independence between 1956 and 1962, retaining the colonial administrative boundaries (Harlow, 2003) as cited in (Wikipedia, 2024).

The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) was established in 1964 by four countries: Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. These nations were brought together because they all have territories that border Lake Chad. About 20% of the basin, lying in these countries, is termed the Conventional Basin. The LCBC manages use of water and other natural resources in this area. Although the lake fluctuates considerably in size from one year to another, the general trend has been for water levels to decrease. There has been a proposal to supply water from the Congo Basin via a canal 2,400 kilometres (1,500 mi) long, but major political, technical, and economic challenges would have to be overcome to make this practical (LCBC, 2023).

As at 2011, more than 30 million people lived in the Chad Basin. The population is growing rapidly. Ethnic groups include Kanuri, Maba, Buduma, Hausa, Kanembu, Kotoko, Bagger, Haddad, Kuri, Fulani and Manga. The largest cities are Kano and Maiduguri in Nigeria, Maroua in Cameroon, N'Djamena in Chad and Diffa in Niger. The region has experienced significant impact from the Boko Haram insurgency, which started in 2009 and is primarily located in Borno State in Northeast Nigeria (LCBC, 2019). It is the outcomes of this collaboration and cooperation by Nigeria with her immediate francophone neighbours that resulted in the creation and establishment of the sub-regional security alliance, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to combat insurgency in the region. It has as its ultimate goal the creation of a security community. In other words, the MNJTF is to serve as the means for the ultimate attainment and realization of a sub-regional security community (Aideloje, 2020).



The MNJTF is a collective defence arrangement or a combined multinational security arrangement which comprises countries like the Benin Republic and Countries of the Lake Chad region namely: Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The Multinational Task Force was created primarily to address the Boko Haram insurgency and related insurgent activities in the Lake Chad region. The task force operates through four distinct sectors: sector one is based in Mara, Cameroon; sector two is located in Baga-Sola, Chad; sector three operates from Monguno, Nigeria; and sector four is positioned in Diffa, Niger.

The task force was initially established in 1994 by Nigeria to address cross-border armed banditry in the Lake Chad Basin area and to promote unrestricted passage along Nigeria's Northeastern border. In its early stages, the force consisted primarily of Nigerian Army personnel, though it worked collaboratively with military and security forces from other Lake Chad Basin Commission member nations.

Active operations began on July 30, 2015, with Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria serving as contributing nations. Each country deployed brigade-level forces stationed within their respective territories. The Republic of Benin also provided troop support to the force, though in a non-combat role. Though the force was to be composed of the military, police and civilian component, much of the operations of the MNJTF have focused largely on the military component (Brubacher, Damman, & Day, 2017) as cited in (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023).

Since its deployment, the force has worked to degrade Boko Haram, recover territories previously controlled by Boko Haram, and free civilians taken as hostages. While much of the progress in degrading the operational capabilities of Boko Haram, especially its capacity to seize and control territories has continued till date since its inception in 2016, Boko haram has modified its strategies, launching surprised attacks against vulnerable civilian, targeting churches, markets and other populated areas.

The Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin has had severe socio-economic consequences, including widespread displacement, economic disruption, poverty, and food insecurity, impacting trade, production, and livelihoods across the region. As the MNJTF is making efforts to curtail the threats against peace and serenity in the region, the operation has been characterized by challenges which have hindered the effective and efficient operations of the mission.

One of the major challenges faced by the MNJTF is the lack of interoperability within the MNJTF. The establishment of the MNJTF represents a significant accomplishment in bringing together four countries to address a common security challenge. However, the force encounters obstacles in managing and coordinating operations across the four Troops Contributing Countries at the operational level. Variations in Tactics, Techniques and Procedures among the TCCs create considerable challenges that can complicate operational planning and field operations. For example, Nigerian forces follow a military doctrine aligned with that of the United Kingdom, while Niger and Cameroon adhere to a French-influenced military doctrine. Chad presents a different situation, as its TTPs lack clear standardization and are typically determined by individual commanders.

Another encumbrance is the lack of adaptability of the MNJTF, which has made it very difficult for the force to adapt quickly to changes in terrorist strategy or tactics to deliver on its mandate. Terrorist



organizations demonstrate significant capacity to adapt their operational methods and strategies to their environment. This adaptability requires that multinational military forces develop corresponding flexibility and responsiveness to effectively counter emerging threats and address unforeseen situations. This is mostly so because, the African Union support for the mission has been inadequate, and this has resulted to the outbreaks of smaller units of criminal groups.

It is therefore on this privy that the study strives to answer the following research questions; how can the MNJTF muffle the problem of lack of adaptability as against the Boko Haram insurgency in the LCB? To what extent has the lack of interoperability mired the operations of the MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin, and other challenges the mission has encountered in recent time.

2.0. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualization

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad, is a self-proclaimed jihadist terrorism organization based in the North-eastern Nigeria and also active in Chad, Niger, northern Cameroon, and Mali.

Lake Chad Basin (LCB)

The Chad Basin is considered Africa's largest endorheic basin, with its center located near Lake Chad. It spans four modern nations, including most of Chad and a large part of Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon.

Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

The Multinational Joint Task Force is a collective defence and security arrangement that includes Benin and countries in the Lake Chad region, such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The MNJTF was established primarily to address Boko Haram insurgency and other insurgent groups operating in the Lake Chad region. It was first organised as a solely Nigerian force in 1994, during the administration of General Sani Abacha, to checkmate banditry activities and to facilitate free movement along its northern border. In 1998 it was expanded to include units from neighbouring Chad and Niger with the purpose of dealing with common cross-border security issues in the region. As Boko Haram insurgency intensified from 2010, the task of the MNJTF was expanded in April 2012 to encompass counter-terrorism operations. The MNJTF has the responsibility to establish safety and security in regions impacted by Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations. It also works to support the execution of stabilization initiatives across the Lake Chad Region and to enable humanitarian efforts and aid delivery to affected populations. (Assanvo et.al. 2016; Ismail & Kifle, 2018; Onuoha, et al., 2023).

Insurgency

This means an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict, like the Boko Haram insurgent group in the Lake Chad Basin. Adejo



(2018) as cited in (Uba, 2024), opined that insurgency is problematic. He added that insurgency is perhaps best understood by first considering what is insurgency? Insurgency is not conventional war or terrorism for example but it shares with them the use of force to achieve political end.

Terrorism

This means the calculated use of violence (or the threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature; this is accomplished through intimidation, coercion, or the instillation of fear, similar to the methods employed by the Boko Haram terrorist group operating in the Lake Chad Basin.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Regional Complex Theory as its major theoretical framework, and the Hard Power Theory as its supporting theory.

Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was originally introduced by Barry Buzan in 1983 and subsequently developed further by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 2003. This theory serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study.

RSCT assumes that security issues are best understood and analysed within regional contexts rather than a global perspective. It posits that the security of one state in a region is closely linked to the security of other states within the same region, creating a web of interconnected security relationships. The theory highlights the importance of geographic proximity as a factor influencing security interactions and the formation of regional security complexes (Wikipedia, 2024). RSCT also recognizes that security perceptions and identities are socially constructed, meaning that states' understanding of threats and security interests are shaped by their interactions and relationships within a region.

RSCT emphasizes the concept of security interdependence, arguing that states within a regional security complex are mutually dependent on each other for security, whether through cooperation or competition. The theory describes "regional security complexes" as groups of states where the primary security concerns of member states are closely interconnected, making it unrealistic to examine their security independently of one another.

Hard Power Theory

Joseph Nye, an American political theorist coined the term hard power in 1990. In international relations, hard power refers to the application of military and economic instruments to shape the actions or interests of other political entities. This type of political influence is frequently characterized as coercive in nature and tends to be most effective when employed by a politically stronger entity against one with comparatively less military or economic capacity. Hard power contrasts with soft power, which comes from diplomacy, culture and history (Wikipedia, 2024).



According to Nye (1990), hard power involves “the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will”. In this context, "carrots" refer to incentives such as lowering trade barriers, offering alliances, or providing military protection guarantees. Conversely, "sticks" denote threats, which may include coercive diplomatic measures, the possibility of military intervention, or the application of economic sanctions (Wikipedia, 2024).

The realist paradigm and its various sub-theories are fundamentally connected to the concept of hard power. The realist school of thought represents the primary framework through which hard power principles are examined and measured in international relations. According to this perspective, states with greater hard power capacity demonstrate a higher likelihood of achieving self-sufficiency and ensuring their survival within the international system. States that failed to establish adequate hard power capabilities were unable to persist. In essence, the requirement for state preservation and the protection of society, which depends on obtaining sufficient hard power capabilities, contributed to the formation of contemporary states. States employed hard power principles to address their security concerns (Kopalyan & Asatryan, 2023).

Justification of the Theories

Firstly, to effectively counter terrorist activities and insurgencies in a particular region, the interaction and interdependency among states in the same region should be paramount. The Regional Security Complex Theory can be applied to determine whether the MNJTF's ability to address the Boko Haram insurgency depends on how well states in the Lake Chad Region coordinate and work together. The core idea is that states within a regional security complex are so interconnected that a security threat to one state can quickly affect the security of others in the region; and so the creation of a joint security task force to combat the issue of insecurity could be the answer.

Secondly, the use of Hard Power theory is very significant to this study in the sense that, even though it is gradually being replaced by soft power and smart power, but when it has to do with terrorism and insurgency, hard power cannot be left behind. Military intervention efforts have aimed to eliminate individuals classified as terrorists, dismantle their organizational structures, and reduce their capacity to carry out terrorist activities. Adoption of military force or Hard Power is viewed as a deterrence against future terrorism and as a critical tool to prop up weak governments and to prevent terrorist groups from taking territory and staking out safe harbours in weak states. From the perspective of this school of thought, states are not to enter into any form of negotiation with terrorist or insurgent groups.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin

The region, which includes parts of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad in Central Africa, has experienced increasing security challenges and associated costs. Many communities throughout this area depend on Lake Chad and its resources for their economic survival and daily living. However, the region's security instability has had a significant economic impact, as insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and communal disputes have resulted in displacement, loss of life and property, and disruption of economic activity. The jihadist group has committed several violent crimes such as bombings, kidnappings, and killings to establish an Islamic state throughout the region. Millions of people have been displaced, and the economies of neighboring Niger, Chad, and Cameroon have



experienced impacts. The infringement of social ties is one of the biggest and most destructive effects of the Boko Haram insurgency in the LCB, from home separation and family member loss to displacement due to conflict in the region. Families are frequently fragmented as a result of the Boko Haram attacks, scattering of communities (CJID, 2023).

Challenges of the MNJTF in Combatting Insurgency in LCB

According to Onuoha, et al. (2023), a primary constraint affecting the force's effectiveness is the absence of police capability within the mission. While the force's CONOPS includes provisions for establishing a police component, the MNJTF has not yet developed and deployed one, despite its necessity. The MNJTF is a military security force that relies on civilian staff support to fulfill its mandate through a two-phase approach. The first phase involves reducing or neutralizing Boko Haram's capacity and clearing areas affected by the group's operations. Military forces deployed by the MNJTF carry out this work to establish a safe environment for populations affected by Boko Haram and related groups. The second phase focuses on stability through implementation of stabilization programs and delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. Civilian and humanitarian actors conduct this work with protection and secure access provided by MNJTF troops. While this has occurred multiple times and produced results for the joint force, the changing strategies of terrorist groups have revealed a significant gap between phase one and phase two of the mandate: the difficulty in maintaining and protecting cleared areas so that stabilization activities can proceed in a secure, coordinated, and sustainable manner.

Operation Lake Sanity 2

The MNJTF experienced notable developments during the year. Two years after Operation Lake Sanity in 2022, the MNJTF conducted Operation Lake Sanity II during April-July 2024, following its delay from 2023. The operation targeted terrorist capacity reduction in the fringes of the Lake Chad Islands while increasing local support to isolate them and encourage surrenders. The operation and related activities resulted in the neutralization of 344 terrorist group members and the capture of various weapons, including one Rocket Propelled Grenade bomb, two RPG tubes, and four Anti-Aircraft guns. Despite these achievements, the 4th LCB Governors Forum report noted that the need remains to clear remaining Boko Haram fighters from their bases on the Tumbuns, which are islands on the Lake Chad fringes from which they continue attacks on surrounding areas. The Tumbuns serve as their logistics hub, secure havens, and staging grounds. Their presence on these islands also enables fund generation through illegal fishing and farming. The forum emphasized that one necessary area is enhancing the MNJTF's amphibious and naval capabilities in and around Lake Chad.

In early January 2025, the Multinational Joint Task Force commemorated the successful completion of Operation Lake Sanity 2 with a medal ceremony recognizing the bravery and sacrifices of its troops. The ceremony took place at Headquarters MNJTF Farcha in N'Djamena, Chad, with Chad's Minister of Armed Forces, Veteran and War Victims, Issaka Maluoa Djamous, as the Special Guest of Honour. The Minister of Defence addressed the gathering and commended the exceptional action and dedication demonstrated by troops during the operation. He stated that the operation's success was a significant milestone and reflected the troops' steadfast resolve and considerable sacrifices (MNJTF, 2020).

**Lack of interoperability in the operations of the MNJTF in LCB**

Interoperability is a characteristic of a product or system to work with other products or systems. The term was initially defined in the context of information technology and systems engineering services to facilitate information exchange. However, a more comprehensive definition now encompasses social, political, and organizational factors that affect how systems interact and perform with one another.

Onuoha, et al. (2023) noted that, while the MNJTF represents a significant accomplishment in coordinating four countries against a common security threat, variations in Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) among the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) create substantial obstacles that can complicate operational planning and field operations. This challenge is compounded by language differences within the force. For instance, Chadian troops primarily speak Arabic with limited French or English proficiency, Nigerien forces speak mainly French, and Nigerian personnel are English speakers with minimal French language skills. In practical terms, this situation makes it challenging to maintain complete effective command and control during joint operations. Differences in TTPs and language barriers can reinforce existing divisions and stereotypes.

This situation contributes to insufficient cooperation between the MNJTF and the national forces of the TCCs. There are cases where national forces have conducted operations independently without involving the MNJTF, or where a TCC has withdrawn its troops before major joint MNJTF operations. This breakdown in communication and coordination provides terrorist organizations with greater mobility and reduces the MNJTF's capacity to monitor these movements, thereby limiting the force's ability to fulfill its objective of establishing a safe and secure environment.

For instance, Chad threatened to withdraw from the force in November 2024 after the deadly October attack in Ngouboua, a western village in Lake Chad, on the island of Barkaram, near the border with Nigeria. Chad initiated Operation Haskanite to pursue and eliminate terrorist groups, though it believed that other MNJTF member states should have offered greater assistance (Remadji & Tayo, 2025).

2.3. Empirical Review

Ibekwe and Nosiri (2023) in their study, "Counter Terrorism: An Assessing Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in Combatting Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Region"; took a close look at the contribution of MNJTF in combating the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Regions, along with the challenges that limit its effective operations in the region. They adopted the RSCT as well as their theoretical framework of analysis. They discovered that the MNJTF has been noted for assisting in the application of pressure against militants and Boko Haram, restricting the group's territorial expansion, and contributing to its fragmentation in certain instances. The force has played a role in recovering captured territories, reducing the insurgent's capacity to carry out attacks, securing the release of abducted individuals, supporting the return of internally displaced persons, and enabling the provision of humanitarian aid to affected populations.

Nwachukwu, et al. (2019) in their study, Multinational Joint Task Force and Insurgent Attacks in the Lake Chad Region: *Nigeria in Perspective*... observed that the persistent threat posed by insurgent



groups in the Lake Chad Basin makes the MNJTF ever more relevant. However, as the counter terror operations appears to be the panacea for security and return of millions of displaced persons who are living in extremely vulnerable conditions, they concluded that there have been persistent insurgent attacks on residents, education and developmental projects. This indicates that much more needs to be done to effectively secure and stabilise the affected areas, especially the North-east Nigeria.

Onuoha, et al. (2023) in their study; “A quest to win the hearts and minds: Assessing the effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force”. The Peace Operation Network Effectiveness Report noted that the Multinational Joint Task Force has achieved notable progress in regional stabilization. Following MNJTF operations, terrorist attacks in the region have declined, thousands of captives have been released, and humanitarian organizations have gained access to previously unreachable remote areas. While significant improvements have been recorded, the situation remains unstable. Terrorist groups have adapted their tactics by relocating to deeper areas within the Tumbuns, increasing their use of improvised explosive devices, integrating into local economic structures, and utilizing organized crime networks to sustain their operations. Additionally, the MNJTF continues to face longstanding obstacles, including limited intelligence capabilities, command and coordination challenges, equipment deficiencies, and inadequate funding.

The major gap this study tends to fill is the gap in timeframe, which has given the researcher much more recent insights in the activities of the MNJTF. The most recent activity of the Force is the launching of the Operation Lake Sanity 2 on April 23 2024, which the previous studies did not actually point out due to the fact that most of their studies came before the launching.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted the Descriptive Historical design. It was used because it aims to analyse and discuss the status of current phenomenon; describing what happened in the past and relating it to the future. According to Williams (2007), descriptive research is a research method that can identify the current state of a phenomenon.

3.2. Data Collection

This study is qualitative. The reason for which is to gain a holistic overview of the context under study, including its logic arrangement, explicit and implicit rule. Data collection here is on secondary basis. That is, from published books, existing literatures, articles, journals, newspaper report, documentaries, research works, and other print Medias. The nature of this research requires the use of secondary sources because it is the most appropriate method for this work in the sense that the information is more comprehensive and has a deeper insight into the phenomenon under study.

3.3. Data Analysis

In this study, data were analyzed using the Content Analysis, in which inferences were drawn from the collected data to nullify or validate the research questions. Content Analysis is a research method used to identify the presence of specific words, themes, or concepts in qualitative data such as text. Through content analysis, researchers are able to measure and examine the occurrence, meanings, and connections between these particular words, themes, or concepts.



4.0. RESULTS

Boko Haram has demonstrated much tenacity and resilience in efforts to achieve its aims, which has made neutralizing the sect difficult.

However, it was discovered that the activities of Boko Haram in the LCB had devastating impacts on the socio-economic development in the region that caused economic activities to shrink, and the displacements of people living the area. It was also observed that Boko Haram operations impacted negatively so much on the countries of the LCB before the deployment of the MNJTF in 2015 by the LCBC. While the MNJTF has achieved significant successes in reducing Boko Haram's operational capacity and combat effectiveness in the region, the force has encountered several challenges in recent times.

These challenges include; poor border security that allows the cross-border trafficking of illegal weapons, lack of adaptability, and lack of interoperability which has caused some member states to have a rethink whether or not they should still remain with the force; like Chad threatened to withdraw its troops in November, 2024 following its attack in October the same year in Barkaram.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The MNJTF has achieved several significant results in stabilizing the Lake Chad Region over recent and past years. Through their operations, terrorist attacks in the region have decreased, numerous captives have been freed, and humanitarian organizations have gained access to previously unreachable remote areas. While these improvements are substantial, the situation continues to be unstable. The MNJTF faces persistent challenges, including inadequate border security, insufficient interoperability among forces, and limited capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.

5.2. Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is an urgent need to ensure effective border security by the MNJTF to enable the resurrection of socioeconomic activities in the LCB. This will help to prevent the inflow or trafficking of illegal weapons, and movement of the insurgent from 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. Tackling cross-border trafficking networks requires close transnational intelligence cooperation.
2. There is also the need for the member states to imbibe the spirit of interoperability. This means that the Lake Chad countries should be able to train, exercise and operate effectively together in the execution of assigned missions and tasks. The capacity to work together in a coordinated, productive, and streamlined manner serves as the foundation for operational success.



3. Lastly, there is need for the MNJTF to address the challenge of inadaptability urgently as virtually everything around the globe is changing. The force needs to adapt to changes in tactics, technology and environment for better results in operation.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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