Multi-National Joint Task Force and the Fight against Boko-Haram Insurgency: A study of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon Republics

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Abstract
The Boko Haram insurgent group, active in the Lake Chad Basin LBC region posed a complex security challenge to Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon Republics. The increasing number of cross-border attacks and the infiltration of Boko Haram insurgents from Nigeria into the neighbouring countries posed a serious security threat to all the countries involved. Adopting counterinsurgency theory as the framework of analysis, this article investigates and analyses the collective efforts of the affected countries in combating Boko Haram in the LCB region. This qualitative study aimed at contributing to the existing literature on the topic and to close the research gap on the collective approach policies applied by the affected countries. The method applied to collect data was interview method where 20 participants were carefully selected based on knowledge and expertise from 3 different fields namely security, academic and journalism. Data were coded and analysed using ATLAS.ti software to generate themes for coding process. The findings suggest that counterinsurgency measures have seen limited success, attributed to an excessive focus on security actions and insufficient attention to political and economic strategies in addressing the insurgency. The article concludes that to bring an end to the menace of Boko Haram across the affected countries, various stakeholders including governments, NGOs, and foreign nations should include soft approaches in addition to the military approach in dealing with the situation.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Lake Chad, Cooperation, MNJTF, Cross-border attacks.

Introduction

The self-described *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) popularly known as Boko Haram is an Islamist insurgent group originated in north-eastern Nigeria. As suggested by the group's

given name, its main ideology is driven by worldview of total rejection of the Western education and value systems. The group's violent activities and serial bombings have led to the killing of hundreds of thousands of people, massive abductions, and migrations across the Lake Chad basin region. The activities of the group especially since the aftermath of the July 2009 clash with the Nigerian security forces has constituted a major security threat to the Nigerian societies and later extended to the neighbouring Lake Chad Basin Countries in general.

The escalation of Boko Haram insurgency has predictably caught international attention. For example, between 2009 to 2019, Global Terrorism Index has recorded 2694 terrorist incidents of Boko Haram insurgency in the LCBC region. The types of attacks include assassination, armed assault, bombings and explosions, hostage taking, kidnappings, and attacks on facilities and infrastructures. (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2018). As a result, the Nigerian government has executed various mechanisms and strategies to combat the insurgents, however, the violence has continued with no sign of abating. Therefore, the need for a collaboration among the neighbouring nations in tackling the insurgents and denying their spill over across the borders became paramount. In response to the scourge, which threatens stability and the security of millions of people in the region, the concerned countries, stepped up their military responses to manage the situation collectively. The countries jointly establishment the Multi- National Joint Task Force MNJTF, under the auspices of the LCBC in 2012. However, the relevant literature on this topic mostly covered individual countries' response to the insurgents, in fact, most of the literature dealt only with Nigeria's response to the insurgents. There is little or mention of a collective approach to tackle the issue.

It is against this background that this research tends to study and analyse the collaborative efforts of the affected countries in combating Boko Haram insurgency. The research will examine and assess the individual member countries' efforts and commitment to ensure the success of the collaborative approach to curb the insurgency. In addition, the study will also investigate the effectiveness of the joint military collaboration to fight the Boko Haram insurgents. The research seeks to evaluate the success of the counter-insurgency measures

that were implemented by the governments of the affected countries. Through the research findings, the study will reveal highlight the accomplishments made by the involved nations.

Literature Review

Since the military clash with the insurgents in 2009 in Borno State, security forces-especially-in Nigeria embarked on military solution to combat Boko Haram insurgents. This situation did not go well with Nigerian authorities although the government achieved some successes such as adopting National Focal Point on Terrorism (NFPT) which came to effect in 2012, public safety and national stability based on modern technology for intelligence, surveillance, detection, and informatics (Udounwa, 2013) unfortunately, the crisis continued to worsen with no sign of abating due to number of reasons such as underestimation of the sect members, and misunderstanding of the nature of such war as Falode opines Boko Haram war should not be called war on terror but hybrid war (Falode, 2016). However, eventually, the government changed its strategy where it applied two concurrent approaches; soft-hand approach which involves dialogues, and amnesty offer, and heavy-hand approach where the government adopted aggressive military crackdown for those who refused the amnesty offer (Agbiboa, 2013).

In contrary, Samu argues that soft security and peace-building process with well-trained negotiators and mediators should be the only solution since the military measures applied by the government has failed (Samu, 2012). Ekanem, Dada, and Ejue argued that the amnesty approach adopted by the Nigerian Federal Government failed due to inadequacy of the security agencies, therefore, there is need to change strategy. (Ekanem, Dada, & Ejue, 2012; Ering, Omono, & Oketa, 2014). Thus, the government initiated a Joint Task Force (JTF) from military, police, intelligence agencies and other paramilitary personnel to fight the insurgents, yet, they too failed to defeat the insurgents, instead, the militant group were able to increase their support base and gained more sympathisers partly due to human rights violations by Nigerian security forces (Barna, 2014), continued extra-judicial killings and arrest without trial of the Boko Haram members (Montclos, 2014), brutality and indiscriminate killings of the group members as well as other innocent people by the security forces (Babalola, 2013; Serrano & Pieri, 2014), and alleged support of some political elites to the sect members

(Oarhe, 2013). Pate added that, security forces concentrated only in the state capitals cooperating with religious leaders and traditional rulers to pinpoint members of Boko Haram. This situation allowed the Boko Haram members to remain free in the rural areas and regain their strengths (Pate, 2015). However, as both the soft hand and heavy hand approaches have failed, the Nigerian government resorted to offering amnesty to the insurgents. Yet, Akpan, Ekanem, & Adeoye opposed the amnesty offer to Boko Haram militants, instead, they suggested that Boko Haram militants should be treated as terrorists (Akpan et al., 2014). Other literature suggested that the relevant authorities should take proactive economic policies that could create employment and improve standard of living not only to the affected areas in the northern part of Nigeria but the Nigerian state in particular (Salaam, 2012) and LCBC at large. Although, sound economic and political measures are important in countering radical ideologies like Boko Haram from gaining supporters and sympathisers in the society, security measures are equally vital, because Boko Haram crisis exposed the weakness of the security forces' poor funding, inadequate staffing, and security deficiency (Maiangwa et al., 2012; Onuoha, 2014). This is evident if we take an example of Nigerian increase defence budget in 2011, but the security forces were poorly funded due to corruption and mismanagement (Campbell, 2014) due to lack of political will by the authorities (Bappah, 2016; Elkaim, 2012). Onapajo added that, Boko Haram crisis persisted because, Nigerian authorities were incapable and clueless in acquiring adequate knowledge on militancy, (Onapajo, 2013). Meanwhile, Comolli opined that the MNJTF has fewer chances to succeed in its fight against Boko Haram as a result of poor relationship between the affected countries and lack of trust among the military coalition (Comolli, 2015).

The reviewed literature above did cover counterinsurgency on the Nigerian part; however, I have not come across any study that talked about collective approach applied by the affected four countries by Boko Haram insurgency to counter the insurgents. Thus, the study will provide an in-depth analysis on the collective approach applied by authorities of the concerned countries.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts counter-insurgency theory as a framework for analysis. This theory often referred to as COIN is opposite of insurgency. In another words, COIN involves a combination of measures undertaken by the legitimate government of a country to curb or suppress an insurgency taken up against it. COIN is defined as a comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes. Hence, countering insurgency occurs in reaction to an insurgency. (Goldefein, 2013). Historically, the Spaniard Alvaro de Navia Osorio is considered the earliest theorist to give considerable attention to counter-insurgency where he discussed how to identify signs of an early insurgency, prevent, and counter them. However, David Galula (1919-1967), a French military officer and scholar is considered one of the major contributors to Counter-insurgency studies. Rather than being primarily military, Galula's theory is a combination of military, political and social actions under the strong control of a single authority. Galula argues that Inter-agency coordination, specifically the cooperation of civilian and military entities is fundamental to success in the COIN campaign. (Galula, 2006).

However, David Kilcullen is among the contemporary counter-insurgency and counterterrorism theorists who contributed to the literature especially in shifting the new paradigm from its classical term. To Kilcullen, the classical counterinsurgency describes the theory of counter-revolutionary warfare developed in response to the wars of national liberation from 1944 to 1980s. Using examples of conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia, Kilcullen argued that the concept of counter-insurgency is logically contingent on that of insurgency. Thus, the nature of counter-insurgency is not fixed, but shifting, and it evolves in response to changes in the insurgency. There is no constant set of operational techniques in counter-insurgency; rather, this is a form of counter-warfare that applies all elements of national power against insurrection. Thus, as insurrection changes, so does counter-insurgency tactics. Kilcullen designed three pillars of counter-insurgency namely security, political and economic pillars in order to support the overarching goal of control. He argued that counterinsurgency is *all measures adopted to suppress an insurgency*. (Kilcullen, 2006). And to counter an insurgency; we must first understand the dynamics of an

insurgency. Thus, an attempt to examine insurgency, its characteristics and types are imperative.

Considering the nature of Boko Haram insurgency in the LCBC region, Kilcullen's three pillars of counter-insurgency strategy will be applied in this study so as to assess the performance of the concerned authorities in combating Boko Haram insurgency.

Error! Reference source not found. shows the diagram for the effective counter-insurgency measures based on Kilcullen's three pillars of counter-insurgency. The figure explains the importance of all the three pillars, and that they all must be applied equally to achieve effectiveness and success in combating insurgencies.
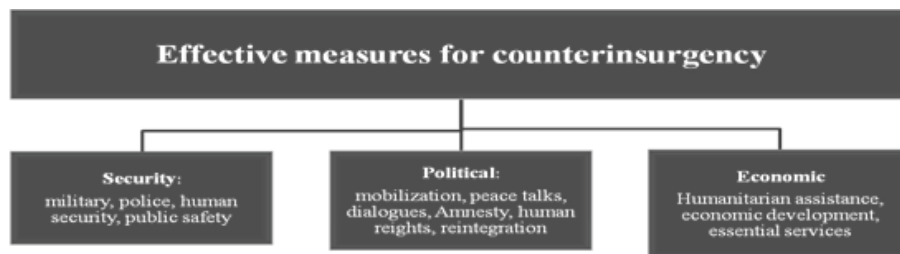

Figure 1 effective counter-insurgency measures.

According to the framework, the three independent approaches to combat insurgency security, political and economic should all be equally important, and must be developed independently otherwise, a campaign would be unbalanced if they are not developed in parallel: for instance, too much security measures without political downplay would strengthen armed groups. In the same vein, too much economic assistance without adequate security would simply create an avalanche of soft targets for the insurgents.

Although substantive security, political and economic measures are critical to be effective they must also rest upon a broader information strategy which is the basic tool to rely on. This is because perception is crucial in developing control and influence over population groups. It includes intelligence collection, analysis and distribution, information operations, media operations and measures to counter insurgent's motivation, sanctuary, and ideology.

Kilcullen notes that until an information base is developed, the other pillars of counterinsurgency cannot be effective. Importantly, the information campaign has to be conducted at global, regional and local levels because modern insurgents draw upon global networks of sympathy, support, funding and recruitment (Kilcullen, 2006).

Methodology

This research aims to analyse policies and strategies utilized by the concerned countries collectively in order to explore and analyse the effectiveness of the applied measure and policies in combating Boko Haram from 2009-2019. Hence, the study applied qualitative method on data analysis to communicate the findings to readers by making sense of the collected data (Williamson et al., 2018), so as to provide credible, comprehensive, transparent and useful research outcome (Roller & Lavrakas, 2018).

As suggested by many scholars, there are various types of interviews such as formal or structured, informal, or non-directive, and semi-structured or focused interviews. As for this study, the semi-structured method is adopted. The reason for choosing this method is due to its suitability to the objectives of this study as this type of interview involves implementation of several predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress and probe beyond the answers as they are given flexibility and control over the course of the interview (Berg & Lune, 2017).

In addition, purposive and criterion sampling were used to collect data from participants. The reason for using purposive sampling is to identify and select participants who are knowledgeable or have experience on the study area. The expertise of the participants was carefully chosen in order to represent the research and cover the main aspects of the research topic which are security personnel representing government authorities, journalists to represent news coverage that is been reported to the public, and academics to representing the academic world. The interview questions were open-ended so as to allow the participants express their perceptions and experiences on the given topic and enable them to have a broad discussion and flexibility to answer the questions at their convenience.
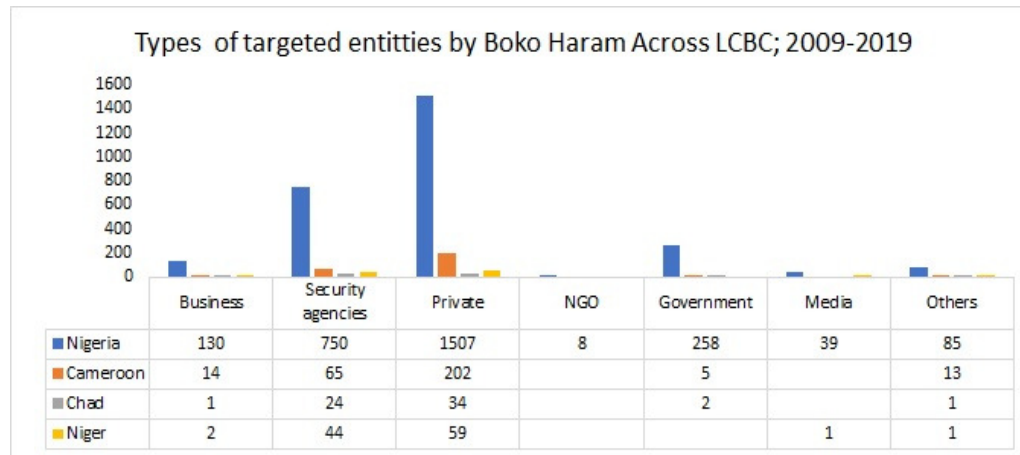
Data collected and analysed for this study were interviews from twenty (20) experts interviewed. The experts were selected based on their expertise and by fulfilling specific criteria with knowledge on the subject matter, the study then designated three important areas to select interview participants. These are three security expertise, two journalists, and four academics. These experts were chosen because of their knowledge and experience concerning the counterinsurgency of Boko Haram in their respective countries. The security experts were special forces personnel who had been involved in the decision-making of the MNJTF and had been active on the ground operations. The journalist experts were those who had reported on Boko Haram and had knowledge regarding the counterinsurgency of the affected countries, both individually and collectively. The academics were experts who had done research on Boko Haram and had at least a doctorate degree in the field of terrorism. All of these experts had a specialisation in security and terrorism, particularly in Africa and globally. The interview data was coded using the ATLAS.ti software to generate themes, word counts, keywords and categorise similar data chunks that related to research questions, hypotheses, constructs and themes (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

Data Presentation and Analysis

The international system has come to recognize the importance of alliances, not just for maintaining the balance of power, but also for addressing perceived, current, and potential security threats. (Buzan & Wæver, 2010). The security of a nation has an undeniable impact on its immediate neighbours and, those in close proximity. (Buzan & Waever, 2003). This is well demonstrated in the Lake Chad region, where Boko Haram's violent activities, killings, destructions and displacement of millions in Nigeria spread to its neighbours since 2010. In 2014, Boko Haram became the deadliest insurgent group in the world, surpassing ISIS and Al-Qaida in numbers. The insurgents have been known to execute kidnappings, killings, bombings, and attacks on civilians and military targets, as well as Western nationals. (United States Department of State, 2016) to explain the group's intention to internationalize its violent (Felter, 2018).   As illustrated in table 2 below, Boko Haram has routinely targeted security organizations, private and public institutions, businesses, and media outlets across the affected countries.

Table 1. Types of Targeted Entities by Boko Haram; 2009-2019

Types of targeted entitties by Boko Haram Across LCBC; 2009-2019

	Business	Security agencies	Private	NGO	Government	Media	Others
Nigeria	130	750	1507	8	258	39	85
Cameroon	14	65	202		5		13
Chad	1	24	34		2		1
Niger	2	44	59			1	1

Source; global terrorism database https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

Additionally, table 1 below illustrates the mortality rate that has been attributed to the group. This is merely the number of casualties that have been documented, while many more have gone unaccounted, as Boko Haram has been known to burn, bury, or otherwise conceal evidence of their atrocities, particularly in rural and remote locations that are inaccessible or difficult to reach. According to Global Terrorism Index, between 2009 and 2019, the four nations affected by the insurgency encountered 2694 terrorist attacks. These attacks included assassinations, armed assaults, bombings, hostage taking, kidnappings and assaults on facilities and infrastructures. (Global Terrorism Database, 2018).

Table 2. Fatality Rate Caused by Boko Haram;2009-2019.

Country	Fatality Rate 2009-2019	
	Death	Injured
Nigeria	19285	8881
Camerron	2443	1174
Chad	678	564
Niger	1277	410
Total	23683	11029

Source; global terrorism database https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

The series of these events awaken the authorities in the LCBC region to realize the importance collective approach to adequately address the problem and maintain the security of millions of people in the region. As a result, the Multi- National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was established, with the approval of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the African Union (AU) authorizing the expansion of the MNJTF to include a force of 10,000 military personnel. Furthermore, policies were implemented to discourage acts of terror, including counterinsurgency legislations, community engagement efforts, and humanitarian development initiatives.(African Union, 2015).

Analysis of the Interview Responses

Table 3 below explains details of the related topics generated from the interview conducted with the study participants. Upon a thorough analysis of the transcripts from each interviewee, a list of codes was produced which enabled the development of patterns and themes. This subsequently led to the formation of seven topics relevant to the study, which are outlined in the table below. The table also reveals the frequency of the themes and their respective percentages of occurrence throughout the interviews. The result percentage shows the essence and impact of the related topics based upon the opinions of the respondents.

Table 3. Analysis of the Interview Responses

Related topics from the interviews	No. of occurrences	% of occurrence
Boko Haram is getting internal and external support	8	15.63%
Absence of government, unemployment & poverty caused people join Boko Haram	13	20.31%
Porous borders caused Boko Haram spread	7	10.94%
Boko Haram gained popularity through propaganda & force	9	14.06%
The collaboration and external support helped the collective approach succeed	32	50.00%
The collective approach has failed to defeat Boko Haram	12	18.75%
The collective approach has mixed results	2	3.13%

The interview findings were organized and presented according to five principal themes that emerged from the related topics. These themes were derived from the combination of general topics discussed. The headings are as follows:

1. **Boko Haram Exploited Absence of Government, Poverty, Unemployment, and Economic Marginalization in the LCBC Region to get More Supporters**

One of the main reasons assisted Boko Haram to thrive for this long is the lack of governmental presence in rural areas of the LCBC region. This was evident in many organized criminal networks, smuggling operations, and other criminal activity that took place prior to the emergence of Boko Haram with many incidences of bandit activities (Harkness, 2022). Majority of respondents who participated in the interviews clarified various explanations as to why people in the region join Boko Haram and poverty plus social, and religious reasons were induced by the lack of government in the surrounding areas. All the interviewees asserted that the lack of economic prospects, which was a result of the non-existent government, caused people to join the organization as it provided them with a way to earn an income:

> Some of the factor we should keep in mind is the fact that this region is a periphery of each of the four countries in the area. The people leaving in this area have been unaffected by the development activities and economic growth taking place in more central regions of the respective countries. The absence of the state in the affected areas allows terrorists to administer them easily.

It is of utmost importance to recognize that those living in the peripheral areas of the LCBC region are more likely to have similar socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic ties between them than with their respective countries. Furthermore, a 2017 United Nation Development Program UNDP report highlighted the fact that "the path to extremism in Africa often originates in peripheral regions where multidimensional poverty is higher than the national average. Individuals in the Journey to Extremism voluntary group are likely to be those from the poorest communities in the national context, with the lowest levels of education and limited livelihood opportunities. The report also stated that feeling a sense of "relative deprivation", those living in the periphery are more susceptible to extremist recruitment "a

sense of grievance towards, and limited confidence in government is perhaps an unsurprising corollary to this pattern of life experience. Political marginalization is a further critical dimension of the overall macro-level environment conducive to violent extremism". (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

Porous Borders and Shared Language Facilitated Boko Haram's Spread Across LCBC

Buzan and Waever emphasize that regional security interdependence is of utmost importance, as security issues, threats, and terrorism are generally transferred within a limited area. They define regional security as the level at which states, or other entities are connected in such a way that their security cannot be seen as separate. The African Regional Security Complex Theory suggests that interstate security dynamics in Africa are frequently the result of domestic dynamics, such as refugee movements, expulsion of foreign citizens, and civil wars (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The borders between Nigeria and Niger Republic measure more than 1,500 kilometres in length, while those with Cameroon and Chad measure over 1,900 kilometres and 85 kilometres respectively. In particular, the border with Niger runs through Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe and Borno States, constituting a distinct risk for the already fragile security of Niger. In addition, cross-border armed incursion is not a novel occurrence among the countries in the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) due to substantial areas with inadequate governance. This lack of regulation has enabled the proliferation of armed groups and bandits, creating vast ungoverned spaces that offer Boko Haram members and other criminals' easy access to various countries with limited control points. Consequently, the porous borders in the northern parts of Nigeria, combined with the cultural affinities among the Nigerian Hausas, Kanuris and other native languages and their counterparts in other LCBC countries, have enabled Boko Haram insurgents to move across the borders with relative ease and carry out their activities without obstacle. (Oyewole, 2015; Samuel & Odunayo, 2019). It can be affirmed that the historical and ethnic ties of the individuals in the Lake Chad region can be traced back to pre-colonial times. As an example, the Kanem-Borno empire, which covered a large area encompassing Chad, Nigeria, and Niger republic, was established in the said region. Moreover, the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the

Kanuri people have managed to transcend the boundaries of the previously mentioned countries.(Barikindo, 2016) to an extent that cultural and linguistic ties of the Kanuri people became so strong that the actual nationality of the inhabitants of the region cannot be easily identified. This was exploited by Boko Haram who used this to their benefit by recruiting and training new members. This viewpoint was further corroborated by many of the interviewees.

Boko Haram Recruits Members Through Force and Religious Doctrinal Propaganda.

Although, Boko Haram has been widely known for their use of violent attacks and by their advanced military tactics, the militants however, changed their strategies over the time when they acknowledged importance of propaganda. They have consistently devoted time and resources to the dissemination of their messages to their targeted audience and public through videos, social media, and press interviews. The early period of these propaganda messages was characterized in denouncing Westernization and the democratic secular system as being un-Islamic, and to encourage Muslims to avoid them. This period began in 2009, when the group's leader Muhammad Yusuf was in charge, and the communicating tool was mainly preachings and religious sermons.

However, once Abubakar Shekau assumed leadership in 2010, the group adopted a more militarized approach (Mohammed, 2014a). In most times, Shekau or another leader within the organization would disseminate communications predominantly in Hausa, Kanuri, or Arabic. When there is any attack occurred, the spokesperson would emerge to take responsibility for an that attack and claim ownership. Additionally, the insurgents also use social media to recruit new members or raise money for their operations, which includes the propagation of violent ideologies and jihadist sermons. Sometimes, the group use YouTube to broadcast its activities as a way of threatening people with messages of fear to force the Nigerian government to concede to its demands. The propaganda campaign has been through phases as the insurgents changed their tactics over the years. For example, the period prior to 2009 was defined by the teachings of the group's leader, Muhammad Yusuf, who vocally opposed Western education and democratic secular society, engaging in debates with other religious scholars on the topics of Westernization, democracy, and secularism. This was seen as a low-profile, mostly harmless period of the group's activity, with the exception of occasional clashes with Nigerian police. During this time, the group had yet to gain any

significant notoriety in the academic realm prior to the uprising of 2009. (Mohammed, 2014b), but it is believed that Yusuf, the leader of the group, has been successful in gaining the favour of the younger generation, many of whom had migrated to Maiduguri in Borno State and joined Yusuf's Mosque and school, where they were taught ideological principles. (Olojo, 2013). Following the leadership change in 2010, when Abubakar Shekau assumed control of the group, the style of propaganda employed by the group changed significantly. It began to use videos to threaten people, as well as to radicalize and recruit individuals to join, many of whom were young boys and girls. The group presented itself as a powerful and destructive force; this was evident in the attack on Baga town in Borno State, which was reported by Amnesty International, and Shekau published a video in response which was intended to both scare Nigerians and convince group members that they were strong and that the establishment of a caliphate in Nigeria was imminent. This has been reinforced by some interviewees who reported that the group adopted a more aggressive propaganda style after Shekau took control.:

> "People in Borno and Yobe are learned; millions have memorized the Holy Qurán but not all of them have the knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence. Therefore, what the Boko Haram elements are doing is to corrupt the real teaching of Islam and preach using the local dialect, quoting the verses of the Qurán but interpreting it wrongly to suit their goal of misleading the locals; hence making indoctrination very easy for them. The poor locals see them as their brothers because they speak their language". So, it can be said that Boko Haram ideology spread through indoctrination, preaching, violent extremism and propaganda".

Other participants conceded the fact that the group's past leader late Muhammad Yusuf, had used the vacuum left by the government in the rural areas to gather supporters. The late leader was able to mobilize and empower hundreds of youths. They reported that:

> "Muhamad Yusuf used his preaching strategy to gather the youths and helped provided them with sources of livelihood. For example, there was a time when he bought dozens of commercial Gulf Volkswagen cars, motorcycles, wheelbarrows and other empowerment tools and shared them to his followers at a giveaway and friendly conditions. With that initiative, he killed two birds with a stone because the followers saw him as a messiah and for that they remained loyal to him" "He was also a preacher with a sweet tongue capable of changing the

perception of anyone that went close to him. He preached in different mosques in different towns for a long period of time".

Along with propaganda, Boko Haram also use force recruitment strategy to employ more members. There are numerous examples of forced recruitment from various villages they have captured, as well as from people they have kidnapped. Notable cases have included the abduction of 278 Chibok girls, as well as many others which are known in the news over the years. According to a report released in 2015 by Amnesty International, Boko Haram has used torture to maintain control, coerced numerous women and girls into marriage, and employed child soldiers by force. In some cases, civilians were presented with the option to be part of the group or face death (Amnesty International, 2015; Kulungu, 2019).

Assessment of the Collective Approach in Combating Boko Haram Militants

The collective response to the Boko Haram crisis serves as a crucial measure for the countries in the LCBC region to not only recover from the destruction of the pass years, but also, more significantly, to provide their citizens with economic, political, and social opportunities. Evidently, this was established in a report produced by the American government in 2012. The report claimed that the concept of efficient counterinsurgency requires a comprehensive tactic that merges and coordinates political, security, legal, economic, developmental, and psychological actions in order to create a holistic aimed at weakening the insurgents and enhance the government's popularity among the public (United States. Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

It is important to highlight that, the affected countries were first reluctant to lunch a crackdown on Boko Haram in the early days of the violence breakout for either fear of repercussion or due to limited capabilities. This is understandable, as most of the interviewees concurred that the collective joint forces together with the external support brought some dividends and achieved successes in their fight against Boko Haram. Collaboration has enabled the collective forces to acquire knowledge from each other, promoted the concept of transnational unity and improved tactical synchronization, especially when the authorities were unable to defend their own territories as series of cross-border strikes became unbearable over the LCBC region. According to one Nigerian high-ranking

military personnel, who was one of the interviewees of this inquiry, "Our forces are learning how to work together and coordinate better:

> "Militarily each country has launched a military operation to contain it within its border. For example, Nigeria has operations Zama Lafiya, Lafiya Dole, etc.". The same has been expressed by an academician and expert on Boko Haram; "Individually, they have all been trying to fight the insurgency elements in their countries and patrol their borders".

The Cameroonian journalist and academician that were consulted for this study expressed their support for this opinion. They both revealed that:

> In the case of Cameroon, there has been the creation of several military bases, the recruitment of new soldiers, capacity building of former soldiers and other gendarmes, and many other strategies that have remained secret.

However, one military officer from Niger republic added some economic measures taken by Niger's government. He informed that:

> "The state has taken action to address it. These measures include military intervention, the demobilization of the sect's movement. the political settlement of internal conflicts, as well as the revival of the economy and public services".

It is evident from the responses above that, the authorities in the LCBC region initially attempted to tackle Boko Haram crisis individually by strengthening their borders in an effort to prevent the Boko Haram insurgency from crossing over. However, by 2015 it became clear for them that these measures were not successful and thus, the MNJTF was established with the purpose of counter terrorism and safeguarding the LCBC borders. The MNJTF forces work in collaboration with other regional operations, such as Operation Restore Order and Civilian Joint Task Force CJTF in Nigeria. While the borders being secured, the countries are expected to focus on chasing out Boko Haram from their respective territories. The emergence of Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 as the Nigerian president has also been a pivotal factor in the collective fight against Boko Haram, with the Nigerian federal government relocating the Military Command and Control to Maiduguri immediately after he was sworn in as president. Furthermore, President Buhari undertook diplomatic visits to Niger, Chad,

and Cameroon to devise a strategy for the reinforcement of the MNJTF to effectively combat the insurgents (Onapajo, 2017). Many of the interview participants praised the accomplishments of the MNJTF forces in regard to alliance to combat a common enemy, cooperating in intelligence-sharing, gradually dismantling the insurgents' camps, neutralizing and causing some Boko Haram combatants to surrender, and helping the gradual return of the Internally Displaced Persons IDPs to their homes. However, it could be suggested that the success in attempting to defeat Boko Haram may only be limited to military operations. This is the opinion of some interview participants, who argued for the need for more effective counterinsurgency policies that include political and economic aspects. They expressed their worries that the Boko Haram crisis has lasted more than a decade with minimal signs of success. As an example, one of the participants stated that:

> "The counter-insurgency measures implemented collectively have had mixed results, in the sense that they have been unable to defeat Boko Haram at the same time, they have been able to circumscribe the insurgencies in pockets of territories. We need to go back to the drawing and see how effective we can manage the counterinsurgency operation. For now, there is no clear roadmap as to how to end the nearly 12-year-old insurgency. I hope to see a renewed commitment on the side of Nigeria in terms of funding and leading the war".

Despite this, it is important to acknowledge the impressive accomplishments that LCBC achieved through a collaborative effort in the fight against Boko Haram, specifically in regard to military operations. The formation of the MNJTF forces alone can be considered a remarkable achievement as it helped in uniting the affected countries' forces which eventually became major factor in attaining a number of victories against the insurgents such as:

1. **Pushing Back the Insurgents and Regaining lost Territories.**

With the help of the local security arrangements, the insurgent group has been pushed back from the major towns in the affected countries and concentrated in Sambisa Forest. Most notably, the recapture of fourteen (14) local governments in Borno State of Nigeria previously under Boko Haram control, the liberation of areas still held by the group, and the freeing of hostages. In addition, the MNJTF has been instrumental in the reduction of

bombings from 2000 in 2015 to 573 in 2018, as well as preventing attacks on civilians. The activation of Operation Gama Aiki (Operation Complete the Job) in 2016 has further added to the successes of the MNJTF, leading to the surrender of many Boko Haram members and the neutralization of Boko Haram fighters in Cameroon. The efforts of the MNJTF have also contributed to decrease displacement as many IDPs returned to their homes (Alufoge & Duruji, 2020). These achievements are crucial in reducing the operational capacity of the insurgent group, disrupting their activities, and providing a more secure environment for local populations. By pushing back, the insurgents and regaining lost territories, the MNJTF contributed not only to the military aspect of the conflict but also to the broader goals of regional stability, peace-building efforts, and the protection of civilians who have been badly affected by the insurgency.

2. Splitting Boko Haram Insurgents into Two Factions

The increased counterinsurgency measures applied by the member countries and efforts made by the MNJTF forces were becoming unbearable to the Insurgents to an extent that the group began to have internal conflicts among the leadership. When the insurgents were defeated and lost almost all the controlled areas in, discontent grew among the rebels. Subsequently, the ISIS central command ordered the group to stop using women and children suicide bombers as well as refrain from mass killings of civilians, however, Shekau refused to obey the orders. As Bukarti noted, the main reason of the crisis was on the basis of interpretations and practices. While Al-Barnawi faction opposed the use of women in violence, Shekau's faction allows and encourages such actions. As a result, internal friction, and long-standing ideological and operational disagreements between the top leaders of the group—Mamman Nur and Barnawi on the one hand and Shekau on the other hand reached a turning point especially on the matter of using women for violent attacks, and bombings (Bulama Bukarti & Bryson, 2018). By August 2016, a significant development occurred as the insurgents were divided into two factions, with ISIS having declared a new leader for its West Africa Province. This has a great ramification for the insurgents' chances for survival, as Shekau refused to relinquish his leadership, causing the emergence of two factions one being ISIS-West Africa ISWAP, while the other is Jama'atu Ahli Sunnah. Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi was consequently proclaimed the Wali, or leader, of the ISWAP group, while Shekau maintained

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his position as head of the other faction. It was reported that al-Barnawi is the eldest son of Boko Haram's founding father, Muhammad Yusuf. (Bulama Bukarti & Bryson, 2018) Shekau refused to recognize Al-Barnawi's appointment and maintained control of his own faction, prompting Barnawi to break away from Shekau. Subsequently, the two factions initiated a conflict of verbal communication, each displaying their own interpretations of Islamic law. The Shekau camp argued that it is necessary to target anyone who does not follow Boko Haram's particular interpretation of Islam, while Barnawi's side disagreed with the idea of killing non-combatants, especially women and children.

Conclusion

The results of the research findings showed the level of success attained by the collective effort in the fight against Boko Haram, particularly in the early days of 2015. All interviewees agreed that the achievements were exclusively from military operations, which led to the insurgents being pushed back and cornered in the Sambisa Forest away from towns. It is evident from the respondents' remarks that the affected countries paid much attention to the use of military measures to address the Boko Haram issue, while putting little or no effort into economic and political solutions to the crisis. It is not surprising then that the conflict intensified, and the authorities were unable to ensure lasting peace in the region.

Certainly, the collaborative efforts of the countries involved have led to a more positive outcome in comparison to the years preceding the collective action. Despite this, it is not possible to eradicate the threats that insurgent groups like Boko Haram pose through the use of military tactics only. Studies have proven that these groups, which conduct attacks on civilians to reach their desired audience and employ guerilla warfare methods, need an integrated approach including security, economic and political measures for a long-term solution that will tackle the underlying social issues in the region which have caused displacement of millions of people (D. J. Kilcullen, 2006b). The success of the military operations would have been even greater had certain factors impeding collective action not been present. Examples of this include the lack of trust between Nigeria and its neighbouring countries, Chad and Cameroon, which has had a negative impact on the commitment of the nations affected. This can be seen in 2015 when the MNJTF force intended to eradicate Boko Haram by December 2015. Despite this, the Chief of Defence Staff General Olonisakin

reported to his Chadian counterpart General Seyni Garba at the Defence Headquarters in Abuja that, by November 2015, Chadian troops which were meant to be part of the 8,700 MNJTF troops had still not been deployed. This showed that Chad and Cameroon were yet to fully commit to the collective approach. (Albert, 2017). Overall understanding among the interview respondents is that MNJTF forces have achieved success despite the challenges they faced. The forces have tried to combat the insurgents from perpetrating their evils across the border towns and villages of the affected countries. They have reduced the upsurge of the menace in the Lake Chad region to some extent. However, it's important to note that sustaining these gains requires ongoing efforts, including addressing the root causes of the conflict, ensuring effective governance, and promoting socio-economic development in the affected areas.

Recommendations

Using the information obtained from this study and the data collected and analysed, it is necessary to provide recommendations for all the concerned authorities and policy makers to enhance their capacity to restore peace, stability, and prosperity to the LCB region. The recommendations are timely and sufficient to contribute to the ongoing collective counterinsurgency efforts in the region.

First recommendation is that the root causes of this insurgency purely ideological, and it is very difficult to change ideology and believe of people especially when it comes to religion. Boko Haram ideology has existed for long time especially in north-eastern Nigeria and many other states in northern Nigeria thanks to the religious freedom that allowed the insurgents the freedom to preach and recruit people in Nigeria and its neighbours. Therefore, there is serious need from the authorities and religious leaders to invest heavily in counter Boko Haram ideology programs in the entire LCB countries. Religious leaders have a bigger role to play here and of course authorities and stakeholders must support in this. I recommend that authorities should regulate preaching programs in the region. Authorities should check every preaching program including Friday sermons, public preaches, weekly or monthly preaches, teachings of religious books and any other forms of public preaching. Those preachers, their

books, sermons, and papers should be screened and make sure they are in line with the true Islamic teachings and not encouraging violence and extremist views.

Second recommendation is that the authorities of the regions and the leadership of MNJTF need to review the current policies and consider engaging in the alternative measures which encompass security, political and economic approaches in order to achieve better results in their counter-terrorism efforts. There is need for the institutions involved in counter-insurgency to have a strong relationship and understanding so that healthy and more consistent plan could be developed. Such relationships are crucial to the success of counterinsurgency.

Third recommendation is related to a developmental agenda -especially to the affected areas- with economic and infrastructural facilities so that IDPs and refugees can go home. In addition, there is serious need to ensure preventing future insurgencies in the region and the countries. Leaders and stakeholders must focus on policies and initiatives that aim at development strategies and tactics that invest in the long-term goal of conflict prevention. It is my opinion that security threat will not change much unless political authorities are willing to resolve it by making a paradigm shift to assure better comprehensive and lasting successes.

Fourth recommendation focus on the lack of enough cooperation by the public to the security forces in their effort to fight the insurgents, hence, further studies are also required to find ways on how the authorities can gain support and cooperation of the public.

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