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**BILATERAL RELATIONS AND THE CHALLENGES OF MULTINATIONAL JOINT TASK  
FORCE IN WEST AFRICA**

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***Abstract***

*The study examines issues and challenges of security community with a particular focus on the Multinational Joint Task Forces (MJTF) in combating Boko Haram insurgency in West Africa. The choice to examine these armed forces against Boko Haram is significant for a number of reasons. One, the threat of Boko Haram insurgency in West Africa emanates from the inherited irregular and poorly delineated colonial borders. Two, armed forces are deployed to safeguard the territorial integrity and national borders of the affected countries against external aggression. Third, issues of Boko Haram insurgency prominently features in the bilateral relations of Nigeria and its neighbouring states. Fourth, the government of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad established MNJTF as a form of collective security architecture against Boko Haram insurgency. Despite the establishment of MJTF, Boko Haram continues to wreck devastations in the Northeast Nigeria and other neighbouring states. Utilising secondary sources of data, the study concludes defective bilateral relations of Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBCs) countries adversely affect the functionality of MNJTF. It is therefore recommended that Lake Chad Basin Countries (LCBCs) need to correct problematic bilateral relations in order to successfully combat Boko haram menace in the West Africasub-region.*

*Keywords: Security, Collective Security, Bilateral Relations, Multinational Joint Task Force.*

**Introduction**

The operations of Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) since its creation in 1998 and re-creation in 2014 have expanded to track Boko Haram's violent extremism in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger (Musa, 2013). The MNJTF has helped to minimize the corrosive attacks of Boko Haram and has rendered the group toothless bulldogs with limited capacity to attacks Nigerians in the

Northeast. The MNJTF, following those successes in its mission against Boko Haram faces several challenges in combating violent extremism (Onuoha, 2014). It is worth remembering that Boko Haram's explicit objectives is to destabilize the regimes of the countries affected, enforce Sharia law and create a Caliphate in their region of control. Commanding the attention of people especially youths as foot soldiers is made easier by the extreme level of poverty, unemployment and religious fundamentalism among the youth in the polity. Egoistic political ambitions, porous borders, the acquisition and use of illicit wealth, poor handling of crises and inadequate determination to check the sect's excesses also prolonged the menace of violent attacks in the Northeast Nigeria. The choice to examine issues and challenges of security community with a particular focus on Multinational Joint Task Forces (MJTF) in West Africa is significant for a number of reasons. One, the threat of Boko Haram insurgency in West Africa emanates from the inherited irregular and poorly delineated colonial borders. Two, armed forces are deployed to safeguard the territorial integrity and national borders of the affected countries against external aggression.

Third, issues of Boko Haram insurgency prominently features in the bilateral relations of Nigeria and its neighboring states. Fourth, the government of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad established MNJTF as a form of collective security architecture against Boko Haram insurgency. Despite the fact that governments of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger have significantly curbed Boko Haram's operations, the sect still lingers to launch intermittent attacks (Kindzeka, 2014).

The study concludes that defective bilateral relations of Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBCs) countries adversely affect the functionality of MNJTF. It is therefore recommended that Lake Chad Basin Countries (LCBCs) need to correct problematic bilateral relations in order to successfully combat Boko Haram's menace in the West Africa sub-region. It is argued that to completely annihilate Boko Haram terrorist, bilateral relations must be straightened to ameliorate the challenges that confront the Multinational Joint Task Force in the quest to safeguard peace and security in West Africa.

### **Bilateral Relations of LBC Countries and the Challenges of Multinational Joint Task Force**

At the beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria saw it as a domestic imbroglio that does not require the mediation of other state-actors. Neighbouring states of Lake Chad Basin saw it from that point of view as well (Ifabiyi, 2013). Despite the fact that the MNJTF was set up as far back as 1994, it

didn't assume any dynamic role in combating Boko Haram insurgency with the contribution of different countries until 2012 – four years after the Boko Haram sect unleashed violent and psychological assaults on Nigeria polity (Kindzeka, 2014). The historical backdrop of security issues propels other states of LCB to join the missions to keep the peace and stability of West Africa. If not for the internationalisation of the violent attacks, Nigeria and other proximate would have commonly not had anything to do with each other in finding lasting solution to the issue of Boko Haram. Consequently, the established MNJTF does not command the needed quality of trust between the LCB states (Ifabiyi,2013).

Nigeria finds it unpalatable and disturbing with the manner in which Chad encouraged the inflow of monstrous arms and ammunition into its territory, particularly from France and US. This made Nigeria be doubtful of Chad's innocence concerning the mayhem caused by the insurgent's group. Be that as it may, the most upsetting issue to Nigeria was the help that Chad got from Mohammad Ghadafi's Libya. The Libyan chief was known in the course of his life to be a genuine companion of Chad. Until his demise, the Libyan head progressed in the direction of inciting Islamic movement in Nigeria; utilizing diverse Islamic groups, most particularly a Libyan Muslim association known as Jam'yat ad-Da'wa al-Islamiya (Hazen and Horner, 2007). The security difficulty compels Nigeria to back United Nations Resolution Council 1973 (of 17 March 2011) which approved every vital measure to ensure citizens' protection in the Libyan crises including the need to cripple the hostility acts of the Libyan armed force. NATO's execution of the Resolution led to the demise of Ghadafi on 20 October 2011 (Nte, 2011).

Chad assumed a spectator role as the Boko Haram sect inflicts agony on the borders of West Africa: claimed to be uninformed of how the agitators utilized its territory as refuge for damaging Nigeria's stability. In December 2011, the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan acted on Section 305(1) of the 1999 Constitution to close Nigeria's borders with all its contiguous neighbors aside from Benin Republic (Onuoha, 2013). In 2012, Nigeria's international borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger were shut, in view of allegations that Boko Haram individuals were utilizing these nations as hideout for violent destruction in Nigeria. There was another border shutdown between Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad in May 2013 (Kindzeka, 2014).

The fourth case was recorded in February 2014 when Nigeria completely shut down its border zone with Cameroon in Adamawa State as a major step in the direction to conquer the violent exercises of the Islamic fundamentalist in the North-east. It was essentially intended to end illegal inflow of jihadist in and out

of the nation (This day, 2014). In spite of counterterrorism measure, Boko Haram insurgent still continues unabated. The alternative was to work together with the nations to deal decisively with the Boko Haram insurgency.

As a result of Nigeria's constant accusation that its Francophone neighbors were supporting Boko Haram, Cameroon and Chad began to take military offensives against individuals from the group in their nations (Stohl and Tuttle, 2009). The other spurring factor was that the violent extremist had begun to launch some shrewd assaults on residents of these francophone nations. Boko Haram reacted by including these nations among its foes. This implied the internationalization of the insurgency as it crossed borders to all the LCB nations (Albert and Danjibo, 2004). The nations currently turned out to be progressively prepared to counter terrorism cooperatively with Nigeria in the MNJTF. As it were, the MNJTF as a security network didn't appear to help Nigeria essentially; however it was to stand as collective's armed force to safeguard LCB countries against a common enemy (Liolio, 2013).

The old doubts between the nations still exist in spite of the presence of the MNJTF. Nigeria doesn't trust either Cameroon or Chad; the nations also are suspicious of Nigeria. This most likely obstructs the dedication of the nations to the operation of the multilateral armed force (Agbiilboa, 2013). An instance of disunity among the LCB countries was evident in the decision of MNJTF to target December 2015 to completely get rid of Boko Haram sect, but by November 2015, Chadian soldiers were yet to be deployed as a major aspect of around 8,700 soldiers that should make up the MNJTF. In his report on deployed multinational armed forces, Olonisakin only mentioned that Nigerien soldiers have been deployed against Boko Haram insurgency without mentioning soldiers from Chad and Cameroon. This is concomitant to lack of commitment from side of Cameroon and Chad (Information Nigeria, 2015).

Nigeria additionally frowns with Cameroon for pursuing Boko Haram sect directly into the Nigerian territory. To Nigeria, it is a violation of the territorial integrity. The nation would prefer a circumstance where the Islamic extremists are pursued to the borderlines and the Nigerian soldiers are left to complete the annihilation of the sect. Language differences among the soldiers in the MNJTF are another clog in the wheel of battling Boko Haram insurgency (Roggio, 2015). Nigerian Armed Forces are not French speakers and that other LCB armed forces are francophone makes strategic planning and operation a difficult thing. A security network incapable of self-funding is certifiably not solid and reasonable. This is one of the principal issues considered by the MNJTF today (Eji, 2017).

Security network in Africa is confronted with similar issue that forestalled either the AU or RECs (ECOWAS and ECCAS) from doing what the MNJTF is currently doing: protecting the nations from physical and psychological oppressors. In February 2015, the Institute for Security Studies reviewed the operationalization effort of the MNJTF. It was discovered that while the establishment of MNJTF was prepared for the endorsement of the Peace and Security Council of the AU, adequate finance remained the central challenge of the mission. To proffer solution, the AU intended to address the issue of finance in March 2015 (Institute for Security Studies 2015).

The Daily Post paper of 28 July 2016 announced a similar issue. Like the AU, the UN was deficient of enough assets to aid the efficiency of the multilateral security forces. This more likely than not hindered effective military activities or restricted the degree to which the MNJTF could go (Albert,2009).

### **Challenges of Multinational Joint Task Force: Offshoot of Defective Bilateral Relations**

That the MNJTF is a fraction of a more extensive reaction to Boko Haram insurgency renders it difficult to assess. Accomplishment against the devilish insurgency group around Lake Chad Basin depends to a huge degree on the approaches of affected states themselves, of which joint activities are just a single part. The MNJTF scored a few triumphs against activists of the Islamic sect (Assanvo et al 2016). It has on some occasions liberated people captured in the territories controlled by insurgent groups. Through cooperation, Lake Chad Basin states have enjoyed the opportunity to learn from one another, and work with the guideline and framework for transnational collaboration against the Islamic militant group (Thurson, 2017). Victories have, notwithstanding, been lost in a short while due to the capacity of Boko Haram sect to adjust with the inconsistent activities of joint security forces. The somewhat absence of ensuring security in the courses of operations affords the jihadist groups the opportunity to pull and reinforce their attacks (Audu and Manag,2017).

Contradictions among authorities of the four nations about whether Boko Haram is a local or a basically Nigeria's peculiar issue is one major cause for the protracted insurgency (Buchanan and Knoope 2017). Numerous senior military actors and eyewitnesses in Chad, Niger and Cameroon consider their states to be experiencing inadvertent blow-back; a difficulty that generally stems, in their view, from Nigeria's ineptitude (Cave and David, 2016). Conversely, a portion of their Nigerian partners highlight the foothold that Boko Haram has gained in neighbouring nations as a sign of seriousness on the part of security agents,

officers and other officials. The blame game among the countries (Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon) undermines sub-regional solidarity and its ability to contain the insurgency (Thurson, 2017).

The differing danger that Islamic extremist present to the four nations likewise obstructs lucid regional partnership. In spite of the fact that the four nations are battling a shared adversary, each country has sought after an alternative arrangement of achieving the objective of conquering the insurgency, which are themselves liable to change (Falode, 2016). The Nigerian government have been combating extremist that controls vast areas of the nation's northeast. Interestingly, Cameroon managed the trans-border threat, and in some occasion thwarts a very much arranged and organised assaults on its border zones (Jacob and Akpan, 2015). As far as it concerns, Chad has concentrated on occasional encounters on the lake and securing flexible border routes through Cameroon. Niger at diverse times, attempted to contain Boko haram attacks along its border areas and, at times launched bigger offensives against the fundamentalist. The unique targets muddle the multilateral reaction as officials from every nation were on the mission with diverse strategies that lack the harmony to drive home the desired result – from restricted containment task in one country to continuous counter-terrorism in another (Kouma, 2017).

The deficient operation of MNJTF additionally mirrors the four nations' fairly whimsical attitudes to battling Boko Haram. In the post 2016 and 2017 tasks, effort to launch a counter-attacks on the Boko Haram melted away for almost two years. ISWAP's resurgence in late 2018 prompted another more coordinated reaction, with the drawn out 2019 mission hailed by concerned observers and MNJTF officials as a deviation from past short-lived efforts. But it is far-fetched whether that activity did in certainty speak to a move in the right direction for a more efficient participation, evident in intelligence sharing and joint operations (Obialor and Ugochukwu, 2017). The reality of defective bilateral relations became glaring in the unilateral Chadian counter-offensive strikes in 2020 against Boko Haram insurgency and the swift action the Chadian President Idris Déby without the affected neighbouring Lake Chad Basin Countries delineate the steady troubles states have in cooperating (Okolie and Ugwuweze2015).

There are difficulties with both hardware and work force. Disagreements about financing have regularly hindered the conveyance of vital equipment's for operations. At the point when such hardware shows up, MNJTF ill-prepared for arrangements and utilization because of poor internal communications (Robert,

2014). Although affected states have pledged a fragment of their armed forces to the MNJTF to battle Boko Haram, they have often times failed to send them into MNJTF units in their particular divisions for continued period. The aftermath is the inconsistent number of armed forces that make up the MNJTF's troop. At the point when MNJTF recover an area from Boko Haram, they lack the teething capacity to sustain the victories as insurgent groups have frequently won back lost ground. As noted by senior officer in the MNJTF, the armed forces experienced helplessly poor equipment (Tar and Mustapha, 2017).

Lake Chad Basin Countries and top military officers have their fair share of blame in the dysfunctionality of MNJTF as they have often times refused to share counter-insurgency plans for effective multilateral arrangements. In spite of the presence of an intelligence unit, supported by the UK, the U.S. furthermore, France, and staffed by Western and territorial officials, information sharing between MNJTF is apparently poor (Zagga et al 2017). Obviously hence, in mid-2019 the top military officer of the MNJTF beckon on the AU convince Lake Chad states to release vital information that can help surmount insurgency to the MNJTF. Even past intelligence sharing and collaboration within the MNJTF were inconsistent and uncoordinated. The coalition of states against Boko Haram Insurgency is limited to joint operations without integrating their diverse strategies. As a result, the armed forces don't generally do what they have consented as responsive collaboration against the insurgency (Tar and Mustapha,2017).

The MNJTF has hardly been able influenced the actions of troops deployed in it. Since the beginning of assignments against Boko Haram, human right abuse by security forces have been reported and, in some occasion instigated community support for militancy (Obialor and Ugochukwu, 2017). Report on human right abuses in the Lake Chad Basin shows that military personnel are responsible for about 40 per cent of abuse in the zone occupied by Boko Haram. The difficult thing is stating the number of security actors working under the MNJTF. MNJTF. Study by the UN Development Program alludes abuses alludes by transnational security actors as an essential factor driving youths into violent groups (Cave and David, 2016).

Even more widely, MNJTF has not been able to properly monitor or improve human right protection in its areas of operation. Diverse reasons account for the weakened performance of MNJTF: its staffing levels are unnecessarily low and resources excessively very few to try and think about going into the field; headway of a typical civilian-military contact office has been hampered; (Zagga et

al 2017) it has encountered resistance from the four countries' military institutions; and outfitted armed forces have planted disorder by dismembering themselves from MNJTF in an unprepared manner as ordered by the national headquarters. In 2019, the MNJTF made some progress with the help of African Union in sorting out framework of handling captured Boko Haram warriors and shared database of those surrendered. Whether or not these guidelines heed a positive result is difficult to articulate (Obialor and Ugochukwu, 2017).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The effort by West African states to combat Boko Haram insurgency by forming Multinational joint task force is a aftermath of the resolution of African states that African problems can only be solve by Africans and the solution created by the Africans. It has dawn on African states that African device solution to solving their own problems would be more potent as it would be fashioned from the knowledge of the local terrain that surround, reinforce, and drive the problem arising from the territory of African Countries. To the international institutions, the MJTNF is another security regimen but to Africans it has formed the reality of African government to always rise to the occasion as there is no help that can be timely and accurate as the ones that come from within Africa. The MNJTF has made some giant strides. They recovered the territory under the siege of the Islamic fundamentalist.

However, Heads of States in Africa must collectively channel their energies to the course of combating Boko Haram insurgency. It is important that politicisation of the multilateral security agency will have a negative effect on the functionality of the security forces. Working according to plan is pivotal. It would enable efficiency that ensures wiping out Boko Haram insurgency in West Africa. The African states need to also create a channel by which ideologies of the Boko Haram sect is changed.

The killing of the terrorist though could spell apparent victory for the countries; it is imperative for African states to start DE radicalizing the mind of their populace. Ideologies are powerful. They continue from generation to generation and as constructivist would think- actions of actors in the international system are governed, directed and propelled by ideas, notion and thought. The underlining ideologies of Boko Haram insurgency must be fought to the latter. The effective collaboration of the African states that form Multi National Joint Task Force must become solid. The Boko Haram sect is really taking advantage of globalisation and the negative effect of globalisation has become horrendous and enormous for a single to state to combat. This calls for the security effort of all



African states to ensure that the West Africa and African region become a safe place for the populace.

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