



Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram – Reflections

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December 2020

Background

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is a joint military effort created by countries of the Chad Basin - Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Benin (without sending military forces) to fight Boko Haram and the ISIS affiliate - West African Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), which threaten the stability of these countries and the entire region. The deterioration of the security situation in the Chad Basin (an area of about 25,000 square kilometers), its humanitarian and developmental consequences, are the motive for the set-up of the joint military force.¹

The history of MNJTF begins in 1994 when it was established with headquarters located in the city of Baga in the state of Borno in Nigeria. The force was made up mainly of Chadian and Nigerian forces. Its main mission was to curb arms smuggling around the border of Lake Chad. The mandate of the force was extended in 1998 to all cross-border security concerns among Nigeria, Chad and Niger.

The proliferation and intensification of Boko Haram's terrorist attacks in Nigeria and in parallel Ansaru's attacks (a branch that split from Boko Haram due to ideological differences) have forced decision-makers in Nigeria, Chad and Niger to reverse the force's designation from dealing with common cross-border security issues in the Lake Chad region and expand it.²

In April 2012, the mandate of the MNJTF was expanded to include anti-subversive combat (COIN-counterinsurgency). The force, after undergoing necessary adjustments, was activated from July 30, 2015 as a combined military force against Boko Haram with the participation of military forces from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Benin and Nigeria under a U.S. mandate.³ The structure chosen was a 'coalition of the willing', i.e., a model of security and military cooperation that 'suffers' from the

¹ The African Union (AU) is the entity that provides support to the multinational force in the field of financial administration.

² Ansaru - Vanguard for the protection of Muslims in Black Africa - an organization that split from Boko Haram on January 1, 2012 the organization focused on kidnapping Westerners and conducting ransom negotiations, the organization is affiliated with the Al-Qaeda branch of the Maghreb (AQIM). The (Lokoja) commander of the Nigerian army, Khalid al-Barnawi, was given a \$ 5 million cash prize by the Americans, and for the capture of the organization's leader, see the link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-violence-idUSKCN0X10NK>.

³ For more on the MNJTF, see the MNJTF website at the link: <https://www.mnjtf-fmm.org/about-mnjtf/organisation/>.

disposition of its members, state dynamic interests, etc. This model, therefore, is subject to lack of funds, inconsistency in the operational agenda resulting from changes in state interests, multiple volatility in positions of the international sponsors, like the EU,⁴ the African Union, the U.S. and others.⁵

From the beginning of 2020, the joint force (about 10,000 fighters) is commanded by the Nigerian general Ibrahim Manu Yusuf.⁶ The headquarters is in Ndjamen, Chad.

To ease operations and prevent sovereignty problems, the combat zone in the region where Boko Haram and other organizations are operating was divided into 4 sectors and each member state was given responsibility for a sector, as follows: Sector 1 (Cameroon) headquartered at Mora; Sector 2 (Chad) headquartered at Baga-Sola; Sector 3 (Nigeria) based in Baga; and Sector 4 (Niger), based in the town of Diffa.

In general, it can be evaluated that the MNJTF, from the very beginning, suffers from structural limitations. The chain of command is weak, even by the standards of multinational forces, because it includes units of national forces that are limited in operating specifically in a cell/sector belonging to their countries as agreed in the force mandate. Each force operates in its sector and may operate outside the borders of the sector, in case of a hot pursuit, up to 25 km beyond the border of the neighboring state.⁷

⁴ This month, on December 12, the European Union provided the Multinational Force, as promised, Command, Control, Communications and Information Systems (C3IS). The training will take place in Chad for Chadian soldiers who will - - (phrase not clear) operate, later, within the sectors of the multinational force. For more information refer to: European Support Continued in Fight Against Boko Haram Insurgency, Second Line Info (20.12.2020). <https://sldinfo.com/2020/12/european-support-continued-in-fight-against-boko-haram-insurgency/>.

⁵ American support for the multinational force is operational - through the deployment of drones from the air base in Niger and Cameroon - and economic: The United States is an important financial contributor. Between 2015 and 2017, the United States contributed a total of \$ 363 million to the MNJTF's terrorist effort.

⁶ Timothy Antigha, General Ude Assumes Duty in MNJTF, Press Release Nigeria (19.8.2018). <https://prnigeria.com/2018/08/19/general-ude-mnjtf-duty/>.

⁷ Babatunde F. Obamamoye, "Counterterrorism, Multinational Joint Task Force and the missing components," *African Identities*, Volume15: Issue 4 (2017) pp. 1-13.

Turning Point

The turning point in the regional and international struggle against Boko Haram was in January 2015, in Baga's attack. Boko Haram fighters surprised and attacked with considerable force the town of Baga (about 10,000 inhabitants), which serves as a commercial junction and a fishing market (from Lake Chad) and the MNJTF headquarters. Boko Haram fighters demolished and burned 620 buildings, including the multinational force headquarters, massacred the local population including dozens of Nigerian soldiers, with a total of – 2000 killed people. According to eyewitnesses, the Nigerian soldiers showed cowardice, while most of them threw their weapons and fled. Attackers seized a great quantity of military equipment, marked a victory over the Army and the federal government representatives and caused a new wave of thousands of refugees who fled the town.⁸

After the attack, Boko Haram spokesman Abi Mos'aab Albernawi explained to the media that the attack on the town stemmed from a desire to damage the Nigerian government's assets and the town, which they believed, is an asset.⁹

The mandate of the multinational force is "to create a safe environment in areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups [...] enable and facilitate the implementation of comprehensive stabilization programs by the LCBC¹⁰ in affected areas, assist in restoring state authority to them and return displaced persons to their homes".¹¹

The Contribution of the Joint Multinational Force

The contribution of the multinational force to its goals is controversial. Along with several military successes against Boko Haram, who lost a large area and bases, suffered many casualties and loss of weapons, Boko Haram, as a learning organization, seems to have strengthened again.¹²

⁸ See link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-30838153>.

⁹ See link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-30987043>.

¹⁰ The LCBC (Lake Chad Basin Commission) is an intergovernmental organization overseeing the use of water and other natural resources in the Chad Basin.

¹¹ AFRICAN UNION (AU), Report of the international efforts to combat the Boko Haram terrorist group, Chairperson of the AU Commission on regional and the way forward, (29.1.2015).

<https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-484-rpt-boko-haram-29-1-2015.pdf>

¹² Since 2019, when the organization began operating in the Chad Basin, more than 100 communities have been destroyed by the organization. - See: Olarewaju Kola, Nigeria: Boko Haram attacks worry political

It can be argued that the success in the battlefield, of a force who fights terrorist and guerrilla organizations is usually measured by the rate of reducing and preventing terrorist attacks. This is not true in the case of Boko Haram, for a variety of reasons.

The first year of operations of the multinational force, in 2015, focused on the establishment of the force and the definition of its mode of operation - a difficult task given that this required diplomatic, national and emotional cooperation between the four member states.

In 2016, the MNJTF recorded several consecutive victories in battles against Boko Haram. A continuous and significant attack was carried out from June to November 2016 around Lake Chad and in the state of Borno - an operation known as Operation Gama Aiki ('finish the work' in Hausa dialect). The military operation included simultaneous collaboration in all four sectors (Baga in Nigeria, Baga-Sola in Chad, Dipafa in Niger and at Mura in Cameroon). At the end, the operation was declared a notable success in the fight against Boko Haram since many hostages were released, certain areas controlled by Boko Haram were liberated, and considerable loss of weapons was inflicted on Boko Haram who also suffered from a wave of defections from its ranks. Another military success was recorded in early November 2016 by the Baga-Sola 2 Battalion, based in western Chad. The attack resulted in the surrender of at least 240 Boko Haram fighters. Between February and May 2016, operations in the 2nd sector based at Mura in Cameroon neutralized many Boko Haram fighters. The force secured the release of hostages, destroyed some of the organization's training camps and seized many weapons.

A report released this year by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) states that the multinational force is succeeding in its operations and occupying territories from Boko Haram, despite budgetary constraints, political problems, technical and logistical difficulties.¹³

A Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) report from October 2020 unequivocally states that the last two years have been the deadliest for the Nigerian military and northeastern residents since 2011.¹⁴

leaders AA (7.11.2019). <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-attacks-worry-political-leaders/1638299>. Note not clear!

¹³ William Assanvo, Jeannine E. A. Abatan, and Aristide Wendyam Sawadogo, "West Africa Report: Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram," *Institute for Security Studies - ISSReport*, issue 19, September 2016. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war19.pdf>.

¹⁴ Monitoring and tracking the State of Security in Nigeria is a body on the Council on Foreign Relations that collects, catalogs and maps violent events in Nigeria based on a weekly review by the Nigerian and international press. See link: <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.

The report points to difficulties in coordination, funding and fortitude at MNJTF headquarters as suspicion and mistrust prevails among the leaders of the countries working against Boko Haram, all due to differences in interests and involvement of foreign powers. Leaders of the countries participating in the joint task force do not hesitate to point out the negative attitude of some of them and state that 'the other partnerships are not doing enough' or 'the military echelon in the countries disagrees on deepening the cooperation required for combat and strives to reduce it to the required minimum' - such atmosphere and mutual suspicion condemn the operation to failure. It turns out that there are countries in the alliance whose sovereignty is more important to them than the common war against Boko Haram and therefore the most important aspect of the war, on the battlefield is neglected: intelligence. No military plan can be executed without preliminary and accurate intelligence. Once the intelligence suffers from lack of coordination and relevancy, units on the battlefield are in fact blind.

Competition between national interests and the rationale for regional cooperation collide, for various reasons; it weakens the multinational force and its efficiency on the one hand, and on the other hand results to a zero-sum game in which the roots of the problems, such as in the Chad Basin, are not identified and persist .

The multinational force, in all sectors, suffers from distrust of the local population. There are several reasons for this: poor communication between them, the disregard for the basic rights of the residents and their ongoing harm. The fact that terrorist attacks have only intensified in recent years and the government presence is still weak convinces the autochtones to not cooperate,¹⁵ Furthermore, despite the promises of the leaders to improve the lives of the inhabitants, the infrastructure, the medical treatment, creating jobs, etc., very little is done in practice, both due to lack of budget and other political priorities. Above all that is the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mistrust between the armies and the autochtones means that civil-military-political coordination is required. To bridge the lack of trust the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) trains the Nigerian forces working against Boko Haram and the 'vigilante groups' of

¹⁵ For more information on the violation of the rights of residents by the military and security forces of Nigeria and Boko Haram, the Human Rights Watch report from 2019 is recommended at the link: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/nigeria>; See also Amnesty International Report: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/nigeria-military-razes-villages-as-boko-haram-attacks-escalate/>.

civilians, who undertake their own control against criminal activities and fight against Boko Haram with official support).¹⁶ As part of the training, focus is given to the issue of attitudes toward citizens and building trust.¹⁷

Can the MNJFT fulfil the mission?

In the international community there is great doubt as to the ability of the MNJTF to deliver the goods. Dissatisfaction with its achievements was expressed on April 10, 2020 by Chadian President Idris Deby, who announced that his army would limit its fighting operations only within Chad's borders and the Sahel. "From today, no Chadian soldiers will take part in a military mission outside Chad ", he said¹⁸ So, what kind of coalition is it?

Relationship Swing: Nigeria-U.S.

U.S.-Nigeria military relations 'suffer' from the U.S. concern for human rights violations by Nigeria's security forces, a concern that prevents U.S. military assistance, intelligence exchange, material supply to Nigeria in its efforts to eradicate Boko Haram. For example, in 2014, the Obama administration blocked the transfer of US produced military helicopters from Israel to Nigeria due to fear of human rights violations in Nigeria. Following the inauguration of President Bukhari in 2015, U.S. security cooperation has grown based on his commitment to the U.S. that it will reduce the violation of the fundamental rights of citizens and investigate any breach.¹⁹ In 2016. the

¹⁶ David Pratten, The Politics of Protection: Perspectives on Vigilantism in Nigeria *GSDRC* (2008).

<https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-politics-of-protection-perspectives-on-vigilantism-in-nigeria/>

¹⁷ See link from July 9, 2019:

<https://www.ng.undp.org/content/nigeria/en/home/presscenter/articles/2019/civilian-joint-task-force--cjtf--members-and-vigilante-groups-tr.html>.

¹⁸ See link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/10/chad-to-stop-participating-in-regional-fight-against-armed-groups> Chad to stop participating in regional fight against armed groups, Aljazeera (10.4.2020).

¹⁹ In 2014, the Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs - Africa, World Health, Global Human Rights And international organizations have held a hearing on the violation of civilian rights in Nigeria by the military and security forces as required by the 1997 Leahy Amendment requiring any U.S. administration to withhold assistance from military units or foreign nationals involved in human rights violations. Nigeria is known for its military and security forces violating basic human rights as a matter of routine. On the state

Obama administration sought congressional approval for the sale of 12 Super-Tucano A-29 attack aircraft to Nigeria. The U.S. administration froze the sale in early 2017, after a Nigerian plane hit a refugee and displaced - camp.²⁰ The Trump administration, which has taken care to erase any achievement or decision of the Obama administration, approved the sale in late 2017, despite opposition from some members of Congress.

An intelligence cooperation and agreement was signed between the United States and Nigeria in 2014.²¹ However, the United States does not provide Nigeria with significant intelligence information for fear that Boko Haram has infiltrated the Nigerian security forces and since Nigerian soldiers tend to defect, trade and even sell weapons and explosives to the organization.²² The U.S. has great doubts about the capabilities of the Nigerian military to effectively operate advanced military equipment due to the phenomenon of corruption as well as the military capability to maintain sophisticated systems.

Summary

A workshop of the multinational force commanders took place on October 22, 2020 in the capital of Chad, N'djamena, with official representatives and experts from the countries involved in the fight to assess and discuss the effectiveness of the joint forces and draw conclusions. The following objectives were agreed upon at the workshop: 1) to deepen the relationship and consult with technical experts and representatives from the combat zones in which the force operates and to take appropriate measures intended on the one hand, deter local communities from providing support and sympathy to Boko Haram and other organizations operating in the area and on the other hand to prevent Boko Haram and ISWAP in recruiting fighters into their ranks from the local population; 2) to plan and design a joint information and communication system in order to

of relations between the United States and Nigeria, see: Congressional Research Service, Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy (September 18, 2020). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33964.pdf>

²⁰ On January 17, 2017, a Nigerian plane accidentally hit the Rann refugee camp, about 170 km from Maiduguri, killing 52 of its residents and injuring about 120. See link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/nigeria-refugee-camp-military-strike-1.3939242>.

²¹ Reuters Staff, U.S. reaches agreement with Nigeria on intelligence sharing, (19.5.2014). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-violence-pentagon-idUSBREA4I0KA20140519>.

²² See: Nigerian Military: Some Officers Selling Arms to Boko Haram (4.9.2016). <https://www.voanews.com/africa/nigerian-military-some-officers-selling-arms-boko-haram>.

prevent extremism in the Chad Basin; 3) offer methodologies and communication channels suitable to disseminate the messages to the targeted local communities.²³

In the workshop, MNJTF Commander General Ibrahim Mano Yusuf emphasized the need for a comprehensive, non-kinetic strategy to complete the kinetic approach in which the great powers operate. The general emphasized that only a combination of the two approaches will change the situation and improve the lives of residents in the Chad Basin area and improve the effectiveness of joint forces operations. General Yusuf acknowledged the existence of gaps in the prevailing communication strategy among MNJTF members.

Time will say if the workshop has provided successful tools to the multinational force on the ground

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28.12.2020

²³ To achieve the goals and objectives set, it was agreed that a team of experienced technical experts, consisting of veteran academics, international media, local dignitaries, and military-civilian and military-communications liaison officers, would connect with each other and combat communities in combat areas. Firsthand. On the workshop see UNDP, Regional workshop to prevent violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin holds in N'Djamena (20.11.2020).

<https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/regional-workshop-to-prevent-violent-extremism-in-the-lake-chad-.html>.

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