

An appraisal of Multinational Joint Task Force and Counterinsurgency in the Lake Chad Basin

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Abstract

On 29 January 2015, the African Union Peace and Security Council authorized the deployment of a Multinational Joint Task Force as a counterinsurgency force against the Boko Haram insurgents and allied terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin under the political leadership of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The mandate was to rid the region of Boko Haram insurgency and create a safe and secure environment in the Boko Haram-affected areas. This effort resulted in a protracted conflict between the MNJTF and Boko Haram that has lingered for over a decade with attendant fatalities and humanitarian consequences. Given this background, the study appraised the counterinsurgency operations of the MNJTF within their subsisting mandate. Dwelling largely on secondary sources of data and the use of content analysis, the study found that the MNJTF has succeeded in attaining the first phase of its mandate using a military offensive to secure the Boko Haram-affected areas, and has moved into the second phase which is the stabilization of the Boko Haram affected areas. It also found out that despite the progress so far towards realizing this mandate, certain fundamental operational constraints and challenges are hindering the mission's efforts. These include inadequate funding, lack of appropriate equipment and Operational Materials, interoperability challenges and lack of policing capability. The study therefore recommended improved funding, effective cooperation and collaboration among the TCCs and adequate provision of appropriate equipment and operational materials amongst others as the way forward for the Mission towards attaining its mandate in the region.

Keywords: *Multinational Joint Task Force, Counterinsurgency, Insurgency, Terrorism, Operation Mandate, Concept of Operations, Lake Chad Basin, Mission, and Security and Stability.*

Introduction

Since the September 11 2001 terrorist attack in the United States of America, issues relating to the protection of human security and territorial integrity of states have dominated global policies and academic discourses as terrorism has continued to spread to many countries of the world posing a serious threat to humanity. Incidentally, the spread of terrorism to developing economies such as Africa has triggered and recalibrated underlying socio-economic issues that have led to issues relating to insurgency with severe fatalities and humanitarian catastrophes. One of the regions in Africa that have been worst hit since the last decade is the Lake Chad Basin region where Boko Haram insurgency and allied terrorist groups have engaged in a deadly attack. The Lake Chad Basin borders Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon and is linked to the Sahel where issues of terrorism and insurgency have remained existential threats over two decades.

The spread of Boko Haram from northeast Nigeria and allied transnational terrorist groups from the Sahel into the Lake Chad Basin transformed the region into a haven for insurgents and its allied transnational terrorist organizations in the region. Apart from their criminal

activities in the border areas of the region, their associated acts of terrorism across the states of the region became a serious threat to the national security of these states as well as posing a common threat to the Lake Chad Basin Countries (LCBCs). In order to address this disturbing threat and restore peace and security in the region, the Lake Chad Basin countries under the aegis of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and the authority of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) in 2015 reactivated the moribund Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF) into a counterinsurgency force known as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad.

The MNJTF, since its deployment as a counterinsurgency force in the Lake Chad Basin has achieved some degree of success in line with their subsisting operational mandates. For instance, in 2021, it succeeded in neutralizing Boko Haram's dreaded leader, Sheik Abubakar Shekau; the leader of the allied terrorist group, the leader of Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP), Abu Musa al-Bernawi, and many other commanders of the groups. It also witnessed the surrender of about 20,000 members of Boko Haram (UNDP Conflict Analysis, 2023). These achievements culminated in the downgrading and degrading of Boko Haram terrorism in the region and have been confirmed by several studies. Moreover, the sudden drastic reduction in significant attacks in the Lake Chad Basin region is a testament to the success of the MNJTF operations in the region. Despite this achievement, the evolving security dynamics and the recent statistics on the records of fatalities and the attendant surge in humanitarian consequences across the Lake Chad Basin countries are raising a security concern that Boko Haram and its allied terrorist groups are still a potent threat in the region.

Against the background of the issues raised above, the paper appraises the MNJTF's counterinsurgency operations in the LCB to determine the impact of the Force against the insurgency in the region. The emphasis here will be on the recent developments in the region between 2021 and 2024. This paper will be guided by the following:

1. What are the characteristics of the MNJTF and what was the rationale behind its establishment in the LCB?
2. What is the mandate of the MNJTF in the LCB?
3. To what degree has the MNJTF achieved its mandate in the LCB?
4. What are the operational capabilities of the MNJTF and the constraints and challenges hampering its efforts towards achieving its mandate in the LCB?

Conceptual Clarification: Multinational Joint Task Force and Counterinsurgency

Multinational Joint Task Force

Generally, the concept of a Multinational Joint Task Force connotes the involvement of different countries' military forces towards the attainment of a common task within a given time. It is usually formed as an ad-hoc military operation for a specific purpose, and that specific purpose has a defined timeframe. However, it may be dissolved or extended when the purpose for which it was created has been achieved or is no longer required (US Joint Publication, 3-33, 2018). To Hennessy (2002) a Multinational Joint Task Force is a transnational army set up jointly by states to provide stability and humanitarian assistance in a conflict-ridden area. Lobban (2004) describes it as a military operation conducted by forces of two or more allied nations acting together for the accomplishment of a common strategy, which involves strategic, operational and sometimes tactical cooperation. Its objective is to

accomplish a task of a common threat within a given period of time (US Joint Publication, 3-33, 2018).

The purpose of a Multinational Joint Task Force as highlighted by the United States Department of Defence Joint Publication Manual 3-33 (2018) is to provide an alliance with flexible and efficient means to generate, at short notice, rapidly deployable combined troops with a dedicated command and control capability and to facilitate operations in concert with partners and other non-signatories to the alliance. The emphasis on the use of military force in a multinational JTF is to combat security issues. Such issues could be insurgency, terrorism, banditry, drugs and human trafficking, piracy, sea robbery or genocidal wars. It can also be in the form of an interventionist force for peace-making, peacekeeping or peace-building force that intervenes to create a humanitarian corridor for aid agencies and refugee or displaced persons protection. It can also be established to respond to military operations other-than-war (MOOTW) such as a counterinsurgency or counterterrorism force to fight insurgency and terrorism within a given space (state or region) (US Joint Publication, 3-33, 2018). A regional multinational counterinsurgency force creates a formidable countermeasure against any form of transnational threats that may constitute a common threat to member-states of the region and by extension the peace and stability of the region. The MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin is a multinational counterinsurgency force to contain the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents and allied terrorist organizations in the LCB and to restore peace and security in the region.

Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency connotes a countermeasure against insurgency activities or a situation of political grievance that escalates to violence (Pratt, 2010). It is closely related to counterterrorism and often erroneously used interchangeably with counterterrorism. However, it depicts a different meaning and understanding of counterterrorism. The United States Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 (2006) defines counterinsurgency as military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken and implemented by the government to defeat an insurgency. It is therefore a broader category of responses to political violence carried out by minority groups, both terroristic and otherwise, which involves the comprehensive use of all elements of a nation's power, including not only the full use of available military resources, but also psychological, political, economic, intelligence, and diplomatic operations, to defeat insurgency (United States Counterinsurgency Joint Publication 3-24, 2018). Its objectives as captured by Oyewole (2016) centre on maintaining adequate security presence, protecting lives and property in the conflict zone and promoting public order while decimating an enemy and its facilities, structures and forces. The MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin is a counterinsurgency force based on its concept of operations (CONOPS).

Theoretical Framework

Although the Multinational Joint Task Force and Counterinsurgency operation in the Lake Chad Basin can be studied with many theories such as the collective security theory, cooperative security theory, and the alliance formation theory, the study adopts the alliance formation theory as propounded by Stephen M. Walt as most suitable theory for the study. Stephen M. Walt's Alliance theory developed in 1987 as a major refinement of his classical approach (1979) provides a better explanation of the rationale behind the establishment of the MNJTF and counterinsurgency operation in the Lake Chad Basin. This is because Walt's

theory of alliance is a departure from the old alliance concept where the rationale for alliance is based on the balance-of-power approach. Stephen M. Walt's alliance theory sees alliance formation from the prism of collective defence and security whereby regional actors seek to ally themselves with other like-minded states against a perceived common threat or enemy within its regional space. It emphasizes a formal agreement that commits states to combine their military forces against any form of threat against the member-states of the alliance. This form of alliance according to Walt is anchored on the balance-of-threat against the balance-of-power approach, which is a core tenet of both classical and neorealist theory, and predicts that states attempt to prevent a potential threat to their national security (Waltz, 1987).

Waltz (1988) in an attempt to examine alliances and the factors that necessitated their formation presented some fundamental questions such as "When will states form alliances, and what determines their choice of allies? Do states tend to balance against strong or threatening powers by allying against them? Are they likely to bandwagon by allying with the most powerful or threatening states? if states tend to balance, aggressors will face numerous opponents and sustained efforts to expand are likely to fail". However, if bandwagonism is the dominant tendency for the formation of an alliance, threats and intimidation are more likely to work, and empires will both be easier to amass and more likely to fall apart (Walt 1988). In answering these questions, Waltz started by critiquing the balance of power approach of the alliance theory and emphasized the role of threat in alliance formation. He argued that the balance of power theory focuses on capabilities of power and ignores other factors that statesmen consider when making alliance choices such as common threats. Therefore, he dismisses the balance of power theory of alliance and extols the balance of threat approach because according to him, it is the threat and not power that is at the heart of security concerns.

Walt further argued that balance of power theory does not well describe the observed behaviour of alliance formation in the historical record, and cannot explain why balances often fail to form. His balance of threat theory gives a better description of alliance formation. Thus, detaching it from the old alliance concept that hangs on the balance of power theory. He characterized the threat level by (i) overall capabilities (ii) proximity (iii) offensive capability vs defensive capability (iv) and perceived intentions (Waltz, 1988:279). This implies that states with close proximity are more dangerous than those that are far away; states with large offensive capabilities defined as the capacity to threaten the sovereignty of other states pose a greater threat than states whose capabilities are more suitable for defence. Finally, states with aggressive intentions are more threatening than those who seek only to preserve the status quo. Therefore, if balancing behaviour is the norm, an increase in any of these factors; power, proximity, offensive capabilities, or aggressive intentions should encourage other states to ally against the most threatening power (Walt 1988:282). In his view, the concepts of balancing and bandwagonism are ideal types, but the actual state behaviour will only approximate either model (Walt, 1988:282).

Consequently, Walt (1988) identifies three types of state behaviour within the context of alliance, which are as follows:

- i. Balancing is alignment against the threatening power (rather than the most powerful one) to deter it;
- ii. Bandwagoning is alignment with a dominant power, either to appease it or in the hope of profiting from its victory. (Unequal exchange, often coerced. Dominant

- power may extract significant, asymmetrical concessions, High risk. It requires trust that the dominant power will be benevolent);
- iii. Détente is the voluntary development of peaceful relations to reduce tensions. (Equal exchange. Symmetrical concessions. Low risk. The dominant power's attempt to exploit the relationship will collapse the détente. The state remains aligned with balancing power against the threatening power).

We can infer from the foregoing analysis of the theory that it provides the most appropriate explanation of the subject matter under investigation. For instance, one fundamental argument of this theory is the fact that states form alliances not to balance power but to curtail and contain threats. This is manifested in the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin, which was established not to balance power against a stronger state but to contain the Boko Haram insurgency and the allied transnational terrorist groups in the region. The Boko Haram and allied transnational terrorist groups operating in the Lake Chad Basin constitute a major threat to all member-states of the Lake Chad Basin and the MNJTF. Therefore, the formation of the MNJTF serves as a deterrence to Boko Haram and transnational terrorist organizations in the Lake Chad Basin. Deterrence is an important aspect of the theory. Apart from the utilization of coercion the states also employ diplomatic means which should eventually lead to détente. Importantly, bandwagonism does not apply to the MNJTF as an alliance because the relationship that exists between the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Benin is not one of unequal exchange, and neither is any member of the alliance coerced into the alliance. The MNJTF as an alliance is a product of collective interest for collective security and as such every ally before allying knew the significance of the alliance to the security of the sub-region and their national security as nation-states.

Overview of the Multinational Joint Task Force and Counterinsurgency Operations in the Lake Chad Basin

The evolution of counterinsurgency operation by the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin could be traced to the revitalization of the moribund Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF) into a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2015 by countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, which comprise Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, and supported by the Republic of Benin, a neighbouring country. This came with a new concept of operations (CONOPS), as a regional counterinsurgency force (Assanvo et al.2016). In other words, the new CONOPS is what differentiated and defined the new MNJTF in Lake Chad from the former. The impact and implications of the activities of Boko Haram on the Lake Chad Basin region and the national security of the member-states of the LCBC prompted the initiatives that culminated in the formation of the MNJTF, a military alliance against threats of terrorism and insurgency in the region.

It is remarkable to note that in 1998 when the MNJTF was first put together by Nigeria, Chad and Niger, the mandate was not to fight terrorism but to combat cross-border banditry and other related crime, which was prevalent in the Lake Chad Basin at the time. However, it was mostly inactive until 2012, when it was reactivated to deal with the Boko Haram group.

The initiative was supported by the African Union as it was in agreement with its position that countries within a specific sub-region should take the initiative of operationalizing a mechanism agreed upon to address threats within their region. Subsequently, several steps were taken by the Lake Chad Basin countries to ensure the support and approval of every stakeholder in the establishment of the new concept of operations for the Mission. These include the Paris

Summit of 17 May 2014, which brought together the Heads of State of the LCBCs including Benin, and representatives of France, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, and the ministerial level meetings that took place in London and Washington on 12 June and 5 August 2014, respectively (AU, 2015). Significantly, the London meeting reaffirmed the commitment of member-states of the Lake Chad Basin made at the Paris Summit and welcomed the progress accomplished from subsequent meetings, particularly, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU) that took place in Yaoundé on 9 June 2014 (AU, 2015).

The outcome of the meetings culminated in the decision to enhance regional cooperation in the fight against the spread of Boko Haram, such as coordinated patrols and border surveillance, pooling intelligence together, adopting sanctions against Boko Haram, Ansaru, and their main leaders, including exchanging relevant information of the activities and operations of Boko Haram in the region (Zamfir, 2015). In October 2014, the Lake Chad Basin countries (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria), including Benin pledged troops to the MNJTF to improve their cooperation to combat Boko Haram, which resulted in a total of 10,000 troops (Nextier SPD Policy Weekly, 2020). The aim was to kick-start operations within national frontiers by November 2014. However, this did not happen despite the contribution of troops and the establishment of the MNJTF Headquarters in Baga because the African Union PSC did not formally authorize such deployment, until 29 January 2015 when the need to recalibrate the concept of regional counterinsurgency force on a multinational dimension to fight Boko Haram and the allied terrorist groups in the region arose.

The need for the authorization of the MNJTF came in 2015 when Boko Haram pledged allegiance to an international terrorist group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and attached the name Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) to itself, and the attendant deadly attacks on civilians and military formations in the region (Aljazeera, 2015). Particularly, the January 2015 Boko Haram dreaded attack on the headquarters of the MNJTF in Baga, which saw the headquarters overrun by Boko Haram militants with attendant fatalities and humanitarian catastrophe in the entire area that runs into thousands (News Express, 2015; BBC News, 2015). Amnesty International described it as the largest and most destructive of all Boko Haram assaults (Amnesty International, 2015). This attack culminated in the political process that led to the authorization of the MNJTF as a counterinsurgency force and the eventual relocation of the Headquarters to N'Djamena, Chad. It is important to note that at the time of the attack in Baga, only Nigerian soldiers were present at the Headquarters.

The authorization of the MNJTF's concept of operation as a counterinsurgency force in the Lake Chad Basin by the African Union Peace and Security Council marked the beginning of a regional counterinsurgency force in the Lake Chad Basin. The aim was to put in place a sub-regional security force to contain the spread of Boko Haram insurgency and the rising allied transnational terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin and to restore peace and security in the once stable region. By this authorization, the mandate and structure of the MNJTF were formalised as a regional counterinsurgency force in the Lake Chad Basin. The MNJTF commenced operations on 30th July 2015 with Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria as Troops Contributing Countries (TCCs), and a new Headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad. Each of the TCCs has with it a Sector of Brigade strength domiciled in its country. Meanwhile, the Republic of Benin also contributed troops of company size in the administrative area of the operation, but not in combat.

The Mandate and Objectives of the MNJTF in Lake Chad Basin

The authorization of the MNJTF by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 29 January 2015 provided the impetus for the deployment and operationalization of the MNJTF under the political leadership of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The MNJTF is mandated by the LCBC to conduct both Kinetic and non-kinetic operations within the following mandate:

- i. Create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, in order to significantly reduce violence against civilians and other abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, in full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP);
- ii. facilitate the implementation of the overall stabilization programmes by the LCBC Member States and Benin in the affected areas, including the full restoration of state authority and the return of IDPs and refugees; and
- iii. Facilitate, within the limit of its capabilities, humanitarian operations and the delivery of assistance to the affected population (African Union PSC Report 48th 2015; About the MNJTF, 2020).

Within the framework of the Mission's mandate, the operation is to be carried out in two phases. The first is the military action to eliminate the insurgents and the allied terrorist groups. This implies that the MNJTF contingents deployed within their national territories are mandated to undertake the following objectives:

- i. conducting military operations to prevent the expansion of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups activities and eliminate their presence;
- ii. facilitating operational coordination amongst the affected countries in the fight against Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, including based on the intelligence collected by the LCBC Member States and Benin and/or availed by external partners;
- iii. encouraging and facilitating the conduct of joint/simultaneous/coordinated patrols and other types of operations at the borders of the affected countries;
- iv. preventing all forms of transfer of arms and ammunitions and other type of support to Boko Haram and other terrorist groups;
- v. ensuring, within its capabilities, the protection of civilians under immediate threat, IDP and refugee camps, humanitarian workers and other civilian personnel;
- vi. actively searching for, and freeing all abductees, including the young girls abducted in Chibok in April 2014;
- vii. undertaking effective psychological operations to encourage defections from Boko Haram and other terrorist groups (African Union PSC Report 48th 2015: 6-7).

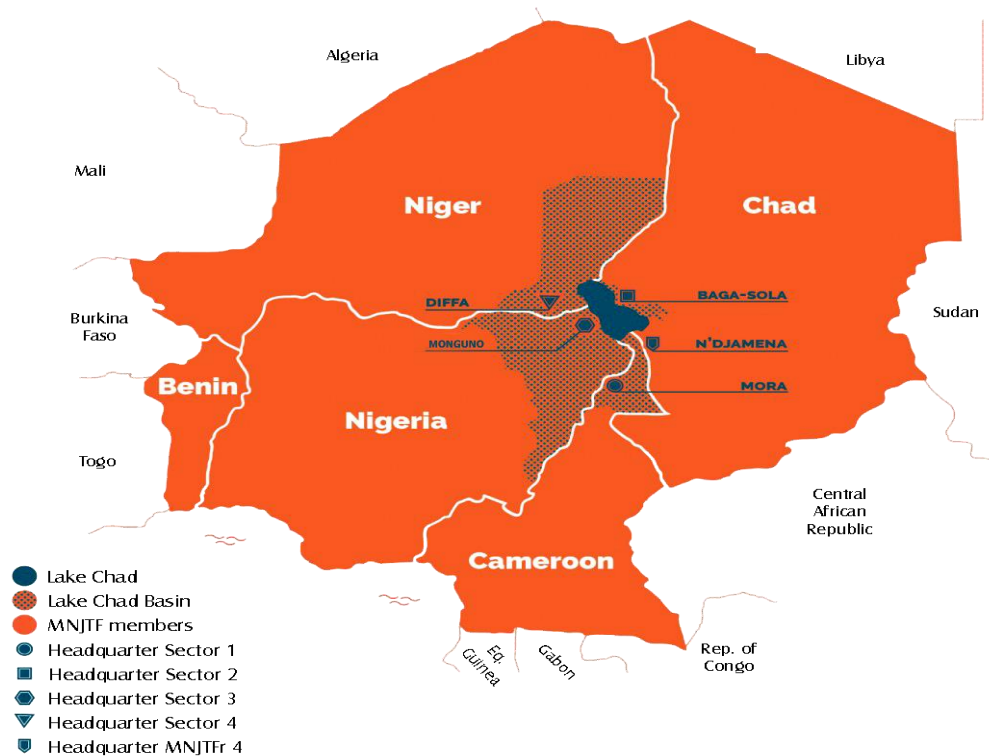
The second phase involves undertaking stabilization measures such as restoration of state authority, and assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their home areas (PSC Meeting, 68th meeting) in line with the provisions of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Resilience and Recovery (RS-SRR), which includes the following objectives:

- i. supporting, as may be appropriate, the initial implementation phase of strategies for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of disengaged fighters into their communities;
- ii. and contributing to the improvement and institutionalization of civil-military coordination, including the provision, upon request, of escorts to humanitarian convoys (African Union PSC 68TH Meeting, 2015: 6-7).

It is remarkable to note that under the RS-SRR, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) serves as a facilitating platform for the relevant governors and stakeholders of the region to discuss and collate the methods and strategies to implement the RS-SRR. At the same time, the Executive Secretary of the LCBC acts as the Head of Mission of the MJTF, providing political support and guidance to both the military contingent and the RS-SRR actors (EPON, 2023).

To achieve the Mission's mandate and objectives, the MNJTF is strategically structured around four sectors located in the four Troops Contributing Countries (TCCs) and an operational headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad. The Headquarters is organized in staff branches, headed by senior military officers from the four Lake Chad Basin member countries and Benin. These are J1 (Administration), J2 (Intelligence Cell), J3 (Operations), J4 (Logistics Cell), J5 (Training Cell), J6 (Communication Cell), and J9 (Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)). The leadership of these cells alongside the Deputy Chief of Staff are shared among the TCCs on a rotational basis while Nigeria maintains the position of the Force Commander throughout the mission in line with the decision and approval of all the member-states of the Force. The reason is based on the fact that the fight against Boko Haram mainly takes place in Nigerian territory, and Nigeria is the major contributor to the force. The MNJTF Headquarters has a Force Medical Section, a Military Public Information Office (MPIO), an Air Liaison Office, and the AU-Mission Support Team (AU-MST). The four operational sectors are:

- i. Sector One located in Mora (Cameroon) comprises troops of Cameroon covering Northern Cameroon;
- ii. Sector Two located in Baga Sola (Chad) comprises troops from Chad covering Western Chad and sub-sectors at Kaiga Ngouboua, Litri, Bargaram, and Koufoua.
- iii. Sector Three located in Monguno (Nigeria) comprises troops from Nigeria covering the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Its area of operation stretches from Baga, Kukawa, and Mallam Fatori up to Damasak.
- iv. Sector Four is located in Diffa (Niger), comprising Nigerien troops. It covers from East to West of Niger along River Komadougou-Yobe and stretches up to Bosso, Baroua, Toumour, and Gueskerou (MNJTF Website. <https://mnjtffmm.org/sectors/>).

Figure 1. Map Showing the Four Sectors of the MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin

Source: MNJTF Website. <https://mnjtffmm.org/sectors/>

Each of the national sectors is expected to rout Boko Haram from their respective domains within their national frontiers and compel them to flee towards the bordering countries where they will be cut down by the MNJTF at the border. However, they cannot exceed a 25 km perimeter into the neighbouring sector unless it is deemed imperative (Assanvo et al. 2016). However, in terms of command and control, the MNJTF is under the direct military command of the Force Commander. The Force Commander is in charge of coordinating command forces across the four sectors based on operational convenience, but operates under the political authority of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (EPON, 2023).

The MNJTF's Operational Capabilities and Performance Within its Mandate

Following the formation of the MNJTF in 2015 and its intervention as a counterinsurgency force in the region, it has conducted six significant operations in the region. However, due to some constraints and challenges many did not last long or sustained long enough to clear the areas of the insurgents and the allied terrorist groups. However, it recorded significant progress that culminated in the degrading of Boko Haram and its allied transnational terrorist organizations in the Boko Haram-affected area in the region. The first military operation conducted by the MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin was Operation Gama Aikin (which means 'getting the job done' in English) conducted from June to October 2016. It was a military offensive that stretched from Damasak and Mallam Fatori to the Lake Chad Islands. It cleared

Damasak, Mallam Fatori, Abadam, Metele, Dogon Chuku, Kangarwa, Tumbun Madayi, Doro Naira, and Alargano in Nigeria, including Kirta-Wulgo, Sagme, and Blangafe in Cameroon of the Boko Haram insurgents. However, the operation was not sustained and consequently, led to the entrenchment of the insurgents in the region (EPON, 2023). The second operation was codenamed “Rawan Kada”. It was conducted between January and June 2017, to consolidate the gains of Operation Gama Aiki. Unfortunately, the forces could not advance to clear the insurgent’s captured areas, including the Lake Chad Islands, culminating in the retreat of the force.

The third operation was Operation Amni Fakat conducted from March to July 2018. It was aimed at clearing areas held by the insurgents up to the Lake Chad Islands such as Kangarwa, Metele, Douma, Gashigar, Jabullam, Abadam, Mallam Fatori, Daya, Ngarwa Yau, and Mainuri. It succeeded in clearing the areas through a sustained offensive that led to the rescue of about 4000 civilians. However, it was not able to clear the Lake Chad Islands despite the sustained offensive that lasted for two months (EPON, 2023). This was followed by Operation Yancin Tafki, the fourth operation in line, which started in January 2019 and ended in March 2021. The operation was able to sustain its offensive for nine months being the longest military offensive by the MNJTF in the region. It involved combined troops of Chad and Nigeria, operating from the Monguno-Baga-Lake Chad Islands axis, and the Niger and Cameroon troops operating along the River Komadougou-Yobe and Wulgo areas. Though it recorded massive success against the insurgents, the tempo of the offensive was stalled due to inconsistencies of funding, thus forcing the MNJT to resort to small-scale operations to contain the activities of the insurgents to the Lake Chad Islands as against the initial large-scale offensive (EPON, 2023).

The fifth operation was Operation Sharan Fage, conducted from 2 to 24 December 2021. The operation was coordinated and conducted in three phases jointly with troops drawn from Sector Three (Monguno-Nigeria) and Sector Four (Diffa-Niger) with support from Nigeria’s internal Operation Hain Kai (OPHK) along River Kamadougou in the Yobe axis of its area of responsibility. The operation was geared towards denying BH/ISWAP terrorists’ freedom of action around the area of operations while creating favourable conditions for the safe return of IDPs and refugees to Mallam Fatori (MNJTF Report, 2022). It was reportedly meant to facilitate the smooth conduct of festivities marking the 63rd anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Niger, which was eventually held in Diffa Region on 18 December 2021 (MNJTF Report, 2022). Operation Sharan Fage led to the neutralizing of 22 BH/ISWAP terrorists, the arrest of several suspects, and the destruction of five terrorist gun trucks, five motorcycles and several logistic bunkers, including the recovery of 8 AK47 rifles. Also, over 20 towns were cleared during the operation, including Mallam Fatori, Asagar, Kainowa, Bulagana, Arege, Gashiga, and Kamagunma.

The sixth operation is Operation Lake Sanity, launched by the MNJTF in late March 2022, to clear Lake Chad Island and settlements known as ‘Tumbuns of Terrorists. It was a joint ad combined operation involving the MNJTF troops from Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon supported by troops from Nigeria’s Operation Hadin Kai, the Air Task Forces of the MNJTF and OPHK, other security agencies, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) (Nmodu, 2022). The cooperation between the troops of the MNJTF and OPHK in Nigeria contributed immensely to the success of the operation. It was able to clear some BH/ISWAP strongholds such as Tudun Fulani, Greda, Daban Gajere, Daban Masara, Fedondiya, and many others. In addition, the

Nigeria and Cameroon troops alongside OPHK sustained an offensive in areas such as Tumbun Rago, Tumbin Dilla, and Jamina settlements, deep within the Lake Chad Islands, which the MNJTF have never been able to penetrate since the deployment of the MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin. Some of the successes of the operation include the elimination of some top commanders of BH/ISWAP terrorists, such as Abu Ibrahim, Abu Jubrila, Abubakar Dan Buduma, Abubakar Shuwa, and Abu Ali among others. The logistics store and arsenal of the terrorists were captured and destroyed with records of 105 mm artillery pieces, several canoes and boats, motorcycles, bicycles, other terrorists' equipment, and several Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs) factories and bunkers. The operation also led to the return of about 500 civilians to Mallam Fatori, and for the first time in about eight years, Eid (Sallah) prayers were celebrated in their ancestral homes (Nmodu, 2022 in EPON 2023). In addition, over 4,000 civilians were rescued and freed, and more than 800 terrorists were killed during the operation. On the side of the MNJTF and the CJTF, five soldiers and a member of the CJTF were killed during the operation. All in all, the various MNJTF operations in the Lake Chad Basin culminated in the eventual degrading and downgrading of the BH/ISWAP in the region.

It is remarkable to note that the MNJTF operations led to the destabilization of the BH/ISWAP camp that culminated in death of the Sheik Abubakar Shekau (Boko Haram Leader) and Abu Musa al-Bernawi (ISWAP Leader) between May and September 2021 and the elimination of the various commanders of the group across the Lake Chad Basin, including the surrender of about 20,000 members of Boko Haram/ISWAP to security forces (UNDP Conflict Analysis, 2023). These achievements culminated in the degrading and downgrading of Boko Haram and the allied transnational terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin. Convincingly, the reduction in significant attacks in the region since 2021 is a testament to the acclaimed degrading and downgrading of the group and its allies in the region. The analogy here is simple in the sense that the killing of the leadership of the leaders and commanders of BH/ISWAP terrorists and the surrender of about 20,000 fighters of the group is a serious reduction in the firepower of the group in the region. Such reduction, therefore equals a significant downgrading of the insurgents and the allied terrorist groups and their activities in the region. More so, the record of the return of refugees and IDPs to the affected areas is an indication of the near restoration of peace and security in the region. Official statistics from the MNJTF website show that it facilitated the return of over 200,000 refugees and IDPs to their ancestral homes across the four Lake Chad countries from September 2021 to April 2022. Below is the number of returned refugees and IDPs in 2021.

Table 1: Number of IDPs and Refugees returned to their Ancestral Homes: 2021-2022

Sector	Country	Total Number of Villages/Locality	Number of Returned IDPs
1.	Cameroon	18	117,193
2.	Chad	20	22,112
3.	Nigeria	5	47,126
4.	Niger	22	30,735
	Total	65	217,166

Source: MNJTF Website (<https://mnjtfimm.org/category/articles/>)

Table 2: The Names of the Villages IDP and Refugees Returned across the Lake Chad Basin: 2021-2022

Sector	Country	Names and Number of Villages/Locality	Number of Returned IDPs
1.	Cameroon	18: Blangoua, Darak, Fotocol, Goulfey, Hile-Alifa, Logone-Birni, Makari, Waza, Zina, Kolofata, Mora, Bourha, Hina, Koza, Mayo-Mazkota, Mogode, Mokolo, and Soulede-Roua.	117,193
2.	Chad	20: Keaoudjerem, Keberom, Kaferom, Kangalia, Briga, Sidemerom, Bout, Moustrom, Bikerem 4-1-3, Choua, Maria, Madai, Ngueila, Kadjahuerem, Djouli, Dougou, Sella, Kaiga, Maya, and Killi-Dodji.	22,112
3.	Nigeria	5: Baga, Doron Baga, Bindiram, Cross Kauwa, and Mallam Fatori.	47,126
4.	Niger	22: Baroua, N'gagam, Dewa 1, Dewa 2, Dewa Fide, Kalgueri 1, Elh Mainari Autochtone, MK, Garin Dogo, Guessere, Yarta, N'garwa Koura, N'garwa Gana, N'gadoua, N'garanna, N'gadodo, Djougoulou, Illaouro, Illaouro Dalamaram, N'galori, Fougouri, and Douloum	30,735
	Total	65	217,166

Source: MNJTF Website (<https://mnjtfmm.org/category/articles/>)

In addition, the MNJTF has started the second phase of its operational mandate, which is the implementation of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR) of the Boko Haram-affected areas. Thus, signalling the successful end of the first phase of its mandate and an indication of a higher degree of success to its mandate. Despite this success, the Lake Chad Basin region continues to face issues of security and humanitarian challenges, as a result of the emerging violent extremism, armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom including armed robbery attacks on transporters and commuters on highways that the remnant of the defeated BH/ISWAP terrorists are carrying out to raise funds for their operations in the region, as they have been cut off from their international and local sponsors. Recall that through the support of the AU PSC, the LCBC countries and other multilateral agencies supporting the MNJTF, the external sources of funding to the terrorists have collapsed, and the majority of them arrested and their activities clamped down. Furthermore, the Mission has a huge humanitarian task to ensure IDPs and refugees return to their homes.

In a report released by the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) in August 2023, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria hosted an estimated 6,077,690 affected individuals consisting of internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees (former IDPs and returnees) and refugees (both in and out-of-camp). 12 per cent of the affected population (750,373) were located in Cameroon, while 5 per cent were located in Chad (307,517), 7 per cent in Niger (430,708) and finally, 76 per cent in Nigeria (4,589,092). Overall, the numbers show increases in IDPs and returnees former IDPs since December 2022 within the Lake Chad Basin countries, with respectively 5 and 12 per cent variations. The IDPs numbers have increased in Cameroon (+11%), Chad (+8%) and Niger (+2%) but have shown a slight decrease

in Nigeria (-3%) (UN IOM, 2023). This indicates that Boko Haram is still a potent threat in the region that must be fully crushed, to liberate the region and make it safe and secure. The table below shows the number of IPDs, Returnees and Refugees in the region between December 2022 and August 2023.

Table 3: Number of IDPs, Returnee former IDPs and Returnees from across the states and Refugees in the Lake Chad Region (December 2022-August 2023)

Country	No of IDPs	No of Returnee former IDPs	Returnees from Outside the country	Refugees	Percentage of the numbers	Variations (%)
Cameroon	427,833	186,058	17,108	119,374	12%	IDPs +11%
Chad	215,928	20,947	22,893	47,749	5%	IDPs +8%
Nigeria	2,388,703	1,887,995	222,044	90,350	76%	IDPs -3%
Niger	168,715	24,494	29,343	208,153	7%	IDPs +2%
Total	3,201,179	2,119,947	291,388	465,626	100%	

Source: UN IOM Monthly Dashboard (2023) September.

The UNOCHA (2023) report also revealed that an estimated 12.5 million victims of this conflict need humanitarian assistance and 5.3 million people are expected to be severely food insecure. This is the highest figure recorded in the region in four years since the conflict started. Surprisingly, these figures have continued to increase, thereby worsening the humanitarian needs which other security challenges such as drought, floods, herders-farmers conflict and COVID-19 have aggravated. Similarly, the UNDP 2023 Conflict Analysis in Lake Chad has revealed that about 350,000 persons were killed in Nigeria alone, about ten times the previous fatalities of about 35,000 estimated for the entire Lake Chad region (UNDP Conflict Analysis, 2023). This implies that Mission is challenged on two major fronts: the humanitarian and evolving security fronts in their effort to facilitate the stabilization of the region and ensure the full return of IDPs and refugees back to their ancestral homes, which automatically would reduce drastically, if not eliminate the challenges of IDPs in the region. Therefore, the Mission has to move faster to consolidate the success achieved in the first phase by ensuring effective implementation of the second phase of its operational mandate, which is the RS-SRR implementation that provides an all-encompassing regional strategy for the security, political, humanitarian, peace, stability and development of the region.

MNJTF and the Implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization Recovery and Resilience in the Lake Chad Basin

Following the degrading and downgrading of the BH/ISWAP in the Lake Chad region by the MNJ TF, which marked the end of the first phase of the operational mandate of the force, on the 14 of January 2022, the Lake Chad Basin Commission in concert with the African Union Peace and Security Council renewed the MNJTF mandate for another one calendar year. With

the renewed mandate, the MNJTF is to further facilitate the implementation of the RS-SRR programme in the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin, including restoration of state authority, and assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees return to their home areas (LCBC and AU PSC, 2018).

The RS-SRR was developed by the LCBC with support from the AU and the UNDP in 2018. It is anchored on nine pillars which include: a] Political Cooperation; b] Security and Human Rights; c] Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, Reinsertion and Reintegration of persons associated with Boko Haram; d] Humanitarian assistance; e] Governance and the Social Contract; f] Socio-economic Recovery and Environmental sustainability; g] education; h] Prevention of Violent Extremism and Building Peace; and i] Empowerment and Inclusion of Women and Youth (MNJT Website). In addition, the LCBC provides the political leadership of Strategy, and the Executive Secretary of the LCBC serves as the Head of Mission of the MNJTF, providing political support and guidance to both the military contingent and the RS-SRR actors (EPON, 2023). This implies that the RS-SRR offers an all-encompassing and more comprehensive effort at addressing the security political, humanitarian, peace and development in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Over the past five years, the MNJTF in concert with the LCBC and the support from the AU has embarked on the implementation of the RS-SRR to consolidate the success of the First Phase which is to create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by Boko Haram and to ensure the stability of the region as well as the return of the IDPs and refugees to their ancestral homes. This programme is been implemented in partnership with the LCBC and the AU PSC playing political leadership and support roles to the mission.

The AU and the LCBC support to the MNJTF is focused on delivering on the requests of the MNJTF and ensuring that the MNJTF meets its mandate. These include advocacy and political support for the MNJTF and the mission among the comity of nations within the continent and outside, multilateral agencies such as the United Nations, the European Union, and Multilateral donor agencies; provision of operational equipment; Resources and Funding by reaching out to partners for supply of the needed resources for the operation such as military hardware, weapons and drones; and the Promotion of inter-regional cooperation, border security and coordination with national forces as encapsulated in the Security and Human Rights pillar for the action of the RS-SRR, to enhance operational capabilities of the MNJTF towards the achievement of its mandate. However, the AU has not been effective to a large extent towards the realization of these goals (EPON, 2023). For instance, since the beginning of the Ukraine-Russian conflict, precisely from January 2022, the AU has not been able to get the usual funding from the EU partners to pay the MNJTF (EPON, 2023). This constitutes a significant constraint and a challenge to the operational capability towards attaining the mission's mandate. However, the MNJTF has continued to make progress in the implementation of the RS-SRR programme in the Lake Chad Basin.

Extant reports and studies revealed that the MNJTF has adopted a wholistic approach to counterinsurgency in the region as a result of the implementation of the RS-SRR programme by encompassing non-kinetic approaches toward their operations in the region, which initially was lacking in the operations. Aniekwe and Brooks (2023) confirmed that through regular dialogue and consultation between the military component led by the J9 of the MNJTF, the LCBC advisers, the CCL contingent, the AU Mission Support Team (MST) and the CIMIC

(Civic Military Cooperation) Advisor of the RS-SRR Secretariat, the mission has inculcated the approach of non-kinetic operations. He further revealed that cooperation through the CIMIC Cell has led to the revision of the MNJTF CIMIC SOPs and the development of a Communication strategy for the MNJTF. The Cell has also managed the deployment of community dialogues and the rollout of several training initiatives for the MNJTF on the protection of civilians, gender-based violence, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023:336). However, previous literature and reports on MNJTF identify a lack of effective community engagement as a major constraint to the efforts of the MNJTF. More so, a more recent assessment of the MNJTF operations found that MNJTF has made considerable progress in building trust between the military and local communities thereby enhancing community dialogue across the affected communities, to the extent that civilians preferred to work with the MNJTF than national forces (EPON, 2023). Reportedly, in 2021 alone four community dialogues took place in Mora (Sector 1) on 13 July, Diffa (Sector 4) on 26 July, Monguno (Sector 3) on 20 August, and Baga Sola (Sector 2) on 24 August (LCBC-RSS Annual Report 2021). This is an indication of the improved community perception of the MNJTF in the region and a step in the right direction towards rebuilding the relationship with the affected communities for improved facilitation of the RS-SRR Programme in the region.

Following the success of the community dialogue and its associated medical outreach in the affected areas, the MNJTF launched a community-based quick impact projects (QIPS), to support the community dialogue approach (Salami & Aniekwe, 2023). The QIPS has ensured the deployment and delivery of essential food items, educational kits/aids to schools, drilling of boreholes, provision of medical and veterinary supplies, building schools and hospitals in areas that were inaccessible to humanitarian agencies (Salami & Aniekwe, 2023). These initiatives have become a regular practice across the sectors and also serve as a platform for cross-fertilization and learning between MNJTF HQs and the Sectors. For the past three years, the MNJTF has deployed over 129 QIPS (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023:338).

As part of the RS-SRR Programme, the MNJTF has also reached out to violent extremism groups in the region, to encourage defections and counter violent extremist narratives. The MNJTF organized its first strategic communication workshop in N'Djamena, Chad in November 2020. The programme recommended that partner forces work to address issues which were leading credibility to violent extremist narratives in the region, including grievances of local populations against the security forces and civilian governments across the affected communities (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023). Consequently, in 2021 based on the findings of the engagement, the MNJTF in collaboration with Radio Ndarason International (RNI), a radio based in N'Djamena which broadcasts local languages across the region, began to develop radio content which challenged violent extremism narratives and sought to shift the view of communities towards the MNJTF and other security agencies. Recall that this strategic communication was non-existent in the military doctrines of all four TCCs at the time of its initiation. By 2022, the MNJTF has initiated a talk show with RNI to allow them to speak directly with local communities, and also serve as a medium to inform the locals about the activities of the MNJTF, including QIPS and to ensure that the right information gets to the vulnerable communities. The success of these initiatives encouraged the sectors to adopt a similar approach. For instance, OPHK Theatre Command in Maiduguri was said to have since 2022, adopted a similar programme for community engagement and communication outreach

to violent extremist groups in the region (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023). Reportedly, these initiatives are yielding results as they have encouraged mass defection of members of BH/ISWAP across the region. Between August 2021 and December 2023, over 100,000 individuals who were associates or combatants of BH/ISWAP or who lived in areas controlled by violent extremist group have surrendered themselves to security forces across the four countries (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023; UNU & UNIDIR, 2024). A key factor in the decision of the members of the groups to surrender was the belief that they would not be killed by security forces, a concern which previously prevented most of them from defecting (UNIDIR, 2022a; UNIDIR, 2022b).

Other areas of the RS-SRR programme where the MNJTF has achieved some level of progress include compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL). Historically, the MNJTF was lagging in these areas and it became a point of criticism for international institutions. For instance, in 2016, the Under-Secretary-General to the United Nations, Jeffrey Feltman, stated that human rights violations and lack of accountability for these violations were among the main issues facing the MNJTF (Feltman, 2016). This was limited to the MNJTF alone as the TCCs' standalone forces in their various countries, particularly in Nigeria were also indicted for such actions (ICG, 2020). However, recent studies have shown that there are substantial improvements in compliance with IHL and IHRL by the MNJTF since 2020 and this has been confirmed by their international partners such as the African Union, EU, UK, France and the United States and confirmed by both the UN and CSO partners (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023). This was achieved through constant comprehensive IHL/IHRL training to troops under its mandate by the MNJTF and the effective coordination of recent sector operations by the MNJTF, which factored to a greater extent IHL compliance into operational planning of the MNJTF (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023; Salami & Aniekwe 2023; EPON, 2023).

Based on the foregoing, it is obvious that the MNJTF has to a large extent achieved a high level of progress in its mandate in the Lake Chad Basin: firstly, it was able to contain the menace of the BH/ISWAP terrorist activities by degrading the group(s), culminating to the commencement of the second phase of its mandate on stabilization of the region. However, it has not been so rosy for the MNJTF as the Mission is confronted with some operational constraints and challenges especially as it struggles to ensure effective implementation of the RS-SRR plan for the stabilization of the region.

The Constraints and Challenges Hindering the Efforts of the MNJTF Operations

Some of the major constraints and challenges militating against the efforts of the MNJTF towards the actualization of its mandate include:

Inadequate Funding of the Mission:

One of the major challenges constraining the efforts of the MNJTF in its operations in the Lake Chad Basin is inadequate and insufficient operational funding for the force. This has been cited by many reports and studies on the MNJTF (Aniekwe & Brooks 2023; Salami & Aniekwe 2023; EPON 2023). EPON (2023:32) report noted that it has been challenging for the MNJTF to maintain predictable funding in the face of the funding constraints and that the MNJTF has been able to plan, execute and sustain large-scale joint offensive operations with a limited financial budget. Moreover, EU funding has not been forthcoming since the emergence of the

Russia-Ukraine war due to a shift of interest to the regional priority of the EU. Aniekwe and Brooks (2023:346) observed that before 2022 the majority of funding came from Nigeria and even when on 29 November 2022 the 16th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission agreed that all four TCCs would contribute to operational costs to ensure a broader resource base for the Mission. Unfortunately, nothing was done as no operation has been conducted since that time, due to lack of availability of required funds. Therefore, it is obvious that inadequate funding has been a major challenge and constraint to the operational mandate of the MNJTF.

Interoperability

The establishment of the four operational sectors of the MNJTF and their utilization towards achieving the mandate of the Mission is a great achievement on its own. However, the differences in military Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) of the TCCs to fight a shared security threat in a joint operation make it difficult for the Force to manage and coordinate the four TCCs. Reports from recent studies have shown the four troops (TCCs) of the MNJTF have different military doctrines and orientations that conflict with each other in operation (EPON 2023). For instance, troops of Niger, Cameroon to a large extent have a more similar doctrine because they adopt the French-oriented military doctrine, while Nigerian forces' military doctrine is similar to that of the UK and therefore contrasts with that of Cameroon and Niger. On the other hand, the Chadian forces TTP are not as clearly defined and are usually shaped by their commanders (EPON, 2023:35). This is also aggravated by the language barrier among the troops: Chadian troops speak mostly Arabic, and not all are French-Speaking or speak little English; Nigeriens and Cameroonians speak primarily French, and Nigerians speak English with little French. What this implies is that it becomes difficult to achieve full effective command and control during operations. Thus, posing a serious constraint to the effective operations of the MNJTF towards achieving its operational mandate. This also has a knock-on effect on the issue of cooperation between the MNJTF and the TCC national forces. Instances abound where national forces have conducted operations without carrying the MNJTF along or where a TCC pulls out its troops on the eve of a major joint operation of the MNJTF. Recently, Niger withdrew its troops from MNJTF at the border with Nigeria due to financial sanctions placed on the country by the EU, AU, the UK governments as well as other donor organizations (Iliya & Omirin, 2023). This has been one of the major reasons that have led to the resurgence of terrorists at many different times in the region after degrading them.

Lack of Appropriate Equipment and Operational Materials

Given the complexity of the environment in the Lake Chad Basin and the fluid nature OF the operations, the lack of appropriate equipment and operational material to conduct operations safely and effectively remains a major challenge for the MNJTF. Reports have shown that the force requires at least 70 per cent or ideally 90 per cent of the operational equipment to be combat-ready, but it hardly has access to about 65 per cent of its requirements (EPON 2023:33). Thereby constraining its capacity to engage in full combat operations. For instance, counter-IED equipment such as Husky Vehicle Mounted Mine Detectors that are needed to aid the movement of military and civilian personnel in the affected areas against IEDs and mines planted on the main supply routes for ambush by the terrorists are conspicuously lacking in the MNJTF operational equipment. Unfortunately, the majority of attacks against the security forces and casualties incurred by the MNJTF are due to IED

incidents (EPON 2023:33). This is just one among the several deficits in equipment and operational materials by the MNJTF such as lack of combat drones, insufficient permanent amphibious platforms and equipment, and lack of suitable communication equipment (such as high-frequency radios that can function from long distances, poor networks and bad weather conditions) to access some of the strongholds of the terrorists. All these significantly posed serious constraints to MNJTF operation and the resultant effect is the protracted nature of the conflict.

Lack of Policing Capability

Lack of policing capability is one of the major constraints to the MNJTF's efforts towards achieving the Mission's mandate. This is not to say that the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) of the MNJTF did not make provision for a police component within the force rather the MNJTF is yet to develop and deploy it despite the pressing need for it. The MNJTF's CONNOPS states that:

The Police Force of the MNJTF would support the re-establishment of Public Order and Rule of Law u the mission zones; contribute to the freedom of all the people abducted or detained by BH and support their return, reintegration and re-adaptation; protect the witnesses, the unarmed civilians and vulnerable groups; combat criminality; recover stolen property; and identify and destroy the funding sources, weaponry and all logistical support to BH (Assanvo et al.2016).

Under the RS-SRR implementation, there is a pressing need for a police component to dampen the coercive force of the military and support the civilian staff to reconnect with the residents of the affected areas after the military onslaught on the terrorists. This is because it is the police component that can hold and protect areas once the military has cleared them so stabilization activities can be plugged in a safe, coherent, and sustainable way. For instance, the hit-and-run tactics, armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom, and the threat of violent extremism engaged by the BH/ISWAP in some of the already declared liberated and safe areas by the MNJTF require the full coverage of the police, well-trained in post-conflict management to take control of the areas. This will help to ensure total mob up of the remnants of the terrorists in areas and also to engage the residents through investigation to fully dislodge the resurgent strategies and plans of the terrorists in the region. However, this has been lacking in the Mission's operational strategy and has remained a major constraining factor to the stabilization of the liberated areas in the region and the entire mission's mandate at large.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is an incontrovertible fact that the MNJTF has achieved a high degree of progress within its subsisting mandate in the Lake Chad region. Firstly, the menace of Boko Haram and its allied transnational terrorist organizations in the region has been degraded and downgraded and the majority of the affected areas liberated as a result of the neutralizing of the leaderships of the dominant terrorist groups BH/ISWAP in the region and their field commanders and the eventual surrender of thousands of their members and fighters to the security forces. Currently, the BH/ISWAP is incapable of waging a conventional attack as it was doing before 2020. Secondly, the MNJTF has commenced the second phase of the Mission's mandate, which is the facilitation of the implementation of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization Resilience and

Recovery (RS-SRR), and gained the approval of the African Union for the renewal of its mandate in 2022. However, the implementation of the RS-SRR by the MNJTF under the supervision of the LCBC and the AU has been very slow due to some operational constraints and challenges as identified in the preceding section. These include inadequate funding for the mission, interoperability, lack of appropriate equipment and operational materials and lack of policing capability in the mission. Given these challenges, the study proffers the following recommendations to enhance the operational effectiveness of the MNJTF towards achieving its mandate within a short period.

- a. **Improved Funding:** Funding of the mission remains one of the major challenges frustrating the mission. Thus the need for improved funding of the mission. Therefore, the LCBCs and the TCCs should see the mission as a serious national security issue that requires a regional approach to resolve so as to be able to vote resources towards the sustenance of the mission. Such an understanding would help in reducing the burden of funding on Nigeria. For instance, if all the TCCs financially contribute their quota, the challenge of funding would be 80 per cent solved. In addition, the MNJTF partners such as AU and the LCBC should improve on their strategy and diplomacy towards ensuring the consistent financial support of international donors such as the EU, UK, and others to surmount the insufficiency and inadequacy of funds constraining the efforts of the Mission.
- b. **Improved Cooperation and Collaboration between the MNJTF and TCCs national forces:** The LCBC, AU and the national governments of the TCCs should find a common ground to address the interoperability challenge among the TCCs and the MNJTF. Such collaboration as joint training and consistent joint operations devoid of bias, suspicion, and unhealthy competition would ensure synergy and improved collaboration and cooperation among the troops for enhanced operational effectiveness.
- c. **Adequate provision of the Appropriate equipment and Operational Materials:** This is one area pressing need that if attended to by the funders of the MNJTF will be the game changer of the entire mission. However, the operations have been lacking in appropriate equipment and operational materials required in such a counterinsurgency operation that is fluid and dangerous, unlike conventional warfare. Therefore, the provision of such equipment as combat drones, Vehicle Mounted IEDs and Mine detectors, High-Frequency Communication gadgets and equipment and many others will go a long way in liberating the region from the remnants of the BH/ISWAP group in the region.
- d. **The Establishment of the Police Component of the Mission's CONOPS:** As enshrined in the Mission's CONOPS, the MNJTF should do the needful to ensure the establishment of the police component of the MNJTF Operation for improved facilitation of the implementation of the stabilization programme in the affected areas. Such a strategy would ensure the consolidation of the achievement of military offensives by ensuring the restoration of public order and rules of law in the affected areas.
- e. **Commitment of the National Governments:** In all this, if the commitment of the national government of the LCB Countries is lacking the achievement of the end state will be difficult. Therefore, there is a need for national governments in the Lake Chad Basin to as a matter of priority lend full support both financially and militarily to the

Mission. This will help to boost the morale of personnel and strengthen the operational effectiveness of the mission towards achieving the end state of the mission.

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