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**THESIS**

**BOKO HARAM'S RISE AND THE MULTINATIONAL  
RESPONSE**

by

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December 2018

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**BOKO HARAM'S RISE AND THE MULTINATIONAL RESPONSE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Boko Haram's Islamic insurgency in northeast Nigeria has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, displaced millions of civilians, and threatened the security and stability of multiple nations. Despite a concerted effort by the militaries of Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, and the 2014 formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) committed to countering it, Boko Haram has remained remarkably resilient and continues to conduct attacks throughout the region. This thesis aims to understand the conditions that led to Boko Haram's development as a violent jihadist organization in northeast Nigeria, how Nigeria's heavy-handed response fueled Boko Haram's growth, how the nations of the Lake Chad Basin responded to Boko Haram's rapid expansion, and the successes and challenges of the multinational force built to combat it. Multiple interviews with current and former MNJTF officers provide insight into how the MNJTF plans and conducts counter-Boko Haram operations and the challenges the MNJTF faces. Ultimately, this thesis provides insight into how the MNJTF can help bring an end to Boko Haram's insurgency and how nations of the Lake Chad Basin can prevent the next Boko Haram-type movement from developing.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

The Islamic insurgency of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria has proven to be incredibly resilient for the past decade, overcoming significant efforts by the governments of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB)—Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon—to defeat it. Boko Haram calls itself *Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa wa-al-Jihad*, which means “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad” but is better known as Boko Haram, meaning “Western education is forbidden” in the Hausa language, and denotes the movement’s abhorrence to what it perceives to be foreign and un-Islamic influences in the region.<sup>1</sup> The details of Boko Haram’s beginnings are disputed; however, most agree that Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by Mohammad Yusuf as a political and religious movement in the city of Maiduguri in Borno State, Nigeria. Tensions between the Nigerian State and Boko Haram grew and, in 2009, a violent crackdown on Boko Haram by Nigerian security forces led to the capture and extra-judicial killing of the movement’s leader Mohammad Yusuf. This action transformed Boko Haram from a religious movement into a violent insurgency.<sup>2</sup> The Nigerian government’s initial response to the crisis was heavy-handed and the international community criticized it for human rights violations.<sup>3</sup>

Since transitioning from a political and religious movement to a violent insurgency in 2009, Boko Haram has terrorized the civilian populations of northeast Nigeria along with portions of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. In 2014, Boko Haram received international attention when the group kidnapped 276 girls from a boarding school in Chibok, Borno State.<sup>4</sup> Following the Chibok kidnapping, the United States offered its support to Nigeria,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Thurston, 140.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2017: Rights Trends in Nigeria,” Human Rights Watch, January 12, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/nigeria>.

<sup>4</sup> Aminu Abubakar, “As Many as 200 Girls Abducted by Boko Haram, Nigerian Officials Say,” CNN, accessed March 22, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/04/15/world/africa/nigeria-girls-abducted/index.html>.

providing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, and advisory support to the Nigerian military, an effort that would continue indefinitely.<sup>5</sup> Despite this support, Boko Haram rapidly expanded its territorial control, challenging the Nigerian government for control of its northeast.

In early 2015, when Boko Haram was at its peak of territorial control, holding over 20,000 square miles and threatening the security of other countries, the nations of the Lake Chad Basin combined their military operations and created the Multi-National Joint Force (MNJTF) to oversee the defeat of Boko Haram.<sup>6</sup> The MNJTF has had significant success at seizing territory from Boko Haram, driving them from multiple population centers in northeast Nigeria and limiting their expansion into neighboring countries. However, the MNJTF and Nigerian security forces have been unable to eradicate Boko Haram, which has successfully reverted into an insurgency and has continued to conduct attacks and suicide bombings in Nigeria and neighboring countries. Throughout this time, Boko Haram has adapted and changed, aligning itself with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2015 and then splitting into two separate Jihadist movements in 2016.<sup>7</sup> As of 2018, the nations of the Lake Chad Basin continue to fight both Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa (IS-WA), with no apparent end in sight.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This thesis aims answer the following questions: What factors contributed to the rise of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria? What was the response from Nigeria and neighboring states toward Boko Haram? How has the MNJTF responded to Boko Haram and how effective has it been? How has Boko adapted and been able to remain resilient to multinational efforts to defeat it? And how can the regional states and the MNJTF bring

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<sup>5</sup> White House. "FACT SHEET: U.S. Efforts to Assist the Nigerian Government in Its Fight against Boko Haram." White House, October 14, 2014. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/10/14/fact-sheet-us-efforts-assist-nigerian-government-its-fight-against-boko->

<sup>6</sup> David Blair, "Boko Haram Is Now a Mini-Islamic State, with Its Own Territory," January 10, 2015, Telegraph, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/11337722/Boko-Haram-is-now-a-mini-Islamic-State-with-its-own-territory.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Zenn and Zacharias Pieri, "How Much Takfir Is Too Much Takfir? The Evolution of Boko Haram's Factionalization.," *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 11 (Summer 2017): 281-308.

Boko Haram's insurgency to a close and prevent a similar jihadist movement from taking root in the Muslim populations of the region?

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis will analyze the rise of Boko Haram and the multinational effort to defeat them by examining pre-existing research and by interviewing African military and civilian officials with experience in the counter Boko Haram effort. From these sources, this thesis aims to process-trace the conditions that have given rise to Boko Haram, how the Nigerian government's response fueled their rise, the efforts of the MNJTF to counter Boko Haram and, where possible, the attitudes of the affected populations toward these efforts.

Analysis of existing academic writing and research will provide insight to understand how Boko Haram evolved over the past two decades into a resilient insurgency. The thesis will analyze the factors that have contributed to Boko Haram's rapid rise and its ability to conquer large swaths of territory and control multiple population centers across northeast Nigeria.

Through nine interviews with military officers and civilian officials from the countries involved in the MNJTF, the thesis will examine the actions taken since the establishment of the MNJTF in 2015 to counter Boko Haram. By interviewing African military leaders, the thesis aims to provide additional insight into the MNJTF's structure, funding and operations. The thesis will then examine Nigeria's and the MNJTF's response to Boko Haram, including the challenges the MNJTF faces in its current counter-Boko Haram campaign. Ultimately, the thesis aims to provide recommendations to the MNJTF on how to defeat Boko Haram and neutralize its ideology, along with suggestions on how the nations of the Lake Chad Basin can prevent and deter future Islamic insurgencies.

### **D. FINDINGS**

This thesis finds that the emergence of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria was built on a foundation of Islamic extremism and economic disparity; these two variables, combined with "Sharia politics" of the early 2000s, produced a mass religious movement

that later became a violent insurgency. Nigeria's ineffective and heavy-handed response to Boko Haram further inflamed the movement, fed Boko Haram's narrative of persecution and isolated the state from its population. While the multinational response under the MNJTF was successful at containing Boko Haram's expansion and recapturing territory from the group, properly combatting extremism in the Lake Chad Basin requires reforms and additional resources from the MNJTF.

Furthermore, the split between Boko Haram and IS-WA along ideological and geographic lines presents both an opportunity for the MNJTF to exploit the fracture and a risk of feeding one insurgent group while fighting the other; the MNJTF's future approach to counter-insurgency operations must take this dynamic into account. Additionally, Boko Haram's and IS-WA's insurgencies remain remarkably resilient against the multinational effort to defeat it. This is due to a combination of circumstances, including Nigeria's military-focused response and the movement's robust network of support in the region that predates the insurgency. While Boko Haram and IS-WA are unlikely to be defeated through military operations alone, the MNJTF is well positioned to play a critical role in the conclusion of the conflict. By activating, funding and manning the MNJTF's police and civilian components, the nations of the Lake Chad Basin will enable the MNJTF to expand beyond military operations against Boko Haram and IS-WA fighters to protect and reintegrate the population.

## **E. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

This thesis is organized into four chapters. Chapter II, "The Rise of Boko Haram," investigates the political, economic and religious factors that contributed to Boko Haram's rise in northeast Nigeria, how the movement transformed from a mass religious movement into a violent insurgency and how the movement has fractured over ideological differences between its competing factions. Chapter III, "The Multinational Response," analyzes how Boko Haram became a regional threat, the response to Boko Haram by Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, the formation of the MNJTF, and how the MNJTF has conducted counter Boko Haram operations. Chapter IV, "Findings and Recommendations," presents



the findings and recommendations from the analysis of Boko Haram's rise to power and the multinational response.

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## II. THE RISE OF BOKO HARAM

For the past half-century, the Muslim population of northern Nigeria has experienced unprecedented disruptions to its religious, economic and political traditions and institutions. These disruptions created a climate that allowed a charismatic young preacher to develop a mass-religious movement that eventually transformed into Boko Haram, a violent insurgency capable of challenging the security of Nigeria and its neighboring countries. At its height in 2014, Boko Haram controlled territory in Nigeria roughly the size of Belgium and caused hundreds of thousands of refugees to flow into neighboring countries, prompting the region's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to develop a military plan aimed at pushing back and disabling this insurgent force.

This chapter will analyze the underlying causes of the Boko Haram insurgency, why the movement became increasingly violent, and the effects that international jihadist movements like Al Qaeda and ISIS have had on Boko Haram. It begins by analyzing the underlying religious, economic and political causes that contributed to the rise of Boko Haram. Second, the chapter will discuss three distinct phases of Boko Haram following the government's crackdown on the group and killing of its founder: Phase One "Nascent Development," 2003–2009; Phase Two "Open Revolt," 2010–2013; Phase Three "Dominance and Territory," 2014–2016. Finally, the chapter will identify weaknesses in the foundation of the movement that caused the insurgent group to split and, on occasion, fight itself.

This investigation finds that Boko Haram's rise and turn toward violence is due in large part to Borno State's religious and political climate in the early 2000s and Nigeria's security-force-focused response that pushed the movement toward further violence. Despite its split in 2015, Boko Haram persists, but the bigger threat comes from IS-WA, which has moderated Boko Haram's extreme ideology and has the potential to spread to other regions of West Africa.

## A. UNDERLYING CAUSES OF BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is distinct from other modern jihadist movements, such as Al-Shabaab, the Taliban and ISIS, in that it developed first as a mass-religious movement before transitioning into a violent jihadist insurgency.<sup>8</sup> Alexander Thurston, an expert on African politics, argues that a “hyper-local” approach that focuses on the interaction between politics and religious extremism in Borno State provides the best explanation of the factors that produced Boko Haram. More specifically, Boko Haram’s insurgency was built on a foundation of Islamic extremism and economic disparity. These two variables combined with the political environment in the capital of Borno, Maiduguri, following Nigeria’s 1999 transition to democracy, including the implementation of Sharia law, also around this timeframe. This combination of unique factors, which will be explained further below, produced Boko Haram.<sup>9</sup>

First, specific religious factors contributed to the rise of Boko Haram. Specifically, Boko Haram and its founder, Mohammad Yusuf, benefited from the region’s move toward political Islam, which began in the 1970s. Before this period, Nigeria’s dominant Sufi orders, the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya tariqas, coexisted with the Nigerian state, which allowed them to practice their understanding of Islam with minimal state involvement.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the late 1970s, however, political Islam began to infiltrate northern Nigeria, particularly Salafism, an ultra-orthodox version of Sunni Islam, similar to what is practiced in Saudi Arabia.<sup>11</sup> Salafi groups saw Nigeria’s political, economic and moral shortcomings as the failure of an imported western system of order and called for Islamic rule in Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> Not all Salafis in northern Nigeria were political, however. For example, the dominate Salafist movement, *Jama’at Izalat al-Bid’a Wa Iqamat as Sunna* (Society of

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<sup>8</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Thurston, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Raufu Mustapha, “Introduction Interpreting Islam Sufis, Salafists, Shi’ites & Islamists in northern Nigeria.” *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2014), loc. 498 of 7516, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> Roman Loimeier, “Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria,” *Africa Spectrum* 47, no. 2-3 (2012): 137-155.

<sup>12</sup> Mustapha, “Introduction Interpreting Islam Sufis, Salafists, Shi’ites & Islamists in northern Nigeria,” loc. 511.

Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunna), or *Yan Izala* for short, founded in Jos, Nigeria in 1978, consisted of non-violent Islamists that actively sought to reform the Nigerian state rather than to replace it.<sup>13</sup> In addition to calling for governmental reforms, Yan Izala was also critical of Sufis and their complacency with the Nigerian government.<sup>14</sup> Overall, however, the arrival of political Islam and Salafist reform movements in Nigeria began the process of breaking down the traditional religious establishment and initiating the confrontation between Islamic movements and the Nigerian state.

In the 1980s, these religious changes began to produce an anti-western, radical Islamic movement, called the *Maitatsine Movement*. This movement, led by the charismatic preacher Muhamadu Marwa, targeted northern Nigeria's young Islamic students, specifically the Almajirai students of the traditional Qur'anic education system, who were common among the rural poor and increasingly concentrated in urban slums.<sup>15</sup> This movement produced a series of riots, known as the Maitatsine riots, throughout the early 1980s, including the 1980 riot in Kano State that caused over 4,000 deaths.<sup>16</sup> The Maitatsine Movement is often cited as a precursor to Boko Haram, although this is still debated among scholars.<sup>17</sup> However, the Maitatsine Movement demonstrated that an extremist ideology, the radicalization of urban youth, and anti-western fever existed within the Islamic community of Nigeria long before Boko Haram developed.

A growing number of Salafi Imams in Maiduguri in the 1990s further shaped the rise of Boko Haram.<sup>18</sup> These preachers were young members of Yan Izala who had studied at the Islamic University of Medina, Saudi Arabia, and returned to northern Nigeria in the

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<sup>13</sup> Mustapha, loc. 511.

<sup>14</sup> Loimeier, "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria."

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Hoehner. "Experiencing inequality at close range Almajiri students & Qur'anic schools in Kano." *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2014), loc. 3332 of 7516. Kindle

<sup>16</sup> Harvard Religious Literacy Project. "The Maitatsine Riots." Accessed September 11, 2018. <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/maitatsine-riots>.

<sup>17</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Thurston, 59.

1990s.<sup>19</sup> Many of these “Medina” graduates became disillusioned by Yan Izala’s dominance of the Salafi movement and broke off to form their own independent communities, continuing an ongoing trend of decentralization in the Salafi movement overall.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1990s, Mohammad Yusuf, Boko Haram’s founder, had become involved with the Salafi movement. At this time, a robust network of independent Salafi movements and mosques throughout northern Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon already existed.<sup>21</sup> It was in this environment of independent Salafi preachers that Yusuf established himself in Maiduguri and founded the *Yusufiyya* movement, which became a magnet for the disaffected youth of Maiduguri seeking an Islamic solution to their problems.<sup>22</sup> During his time leading Yusufiyya, Yusuf became more radical and adopted an increasingly anti-western and Islamic exclusivist ideology, causing a break with the broader Salafi community in northern Nigeria.<sup>23</sup> Yusufiyya later became *Jama’atu Ahlul Sunna li Da’awati wal Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad), also known Boko Haram. Yusuf developed a mass-religious movement fueled by pre-existing, anti-western fever and Salafi ideology. The breakdown of the traditional religious establishment and the growth of political Islam further facilitated the Yusufiyya movement’s development and growth.

A second major contributing factor to the rise of Boko Haram was endemic poverty and underdevelopment in northeast Nigeria. Daniel E. Agbiboa, an expert on conflict analysis and resolution, argues that structural poverty and inequality in northeastern Nigeria, along with a swelling population and lack of economic opportunity, created an environment ripe for extremist groups to grow.<sup>24</sup> Expert on African politics Abdul Raufu

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<sup>19</sup> Thurston, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Thurston, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Thurston, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram." *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2014), loc. 4659 of 7516, Kindle.

<sup>23</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel E. Agbiboa, “Living in Fear: Religious Identity, Relative Deprivation and the Boko Haram Terrorism,” *African Security* 6, no. 2 (2013): 153–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2013.788410>.

Mustapha identifies two types of inequality in northeast Nigeria in particular that contributed to Boko Haram's rise: regional and ethnic (what he calls "horizontal") and class-based (or "vertical").<sup>25</sup> Specifically, Mustapha argues that the rise of Boko Haram should be viewed not just in the context of its extremist doctrinal positions, but also in the context of poverty, inequality and alienation.<sup>26</sup> The economic disparity of the region produced grievances centering on the state's inability to improve the people's economic situation, and this grievance produced a base of support for Boko Haram through economically marginalized young men.

The economic inequality between the Muslim dominant north and the "Christian" south of Nigeria is another critical grievance that helped produce Boko Haram. Despite an average Nigerian GDP growth rate of 8% between 2000 and 2010, northern Nigeria did not see significant improvements in its economic conditions.<sup>27</sup> The poverty rates in the 2011 Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) for Nigeria (Figure 1), as the last year data was collected before Boko Haram's insurgency, show that the northeast had a severe poverty rate of 67.2 %, while each of the southern regions were under 12%.<sup>28</sup> The data from the OPHI show not only that the poverty of the north is more severe than the south, but that it also affects more people due to the north's larger population. Furthermore, Nigeria's system for distributing its oil revenue has not helped alleviate the north's poverty. Since 1999, the 19 northern states have received approximately half of the per capita amount of oil revenue that the southern states received.<sup>29</sup> Despite this disparity, the northern states have received higher federal revenue, placing high expectations on governors in the north to deliver on economic development and job creation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," loc. 5143.

<sup>26</sup> Mustapha, loc. 5194.

<sup>27</sup> Nigeria Data Portal. "GDP by Country | Statistics from the World Bank, 1960-2017 - Nigeria Data Portal." Knoema. Accessed September 12, 2018. <http://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/mhrzolg/gdp-by-country-statistics-from-the-world-bank-1960-2017?country=Nigeria>.

<sup>28</sup> OPHI. "Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Nigeria 2011," accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Nigeria1.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Leena Koni Hoffmann, "Who Speaks for the North?" (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, July 2104).

<sup>30</sup> Hoffmann.

Region	Percentage of Population	Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI = H×A)	Incidence of Poverty (H)	Average Intensity Across the Poor (A)	Percentage of Population Vulnerable to Poverty	Percentage of Population in Severe Poverty
North Central	14.6%	0.319	59.6%	53.4%	19.1%	33.8%
North East	13.5%	0.561	86.3%	64.9%	8.2%	67.2%
North West	25.8%	0.497	79.5%	62.5%	10.9%	60.0%
South East	11.6%	0.127	28.0%	45.2%	24.3%	9.3%
South South	14.8%	0.154	34.3%	45.0%	23.8%	11.6%
South West	19.7%	0.120	25.8%	46.5%	23.8%	9.4%

Figure 1. Multidimensional Poverty across Sub-National Regions of Nigeria<sup>31</sup>

The income inequality in northern Nigeria, exasperated by the remnants of traditional society and limited western education in the region, effectively excluded the youth of the region from economic opportunity. Mustapha argues that not only is there inequality between the north and south in Nigeria but that there also significant inequality internal to the north.<sup>32</sup> He identifies northern Muslim societies as being more “hierarchical” than in the South due to “the heritage of pre-colonial aristocracies, colonial Indirect Rule policies and the relatively limited spread of Western education in the region.”<sup>33</sup> A 2014 report by the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme summarizes the effects of the inequality in northern Nigeria, finding that, in situations where youth felt excluded from economic power structures, marginalized from economic opportunity, and were unable to achieve financial security, “violence can offer opportunities to gain control.”<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, urbanization brought tens of thousands of young men to Maiduguri in search of economic opportunity, a situation Mohammed Yusuf exploited to grow and expand his movement. The population of Maiduguri increased by 1000% over the past 50 years with the most dramatic increases between 1991 and 2006.<sup>35</sup> This rapid urbanization contributed to startling unemployment rates for young men. Nigeria’s National Bureau of

<sup>31</sup> Source: OPHI.

<sup>32</sup> Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," loc. 5153.

<sup>33</sup> Mustapha, loc. 5153.

<sup>34</sup> “Winners or Losers? Assessing the Contribution of Youth Employment and Empowerment Programmes to Reducing Conflict Risk in Nigeria,” accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WINNER-OR-LOSER-final-6.2.2014.pdf>. p 6

<sup>35</sup> Alhaji A. Aliyu and Lawal Amadu, “Urbanization, Cities, and Health: The Challenges to Nigeria – A Review,” *Annals of African Medicine* 16, no. 4 (2017): 149–58, [https://doi.org/10.4103/aam.aam\\_1\\_17](https://doi.org/10.4103/aam.aam_1_17).



Statistics lists the urban unemployment rate in 2009 for ages 15–24 as 49.9% compared to 10% for ages 45–59.<sup>36</sup>

Mohammed Yusuf capitalized on these economic conditions and built support for his burgeoning movement by providing an extensive system of microfinance to recruit young men seeking economic opportunity. Specifically, Yusuf provided loans to start motorbike taxis, car washes, trucking and other small economic enterprises.<sup>37</sup> This microfinance program initially started in Maiduguri, but later spread throughout northeast Nigeria.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Yusuf’s microfinance system fit into a long-standing tradition of young Kanuri men leaving their kinship networks to search for economic achievement by attaching themselves to “big men” in a patron-client relationship. Ronald Cohen, an anthropologist who spent several years living among the Kanuri, observed a discipline-respect relationship known as “berzum” that would form between a young man and an older man.<sup>39</sup> Young Kanuri men were known to abandon their farms and attach themselves to a “big man” in a “berzum” relationship if they believed it would bring increased social or economic status.<sup>40</sup> Mohammad Yusuf filled this “big man” role and provided economic opportunity in addition to Islamic preaching in the urban slums of Maiduguri. This commercial network tied many young men’s economic success to Boko Haram and contributed to Boko Haram’s resiliency in the face of security force crackdowns.

Finally, political factors also played a key role in the emergence of Boko Haram. The 1999 Nigerian transition to democracy and the debate surrounding the implementation of Sharia law in northern Nigeria provided the impetus for many to mobilize and become politically active. These events led to the rise of “Sharia politics” in the northern states and created an environment where Islamic activists sought to reshape the relationship between

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<sup>36</sup> National Bureau of Statistics. “2010 Review of the Nigerian Economy”. Scribd. Accessed November 15, 2018. <https://www.scribd.com/document/332328411/2010-Review-of-the-Nigerian-Economy>.

<sup>37</sup> Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Nigeria’s Interminable Insurgency?” (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2014), 38.

<sup>38</sup> de Montclos.

<sup>39</sup> Ronald Cohen, *The Kanuri of Bornu* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 54.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, 72.

politics and Islam throughout this part of Nigeria.<sup>41</sup> Thurston views the political awakening of Islamic groups during this period of Sharia implementation as “indispensable to understanding Boko Haram’s emergence.”<sup>42</sup> Mustapha shares Thurston’s emphasis on the political causes of Boko Haram, arguing that post-1999 political competition and the breakdown of the state’s “surveillance and control functions” in the northeast further contributed to Boko Haram’s rise.<sup>43</sup> The political mobilization of Islamic movements in response to “Sharia politics” combined with a breakdown in traditional authority helped Mohammed Yusuf turn his small religious movement into a political machine.

During the latter half of the 20th century, northeast Nigeria experienced a dissolution of traditional governing structures, creating the conditions for groups like Boko Haram to flourish unchecked. Mustapha describes the effects this had on security: “The collapse of the surveillance and control functions of local state institutions, including those of traditional authorities, make it practically possible for the unhindered mobilization of disaffected youth.”<sup>44</sup> Before 1967, the Native Administrations (NA), consisting of traditional authorities (emirs) loosely overseen by the Nigerian state, kept a firm grip on political activities in the northeast.<sup>45</sup> In 1967, Mustapha notes that the NAs were dissolved and the emirs lost control of “the police, courts and prisons, and representation on the various councils responsible for local government.”<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, Mustapha describes that the federally-structured local governments with “their poor staffing and funding situation, and constantly changing political leadership” were never able to reestablish proper governance over the population, and the traditional authorities were a “pale shadow of their former status.”<sup>47</sup> This drastic change in politics combined with the rapid urbanization in the northeast created the “virtual collapse

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<sup>41</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 113.

<sup>42</sup> Thurston, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Mustapha, “Understanding Boko Haram,” loc. 5206.

<sup>44</sup> Mustapha, loc. 5216.

<sup>45</sup> Mustapha, loc. 5206.

<sup>46</sup> Mustapha, loc. 5206.

<sup>47</sup> Mustapha, loc. 5206.

of governance structure at the community level, making it impossible to keep track of activities in local communities.”<sup>48</sup> The breakdown of local governing structure in the northeast facilitated the development and unhindered growth of Boko Haram, allowing it to entrench itself throughout the region before the state fully grasped its threat to stability and peace.

In the post-1999 transition to democracy, many northern Nigerian politicians took advantage of political Islamic groups’ interests in the Sharia law debate to build a base of support, only to abandon these groups following the election. Wisdom Iyekekpolo, an expert in conflict, terrorism and peace, views Boko Haram as an identity group that developed during this period of Sharia implementation.<sup>49</sup> He argues that partial democracies with powerful ethnic factions like Nigeria are highly vulnerable to insurgencies because of their reliance on identity as platforms for political power. The origin of Boko Haram, according to Iyekekpolo, is as an identity group that politicians use to win elections, giving the group political relevance and a voice.<sup>50</sup> Boko Haram used that relevance to make political demands, particularly for the adoption of a stricter form of Sharia law and its enforcement.<sup>51</sup> This demand caused antagonism between the organization’s followers and the political elites, eventually leading to violence and the birth of an insurgency out of the original political identity group.<sup>52</sup>

Mohammed Yusuf and his Yusufiyya movement worked to elect Ali Modu Sheriff, a candidate for governor of Borno State in the 2003 election, in exchange for the stricter implementation of Sharia law, a financial reward, and the appointment of a Yusufiyya sect member to the office of the Commissioner for Religious Affairs.<sup>53</sup> Sheriff won the election

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<sup>48</sup> Adekunle, “Poverty Fueling Unrest in Kano, Says Report,” *Vanguard News* (blog), February 15, 2012, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/02/poverty-fueling-unrest-in-kano-says-report/>.

<sup>49</sup> Wisdom Oghosa Iyekekpolo, “Political Elites and the Rise of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (January 8, 2018): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1400431>.

<sup>50</sup> Iyekekpolo.

<sup>51</sup> Iyekekpolo.

<sup>52</sup> Iyekekpolo.

<sup>53</sup> Joan Inikpi Akpa, “Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria,” *African Security Review* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2015.996023>.

and appointed Alhaji Buji Foyi, Yusufiyah's national secretary, as his commissioner of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>54</sup> However, shortly after the election, the implementation of a stricter form of Sharia stagnated, Yusuf and Sheriff had a falling out, and Foyi resigned from his post.<sup>55</sup> This experience disillusioned Yusuf with the political process, hardened Yusuf's anti-western and anti-democratic views, and increased violent confrontation between Yusuf's followers and the Nigerian state.

The Yusufiyah movement, which later became known as Boko Haram, manifested itself in Borno State because of a unique set of political, religious and economic circumstances. This movement, after failing to influence the government through the political process, turned to violence to confront the Nigerian state.

## **B. BOKO HARAM'S USE OF VIOLENCE**

Boko Haram's rise to power in northeast Nigeria is best analyzed through three stages, which closely resemble Mao Zedong's three phases of insurgency. The first stage, the "Nascent Phase" from 2003–2009, was when Yusuf refined his anti-western and Islamic exclusivist ideology, expanded his movement's influence, and began to use violence against Nigerian Security forces. The second phase, "Open Revolt" from 2010–2013, was when Boko Haram expanded its targeting beyond security forces, adopted an ideology of violence under its new leader, Abubakar Shekau, and was directly confronted by Nigerian and civilian security forces. Finally, the third stage, "Dominance and Territory" from 2014–2016, was when Boko Haram seized territory including several large population centers, attempted to establish Islamic governance, expanded the conflict to Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and compelled the combined response of multiple nations' militaries. Each of these stages is further explained below.

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<sup>54</sup> Akpa, 166.

<sup>55</sup> Akpa, 166.

## 1. Stage One: Nascent Development, 2003–2009

Throughout much of the period from 2003–2009, Yusuf and Boko Haram remained in a state of semi-conflict with Nigerian security forces as the movement grew in size and hardened its ideology. The group first came into direct conflict with the Nigerian state when a contingent of around 200 followers established an Islamic community in Kanama, Yobe State from 2003 to 2004.<sup>56</sup> Inspired by the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, they called themselves the “Nigerian Taliban.”<sup>57</sup> During this time, Yusuf’s ideology continued to harden. In a 2006 sermon, Yusuf attacked the idea of democracy, declaring it an act of polytheism and anyone who supported the Nigerian state a polytheist.<sup>58</sup> Again, in a 2006 debate with Nigerian Salafist scholars, Yusuf accused the others of having a relaxed stance on Muslims working with and supporting the Nigerian state; Yusuf argued any support of the Nigerian state was un-Islamic.<sup>59</sup> In a 2009 open letter to the Nigerian government, Yusuf presented an image of persecution by the Nigerian security forces and lashed out against the Nigerian state, accusing it of ignoring justice and pursuing a policy of killing Muslims. He claimed, “They did not build the government of Nigeria to guarantee justice...They built it to fight Islam and kill the Muslims.”<sup>60</sup>

Over the next several years, Boko Haram transitioned from intermittent conflict with Nigeria’s security forces to outright rebellion. This state of semi-conflict changed with the launch of “Operation FLUSH” in 2008, a joint military and police operation in Borno State.<sup>61</sup> In July of 2009, Boko Haram executed a coordinated bombing and attack campaign on police stations and churches across the northeast.<sup>62</sup> The police and the army responded with force, killing roughly a thousand Boko Haram members, capturing Yusuf, and

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<sup>56</sup> Mustapha, “Understanding Boko Haram,” loc. 4653.

<sup>57</sup> Mustapha, loc. 4653.

<sup>58</sup> Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael ` Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, Kindle (Oxford University Press, 2018), 45.

<sup>59</sup> Kassim and Nwankpa, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Kassim and Nwankpa, 181.

<sup>61</sup> “Why I Blame Sheriff for Boko Haram Violence –Borno AG,” *The Sun News* (blog), August 29, 2016, <http://sunnewsonline.com/why-i-blame-sheriff-for-boko-haram-violence-borno-ag/>.

<sup>62</sup> Mustapha, loc. 4683.

executing him while in police custody.<sup>63</sup> Security forces effectively put down the uprising, and the remaining followers of Boko Haram went into hiding and began to rebuild the movement under a new leader.

## 2. Stage Two: Open Revolt 2010–2013

Boko Haram's vengeful return from hiding in 2010 brought with it a campaign of bombings, assassinations, and attacks on security forces that spread violence and destruction across northeast Nigeria. Expert on terrorism and ethnic violence, Suranjan Weeraratane, identifies several facets of Boko Haram's increased violence during this phase, including the spread of the cell-like structure of the group, its increasing ties to regional and international jihadist groups, the Nigerian military's forceful response, and the group's use of porous borders to move militants and materials between the countries of the Lake Chad Basin.<sup>64</sup>

The turn toward increased violence was in part a reaction to Nigeria's 2009 crackdown on the group and in part a response to its new leader, Abubakar Shekau, and his ideology. Thurston notes: "If there is a one-line distillation of Shekau's thought, it would be his interpretation of the Qur'anic verse 'chaos is worse than killing' [*al-fitna ashadd min al-qatl*] (2:191)."<sup>65</sup> Thurston further notes that, for Shekau, "the chaos the Qur'an condemns has already come to Nigeria in the form of a heretical system: democracy, constitutionalism, Western-style education and so on. The only suitable response was to oppose the system violently."<sup>66</sup> For Shekau and Boko Haram the "chaos" of Western values and democracy in Nigeria justified the killing of anyone, even Muslim civilians that opposed their goals of annihilating western influence. During this period, Boko Haram took revenge on any group or person that opposed its movement over the past decade. It

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<sup>63</sup> Daniel E. Agbiboa, "Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 41–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.853602>.

<sup>64</sup> Suranjan Weeraratne, "Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 610–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1005742>.

<sup>65</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 183.

<sup>66</sup> Thurston, 183.

expanded its target selection from primarily security forces, to include the education system, politicians, religious groups (Muslim and Christian), government infrastructure and the broader Nigerian public.<sup>67</sup> Weeraratne’s analysis shows the diversity of targets Boko Haram attacked (Figure 2) and a sharp rise in attacks after 2010 (Figure 3).

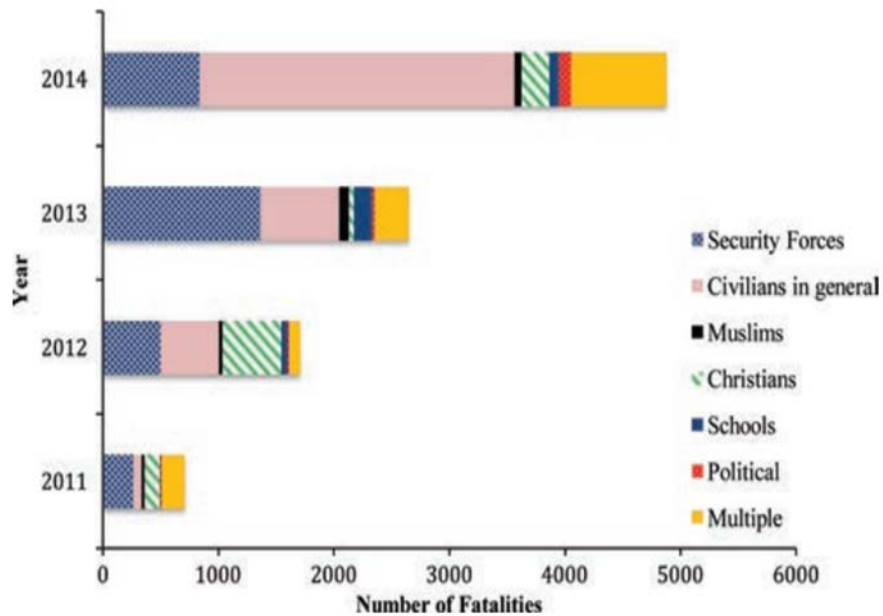


Figure 2. Boko Haram Violence by Target Group (2011–2014).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Weeraratne, “Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria.”

<sup>68</sup> Source: Weeraratne.

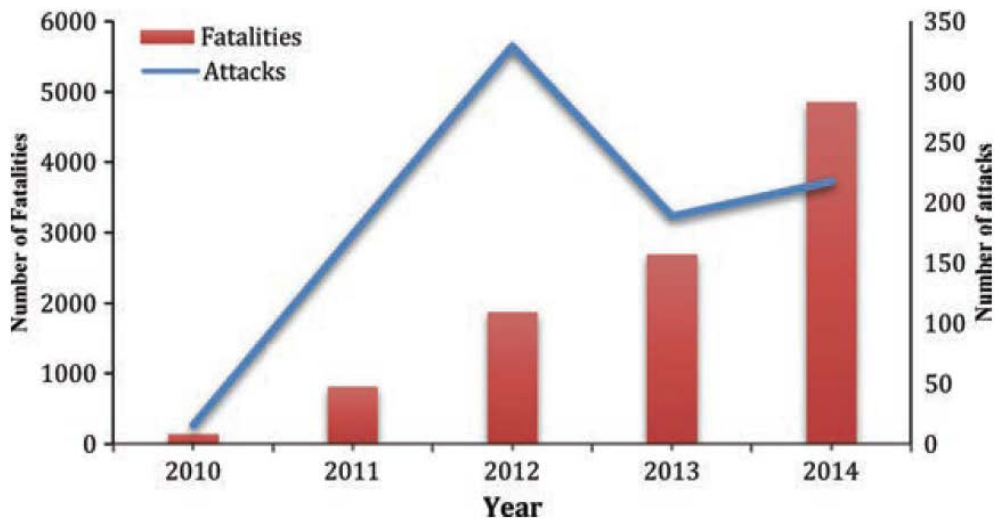


Figure 3. Boko Haram Attacks and Fatalities (2010–2014)<sup>69</sup>

Boko Haram’s campaign of violence across the northeast forced Nigerian security forces to respond. In 2011, Nigeria established the Joint Task Force (JTF), a combination of police and military forces, and launched Operation RESTORE HOPE to prevent the group’s resurgence.<sup>70</sup> By 2013, the JTF had to enlist the support of civilian militias, Civilian Joint Task Forces (C-JTF), to help drive Boko Haram out of the northeastern cities. The C-JTF were government-backed militias made up mostly of young men that assisted the JTF in finding and detaining suspected members of Boko Haram.<sup>71</sup> While this combined civilian-government force had success in disabling Boko Haram, it was not without negative consequences. Agbiboa, for example, argues that the security forces’ response to Boko Haram was indiscriminate in its targeting and it further radicalized elements of the population.<sup>72</sup> For example, the C-JTF cordoned off whole neighborhoods to conduct house-to-house searches, killing many young men in their homes.<sup>73</sup> The JTF,

<sup>69</sup> Source: Weeraratne.

<sup>70</sup> Agbiboa, “Peace at Daggers Drawn,” January 2, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Agbiboa, “Peace at Daggers Drawn,” January 2, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Agbiboa, “Peace at Daggers Drawn,” January 2, 2014, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Agbiboa, “Peace at Daggers Drawn,” January 2, 2014.



succeeded in driving Boko Haram out of Maiduguri with the C-JTF's help. However, the JTF caused the Nigerian state to, in the words of Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake, "present itself as an apparatus of violence... That relied unduly on coercion for compliance, rather than authority" in the eyes of the population, and brought accusations of human rights violations from international organizations, in addition to feeding Boko Haram's narrative of persecution.<sup>74</sup>

### 3. Stage Three: Dominance and Territory, 2014–2016

By 2014, the C-JTF's Counter-Boko Haram operations in Maiduguri, while brutal, were successful in driving the insurgent group from its base in Maiduguri to the "periphery" of Borno State.<sup>75</sup> Boko Haram established itself in the safe havens of the Sambisa Forest, the Mandara Mountains and later on the islands of Lake Chad. During this phase, they began seizing towns and small cities.<sup>76</sup> Weeraratne's analysis of Boko Haram identifies two trends from 2013 to 2014: a stark increase in civilian casualties (Figure 2) and the shift in attacks from urban Maiduguri to rural Borno State (Figure 4). The combination of these trends demonstrates Boko Haram's transition from an insurgency focused on striking security forces and government officials in urban areas to a military force capable of dominating and controlling large amounts of the Nigerian countryside. Thurston argues, "Although Boko Haram was born in the city, many members were immigrants to Maiduguri from rural areas. They were now operating on their home turf. Many Boko Haram members knew the northeastern countryside well: some battles even occurred in Tarmuwa, Yobe—Shekau's home."<sup>77</sup> Boko Haram also increased its suicide operations during this period. In 2013, they perpetrated a total of 109 suicide attacks, mostly in Maiduguri, whereas in 2015 they executed 1,989 suicide attacks across the northeast and into Niger, Chad and Cameroon.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Agbiboa, "Peace at Daggers Drawn," January 2, 2014, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," loc. 4752.

<sup>76</sup> Mustapha, loc. 4752.

<sup>77</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 226.

<sup>78</sup> "Boko Haram's Deadly Impact," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed September 18, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/article/boko-harams-deadly-impact>.

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Borno–Maiduguri incidents	91.4	75	23.8	5
Borno–elsewhere incidents	8.6	25	66.2	95
Borno–Maiduguri fatalities	89	79.4	9.6	13.3
Borno–elsewhere fatalities	11	20.6	90.4	86.7

Figure 4. The Percentage of Incidents and Fatalities in Maiduguri and Elsewhere in Borno State<sup>79</sup>

Boko Haram’s ideology during this time continued to become more extreme. Shekau hardened his stance on *takfir* attacks (killing fellow Muslims), advocated for the forceful capture of slaves, and maintained the group’s focus on jihad against the Nigerian state.<sup>80</sup> In a May 2014 video, Shekau declared, “Allah has commanded us to slaughter and kill. If you meet the polytheists on the battlefield, my brothers, you should strike their necks. This is the command of Allah, not Shekau.”<sup>81</sup> In the same address, Shekau defended Boko Haram’s taking of slaves, specifically the Chibok school girls, arguing that there is no ban on taking slaves in Islam.<sup>82</sup> Shekau’s rhetoric continued to call for mass slaughter in a March 2014 statement. Shekau stated that his followers “must establish the Qur’an and burn the constitution,” meaning destroy the Nigerian state and establish Islamic rule; however, he continued, “If Allah commands me to burn [something], I will burn it. However, right now I will only slaughter, not burn, because the time for burning has not come. Let me first commence with slaughtering.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Source: Weeraratne, “Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria.”

<sup>80</sup> Takfir is the act of a Muslim declaring other Muslims to be infidels or unbelievers. See: Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, “Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al-Qa’ida and Its Periphery” (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, December 16, 2010), 22, <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA536531>.

<sup>81</sup> Kassim and Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*, 302.

<sup>82</sup> Kassim and Nwankpa, 302.

<sup>83</sup> Kassim and Nwankpa, 294.

Boko Haram succeeded in controlling large swaths of northeast Nigeria from 2014–2016, including several large population centers, yet made no serious attempt to establish functioning civil institutions. A 2016 Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Program (NSRP) found that governance in Boko Haram-controlled areas meant “a set of rules, a police system and ‘justice’ (largely a mechanism for dispensing punishment).”<sup>84</sup> Education programs instructed students in Boko Haram’s harsh form of Islam and taught them to violently oppose those who disagreed.<sup>85</sup> Thurston notes, “It is striking that the group made little effort to institutionalize Islamic courts and schools or to distribute humanitarian relief.”<sup>86</sup>

In 2014, as Boko Haram’s violence spread to Chad, Niger and Cameroon, these countries along with Nigeria reactivated a preexisting security cooperation organization known as the Multinational Joint Security Force, which was originally designed to combat cross border crime and smuggling in the region. This organization was rebranded the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and given a mandate by the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission to “eliminate Boko Haram in order to create a safe and secure environment and facilitate the stabilization in the areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups.”<sup>87</sup> Chapter III, “The Multinational Response,” will provide an in-depth analysis of the MNJTF’s formation, mandate and counter-Boko Haram operations.

### **C. FRACTURES IN BOKO HARAM AND ITS ALLIANCE WITH ISIS**

Boko Haram went through several periods of alignment and fracture based on ideological and operational differences. In 2009, while trying to rebuild following Nigeria’s crackdown on the movement, Boko Haram approached Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an off-shoot of Al Qaeda that operates in the Sahel region of Africa, for

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<sup>84</sup> Sarah Ladbury et al., “Jihadi Groups and State-Building: The Case of Boko Haram in Nigeria,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 5, no. 1 (November 30, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.427>.

<sup>85</sup> Ladbury et al.

<sup>86</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 227.

<sup>87</sup> “Multinational Joint Task Force Mandate.” MNJTF (blog). Accessed October 23, 2018. <https://www.mnjtf.org/about-mnjtf/mnjtf-mandate/>.

assistance.<sup>88</sup> Initially, AQIM supported Boko Haram's development as a jihadist organization in line with AQIM's two objectives: attacking the "far enemy" (the United States and France), and overthrowing the "near enemy," the non-Islamic governments of the region.<sup>89</sup> AQIM's emir, Abd al-Malik Droukdel, agreed to assist Boko Haram with training, funding, media support and equipment, which contributed to Boko Haram's resurgence in northeast Nigeria.<sup>90</sup> AQIM's ideological influence on Boko Haram resulted in its 2011 suicide bombing attack on the United Nations Headquarters in Abuja, killing twenty-three people, which was its only high-profile attack on a western target.<sup>91</sup>

The alliance between Boko Haram and AQIM, however, was short lived. Boko Haram and AQIM began to disagree over Shekau's focus on launching an insurgency in northeast Nigeria rather than attacking high-profile western targets, in addition to Shekau's aggressive targeting of Nigerian Muslims.<sup>92</sup> These disagreements opened the door for several disaffected members of Boko Haram, who rejected Shekau's leadership and extreme takfir policy, to form a new group, *Ansarul al-Muslimin fi Biladis Sudan* (Defenders of Muslims in Lands of the Blacks), or Ansaru for short. Following Ansaru's split from Boko Haram in 2012, it aligned itself more closely with AQIM.<sup>93</sup> In its founding charter, Ansaru declared that it would not apply takfir and target Nigeria's Muslim civilian population as Shekau did, and would instead focus its efforts on targeting westerners and the Nigerian state.<sup>94</sup> Ansaru never achieved the notoriety or scale of operations as Boko

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<sup>88</sup> Micha'el Tanchum, "Al-Qa'ida's West African Advance: Nigeria's Boko Haram, Mali's Touareg, and the Spread of Salafi Jihadism," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 2 (January 2012): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2012.11446504>.

<sup>89</sup> Tanchum, 79.

<sup>90</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 165.

<sup>91</sup> "UN Releases Names of Abuja Bomb Attack Casualties," UNDP, accessed August 19, 2018, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2011/09/13/un-releases-names-of-abuja-bomb-attack-casualties.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 168.

<sup>93</sup> Thurston, 169.

<sup>94</sup> Thurston, 170.

Haram, and eventually became operationally defunct in mid-2013 after having conducted only a handful of kidnapping operations against westerners.<sup>95</sup>

Similar to the way Boko Haram's split with AQIM led to the founding of Ansaru, Shekau's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015 led to the fracturing of Boko Haram into two separate jihadist movements. Despite Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State and its adoption of the name Islamic State West Africa (IS-WA), the relationship between Boko Haram and Islamic State's central leadership in Iraq and Syria weakened compared to other ISIS affiliates.<sup>96</sup> In August 2016, the Islamic State demoted Shekau and announced Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi, the believed son of Boko Haram's founder Mohammad Yusuf, as the new leader of IS-WA.<sup>97</sup>

The issue of killing Muslim civilians in Nigeria continued to be a key concern in the ideological debate of IS-WA. Jacob Zenn, an expert on violent non-state actors, describes, "Shekau's excessive takfir was untenable from a theological, operational and alliance perspective." Zenn goes on to describe:

Theologically Shekau considered too wide a group of Muslims to be *kafir* [unbelievers]; operationally, Shekau killed ordinary Muslims and ignored their needs, which meant those who were supposed to live in the west African Province 'Islamic State' were alienated; and he caused internal *fitna* [civil strife] by killing off commanders and disregarding al-Baghdadis' orders, especially on the issue of slavery.<sup>98</sup>

Both IS-WA and Boko Haram sought to establish an Islamic emirate in northern Nigeria; however, the two movements advocated different approaches to achieving this goal. Boko Haram sought to establish the emirate through force, violence, and jihad, compelling the local Muslim population into submission. Thurston argues that, when Boko Haram was at its peak of territorial control in 2014, it made little attempt to "implement

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<sup>95</sup> Zenn and Pieri, "How Much Takfir Is Too Much Takfir?," 296.

<sup>96</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 274.

<sup>97</sup> Thurston, 274.

<sup>98</sup> Zenn and Pieri, "How Much Takfir Is Too Much Takfir?," 301.

the type of law and order that won other African Jihadists limited popularity.”<sup>99</sup> Instead, Shekau focused on continuing the jihad against the Nigerian state and any Muslims who supported it. Thurston summarizes, “Boko Haram, under Shekau, antagonized almost the entire spectrum of Muslims in its region, committing atrocities that likely forecloses the possibility of collaboration with any other sizeable Muslim constituency, save other Jihadist groups.”<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, the current Boko Haram movement under Shekau is best categorized as a “movement of rage” and has created the ideological space to allow the IS-WA to develop as a force in northeast Nigeria.<sup>101</sup>

IS-WA under Al-Barnawi has taken a different approach and sought to win over the local population. IS-WA protects locals from Boko Haram’s violence, something the Nigerian military has been unable to do, and provides safe passage to traders and herdsman.<sup>102</sup> It also sends representatives to internally displaced centers and refugee camps to encourage refugees to return to farming and be part of the Islamic State.<sup>103</sup> These actions suggest that IS-WA is trying to position itself as a stabilizing force that can bring security to parts of Nigeria that have been decimated by war for the past decade, in the same way the Taliban was able to rise to power in Afghanistan in the early 1990s.

The split with IS-WA will likely be permanent. Over the past two years, the two groups have fractured along geographic lines (Figure 5). As of 2018, Boko Haram under Shekau dominates south of Maiduguri in the Sambisa Forest and the Mandarra Mountains and along the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. IS-WA has established itself north of Maiduguri, in Lake Chad, and in the communities along the border between Nigeria and Niger.

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<sup>99</sup> Alexander Thurston. “The Disease Is Unbelief” Boko Haram’s Religious” 20, accessed August 29, 2018, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper\\_Alex-Thurston\\_Final\\_Web.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Brookings-Analysis-Paper_Alex-Thurston_Final_Web.pdf).

<sup>100</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 276.

<sup>101</sup> Kenneth Jowitt, *Movements of Rage*, accessed August 31, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sTqueffFtg>.

<sup>102</sup> “Islamic State Offshoot Stakes Lake Chad Territory,” VOA, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/islamic-state-ally-lake-chad-territory/4369501.html>.

<sup>103</sup> “Islamic State Offshoot Stakes Lake Chad Territory.”

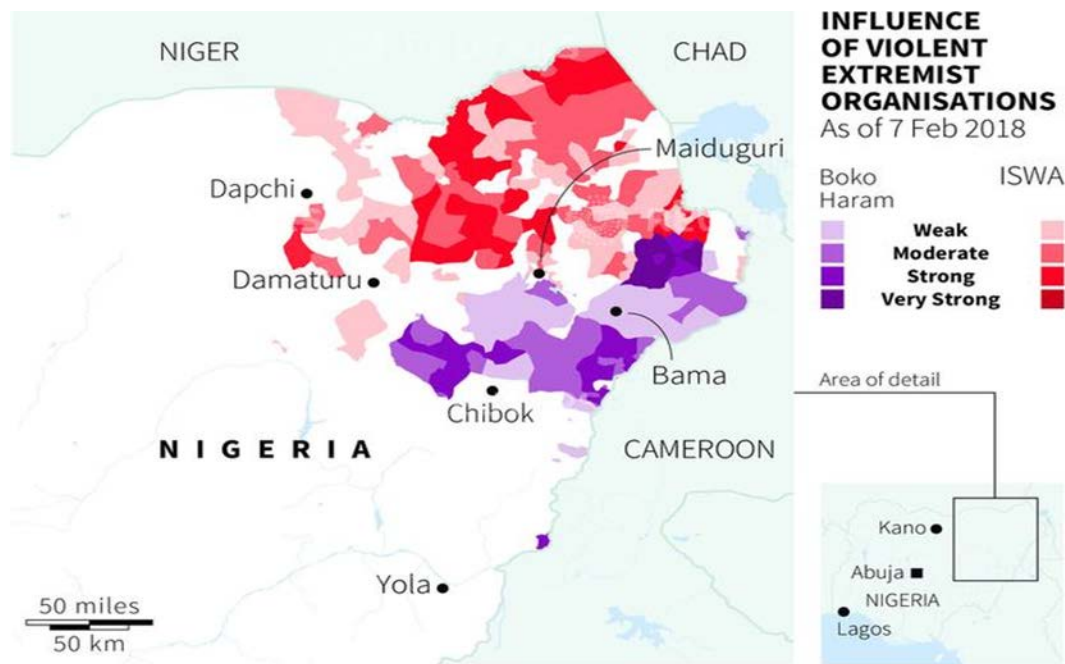


Figure 5. Map of Boko Haram and IS-WA's Influence in Borno State<sup>104</sup>

#### D. CONCLUSION

This chapter covered the underlying causes of the Boko Haram movement, Boko Haram's use of violence in its three phases of insurgency and how the movement fractured over ideological differences. Boko Haram developed in northeast Nigeria due to a confluence of endemic poverty, a breakdown of traditional religious authority and a growing Salafist movement, which combined with the "Sharia politics" of the late 1990s and early 2000s to produce a violent Islamist movement. Nigeria's heavy-handed response to this nascent insurgent movement further fueled Boko Haram's grievances against the state, hardened its ideology and led to Boko Haram's rapid expansion across the region. Boko Haram's initial pledge of allegiance to ISIS in 2015 led to a split in the movement with Shekau's fraction of Boko Haram continuing its campaign of violence in the south and IS-WA entrenching itself in the north along Lake Chad's shores.

<sup>104</sup> Source: "Influence of Violent Extremists Organizations." Reuters. accessed October 30, 2018, <http://fingfx.thomsonreuters.com/gfx/rngs/NIGERIA-SECURITY/010062F043W/NIGERIA-SECURITY.jpg>.

The next chapter will look at Boko Haram's specific tactics, individual countries' response to the rise of Boko Haram, and the creation of the MNJTF in 2014, which has aimed to eradicate Boko Haram through joint operations of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad and Benin.



### **III. THE MULTINATIONAL RESPONSE**

Beginning in 2012, Boko Haram's presence in Nigeria began to spread from Borno State in the Northeast to neighboring countries of the Lake Chad Basin, including Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The expansion of Boko Haram compelled these countries to respond to the insurgent group's growing threat to the region's stability. Initially, each country created its own independent counter-Boko Haram strategy. However, after two years of limited success, five countries of the Lake Chad Basin (Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad and Benin) turned to the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a pre-existing collective organization that the countries had formed to combat smuggling and crime on Lake Chad, as a resource for countering Boko Haram. The new mission of the MNJTF focused on sharing intelligence, synchronizing operations and de-conflicting each nation's counter-Boko Haram operations.

This chapter provides an overview of the Lake Chad Basin's efforts to counter Boko Haram from 2012 to 2018. Building on Chapter II, the chapter begins by analyzing how Boko Haram became a regional threat, and its various operations. The second section investigates the individual responses of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to the Boko Haram threat. Drawing from interviews with various officers from the region, the third section looks at the creation of the MNJTF, including its organization, and how it has executed its assigned missions. The final section offers concluding remarks.

Overall, this chapter finds that, while the countries of the Lake Chad Basin have made considerable progress in countering Boko Haram, including reducing the number of large-scale attacks on civilians and capturing the terrorists' main strongholds, the insurgent group is still operational and able to carry out offensive missions against military and civilian targets.

#### **A. BOKO HARAM'S EXPANSION IN THE LAKE CHAD REGION**

The countries of the Lake Chad Basin have a long history of cooperation, including initiatives aimed at reducing the effects of climate change, combatting desertification and drought, tackling food insecurity, and addressing related problems of agricultural

underproduction and resource scarcity.<sup>105</sup> These previous efforts helped pave the way for a joint counter-Boko Haram initiative between Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, which began in 2014.

In order to understand the MNJTF's mission and operations, it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of the region and the various challenges that each country faces. Niger, Chad, and Cameroon all share a border with Borno State, Nigeria, the birthplace of Boko Haram. Each of these countries has a history of weak governance in their remote border regions, and limited governmental reach. Originally, as Onyinyechi Uwakwe, an expert on Nigeria security studies, points out, Boko Haram was a mere local group with limited domestic objectives.<sup>106</sup> However, as described in Chapter II, beginning around 2012, it became a regional threat, targeting security forces, local administrative officials, and civilians.

There are several reasons why Boko Haram has successfully spread throughout the Lake Chad Basin. For example, the literacy rate in Cameroon's far north region and in Niger's southeastern province is well below average, suggesting a lack of government resources in these areas, such as education. Furthermore, more than 70% of the population is living below the poverty line.<sup>107</sup> In fact, Omar Mahmood, expert on security studies across sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizes that several factors in the Lake Chad region make it susceptible to the presence of criminal organizations and insurgent groups, such as a lack of security forces and widespread smuggling and corruption.<sup>108</sup> For example, in the early 2000s, banditry and cross-border smuggling between Chad and Nigeria became so bad that Nigeria had to patrol the northern highways along the shore of Lake Chad with MI-35

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<sup>105</sup> "Projects | The Lake Chad Basin Commission," The Lake Chad Basin Commission, accessed October 2, 2018, <http://www.cblt.org/en/projects>.

<sup>106</sup> Blessing Onyinyechi Uwakwe and Buhari Shehu Miapyen, "Boko Haram and Identity Reconstruction in Lake Chad Basin Region," (2018), 141–63, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75280-8\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75280-8_7).

<sup>107</sup> "Welcome Humanitarian Data Exchange," accessed October 2, 2018, <https://data.humdata.org/>.

<sup>108</sup> Mahmood, Omar S, and Ndubuisi Christian Ani. "Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods," Institute for Security Studies, July. 2018, 34.

helicopters.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the rampant corruption and the poverty of the region create a permissive environment for civil conflict and provide the conditions for insurgent groups to grow and expand. Overall, therefore, Boko Haram's expansion and influence into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon are indicative of the region's weak governance.<sup>110</sup>

Alongside weak governance, these countries have a very low level of public trust in the local governments of the Borno State and the regions in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon that border it. Boko Haram has benefited from the powerlessness of local authorities to push its ideological agenda. For instance, Mohamed Yousuf, the founder of Boko Haram, recorded a series of extremist videocassettes, which preached hate and intolerance in addition to raising suspicions toward the local government. These cassettes were in free circulation in Maiduguri and all over Borno State around 2009, further diminishing local trust in the government.<sup>111</sup>

Boko Haram has also taken full advantage of the feeling of marginalization and social exclusion of specific ethnic groups, most notably the Kanuri people, the Fulani pastoralist communities, the Mober communities in Niger, the Yedina people in Chad, and the Boudouma communities that occupy islands within Lake Chad.<sup>112</sup> Boko Haram has played on these ethnic grievances to accelerate its expansion beyond Nigeria and into the other nations of the Chad Lake region. In interviews with traditional rulers in Cameroon, they pointed out that Boko Haram has given the Boudouma the opportunity to control income generated by pastoral and fishing resources of some islands in Lake Chad, to the

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<sup>109</sup> Adedoyin J. Omede, "Nigeria's Relations with Her Neighbours," *Studies of Tribes and Tribals* 4, no. 1 (July 2006): 7–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0972639X.2006.11886532>.

<sup>110</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, 10–15.

<sup>111</sup> Muhammad Bakur, *Waazin Shekh Muhammad Yusuf Maiduguri* 4, accessed October 23, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yU7eVc-NOyE>.

<sup>112</sup> Géraud Magrin, "Crisis and Development. The Lake Chad Region and Boko Haram." *Agence Francaise de Development*, August 2018.

detriment of Hausa, the major group in the region, thus taking advantage of pre-existing ethnic divisions.<sup>113</sup>

This region has also suffered from loose border control, which has allowed for smuggling and trafficking of various illicit goods, most notably small arms, which Boko Haram has taken advantage of to grow and counter the region's security forces.<sup>114</sup> As Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, senior researcher at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) in Paris states, "the best-enduring terrorist or insurgent groups are those who criminalize themselves by moving away from their original ideology."<sup>115</sup> The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and Al Shabab in Somalia, are examples of this approach, as is Boko Haram. Specifically, Boko Haram has forged alliances with the region's minorities that engage in a range of cross-border criminal activity, such as extortion, organized crime, terror, destruction, propaganda.<sup>116</sup>

Boko Haram has also changed significantly by forming alliances with transnational Islamist groups. As described in Chapter II, Boko Haram split into two prominent groups in 2016, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa (IS-WA).<sup>117</sup> Under the command of Shekau, Boko Haram remains the most violent faction and is responsible for large-scale suicide attack campaigns, and the massive use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which have caused heavy civilian casualties. According to the Fifth Global Terrorism Index report, in 2015 29% of attacks involved suicide bombers and accounted for 27% of total deaths.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, from the same source, in 2016 the military response triggered a

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<sup>113</sup> Christian Seignobos, "Boko Haram and Lake Chad An Extension or a Sanctuary?" *Afrique Contemporaine*, 2015. 102. In 2006, Christian Seignobos personally witnessed deep community tensions in Darak as the numerous and entrepreneurial Hausa competed with Shuwa Arabs and Bornouans in the same market niches.

<sup>114</sup> Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, "Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria," Small Arms Survey, July 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, *L'Afrique, nouvelle frontière du djihad?*, La Découverte, Paris. 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> "Boko Haram," Counter Extremism Project, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/boko-haram>.

<sup>118</sup> "Global Terrorism Index 2017 - World," ReliefWeb, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2017>.

35% rise in violent attacks in the region, accounting for 49% of deaths, particularly at the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos believes that “Abubakar Shekau’s group would remain a toxic yet weakened organization that could continue attacks from remote rural areas of Borno State or neighboring countries,” especially from the refuge areas of Gwoza hills and Ngoshe.<sup>119</sup>

On the other hand, IS-WA, under the control of Abu Musa Al Barnawi, has devoted considerable effort and resources to hitting military targets, as opposed to civilians. IS-WA’s initial attacks were large armed assaults that used scores of fighters, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades to attack government forces’ positions. More recently, however, the latest Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reports indicate that IS-WA has deployed male suicide bombers, primarily through vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), to target security forces. IS-WA has also used kidnappings and targeted assassinations.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, ACLED reports reveal the majority of IS-WA’s attacks occurred in the border areas between Nigeria and Niger, where control of smuggling routes represents a key source of funding for the insurgent group.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, a series of factors have contributed to the growth and spread of Boko Haram into the Lake Chad Basin, including weak governance, lack of economic development, the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, porous borders, historic smuggling routes, Boko Haram’s partnership with criminal networks, and its alliance with ISIS and the split of the organization. These factors have compelled the countries of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad to take actions aimed at pushing back and defeating this regional insurgent threat.

## **A. INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY RESPONSES TO BOKO HARAM**

As the Boko Haram insurgency intensified around 2012, the countries of the Lake Chad Basin initially took different approaches to counter this threat, focusing on their own

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<sup>119</sup> Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, “Nigeria’s Interminable Insurgency?,” *Lake Chad*, n.d., 38.

<sup>120</sup> Hilary Matfess, “Boko Haram’s Deadly Persistence (1 January 2011 – 31 August 2018),” *Acled Data* (blog), September 13, 2018, <https://www.acleddata.com/2018/09/13/boko-harams-deadly-persistence-1-january-2011-31-august-2018/>.

<sup>121</sup> “Realtime Data (2017) – ACLED,” accessed November 14, 2017, <https://www.acleddata.com/data/realtime-data/>.

national interests. William Assanvo, expert in African security studies, notes that, “Whereas Nigeria had carried out a military offensive to halt Boko Haram’s territorial gains and retake the localities under the group’s control from February 2015 onwards, Cameroon, Niger and Chad had sought instead to contain its expansionist tendencies.”<sup>122</sup> These independent approaches limited the success of countering Boko Haram and, as will be described, required a more concerted effort. Each country’s independent policies are described in greater detail below.

## 1. Nigeria

Nigeria’s civilian population pays the heaviest price in the war against Boko Haram. In response, the Nigerian government’s response has evolved from a limited police security operation to a large-scale, joint, combined security and civilian operation aimed at overcoming the country’s limited capacity and geographic constraints. This multi-pronged approach began in 2012 with Operation RESTORE ORDER. The 21st Armored Brigade (21Bde) deployed personnel to form the nucleus of the task force combat element, whose mission was to maintain a secure and stable environment in Borno and Yobe States. The troops carried out counterinsurgency operations specifically in Maiduguri city. However, despite the rise in military presence in northeastern Nigeria, insecurity persisted, particularly to the east of Borno State.<sup>123</sup>

On May 13, 2013, Nigerian military personnel, together with police units and the Department of State Security Special Forces, took part in Operation BOYONA. Its mandate was to secure the country’s borders, destroy Boko Haram camps, and neutralize the organization’s leaders. A number of interviews with soldiers in the Nigerian military, conducted in 2018, noted that this operation suffered from bureaucratic problems and lack of effective coordination, resulting in less-than-convincing results against Boko Haram.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, in August 2013, this task force was supplemented by the creation of the

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<sup>122</sup> William Assanvo, “Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram,” n.d., 16.

<sup>123</sup> Pulse Nigeria, *Mama Boko Haram, Aisha Wakil Explains Her Relationship With Boko Haram / Pulse TV Exclusive*, accessed December 20, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb6G4y\\_ZTAK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb6G4y_ZTAK).

<sup>124</sup> MNJTF officer, Interview by author, Skype, July 6, 2018.

Nigerian Army's 7th Division, which had new military capabilities established to decisively counter the threat of insurgency, terrorism and armed banditry in northeastern Nigeria. Although Georges Berghezan, senior researcher at the Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP), concedes that the surge in capabilities was relevant for security operations, he still observes that the capacity of the military units deployed in Borno State were weakened as a result of poor logistics, inoperable equipment and low morale.<sup>125</sup>

In July 2015, Operation ZAMAN LAFIYA was reorganized and later renamed Operation LAFIYA DOLE, which means "Peace by Force" in Hausa. Initially, Operation LAFIYA DOLE was successful in regaining control in some of the areas lost previously to Boko Haram.<sup>126</sup> Its accomplishments gradually created conditions that encouraged the return of civilians, governing officials, and civil servants to some parts of Borno State. This progress, however, was limited to some towns and small cities found along the major highways. In fact, Hussein Solomon, the author of *Understanding Boko Haram and Insurgency in Africa*, observes that LAFIYA DOLE prioritized the securing of transport routes and sought to avoid dangerous operations in populated areas.<sup>127</sup> Operation RUWAN WUTA, launched in September 2017, involved extensive air strikes and achieved success in dispersing large groups of Boko Haram fighters. Operation DEEP PUNCH in the Sambisa Forest, also significantly degraded the logistic capability of Boko Haram.

Although the Nigerian military response reduced the potential impact of Boko Haram, overall security in Borno State lags far behind the rest of Nigeria.<sup>128</sup> Nigeria's military operations against Boko Haram are summarized in Figure 6.

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<sup>125</sup> Berghezan, Georges. "Éradiquer Boko Haram : acteurs multiples, résultat incertain," Groupe De Recherche et D'information sur la Paix Et La Securitie. March. 2016.

<sup>126</sup> International Crisis Group, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency" International Crisis Group, April 3, 2014, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/curbing-violence-nigeria-ii-boko-haram-insurgency>.

<sup>127</sup> James J Hentz and Hussein Solomon, *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), <http://www.tandfebooks.com/isbn/9781315525051>.

<sup>128</sup> Pulse Nigeria, *Mama Boko Haram, Aisha Wakil Explains Her Relationship With Boko Haram / Pulse TV Exclusive.*; Channels Television, *Terrorism Now A Multi-Billion Dollar Industry, Naja'atu Blames Political Elite for BH Creation Pt.1*, accessed June 22, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_GH9AeizilA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GH9AeizilA).

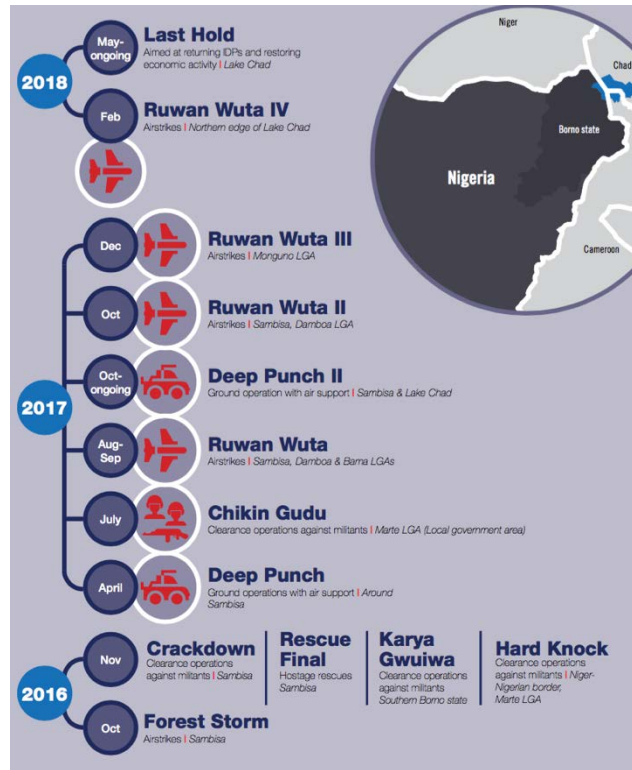


Figure 6. Major Nigerian Military Operations Against Boko Haram<sup>129</sup>

## 2. Cameroon

Cameroon's response to Boko Haram's expansion was initially slow and unfocused. This quickly changed as Boko Haram grew more powerful in Nigeria and began to threaten Cameroon's sovereignty in its far north. Beginning in 2012, Boko Haram started carrying out limited raids in the far north region of Cameroon, primarily in Fotokol, Amchidé, and Dabanga. These attacks, sometimes deadly, were isolated cases and appeared to be largely ignored because Cameroon's government perceived the Boko Haram threat on its territory to be low. Cameroon focused on preventing smugglers from trafficking in illegal goods, and its slow pace of its defense forces' deployment against Boko Haram militants became a source of tension between Cameroon and Nigeria.<sup>130</sup> Beginning in 2013, as the number of large-scale attacks on civilians dramatically increased,

<sup>129</sup> Source: Mahmood and Ani, "Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods."

<sup>130</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2018.



Cameron changed its attitude toward Boko Haram. The kidnapping of foreign civilians for ransom and the media attention it brought was instrumental to this shift in Cameroon's approach.<sup>131</sup>

Two particular events set the stage for Cameroonian military operations against Boko Haram. First, on May 17, 2014, the heads of state of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin met in Paris with French President François Hollande, and they approved a regional approach to combating the spread of Boko Haram.<sup>132</sup> This agreement paved the way for a more coordinated effort between countries, in addition to a greater response by each individual country toward the Boko Haram threat. Second, on May 22, 2014, the UN Security Council placed Boko Haram on its terrorist list.<sup>133</sup> This decision convinced the Cameroonian government that there was an urgent need for action against this insurgent group.

The initial Cameroonian security strategy against Boko Haram rested on three pillars. First, Cameroonian forces would pressure Boko Haram at the border with Nigeria. The area of operation would have a limited depth in order to contain the threat close to the border areas. Furthermore, self-defense committees in border villages would be part of the Popular Defense Forces and help with this effort. Second, Cameroon would focus on a broader military deployment throughout the region. To protect the civilian population in these remote areas, Cameroon defense forces would stress tactical mobility, including the capacity to patrol, and its ability to engage in kinetic operations through specific equipment deployed, including MI17 and MI24 helicopters. Third, the Cameroonian government initiated coordinated inter-departmental action with the aim of improving collaboration across sectors. This coordinated effort would allow the population to resume social and

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<sup>131</sup> "Chronologie - Cameroun," accessed October 2, 2018, <http://webdoc.rfi.fr/cameroun-boko-haram-nigeria-terreur-frontieres-jihadistes/chrono-cameroun/index.html>.

<sup>132</sup> "Paris Summit to Try to Rally Region against Nigeria's Boko Haram," *Reuters*, May 16, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-girls-summit/paris-summit-to-try-to-rally-region-against-nigerias-boko-haram-idUSBREA4F0BQ20140516>.

<sup>133</sup> "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Boko Haram to Its Sanctions List | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," accessed October 2, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11410.doc.htm>.

economic activities and emphasized the need to go beyond security, as expressed in the report of the Ministry of Justice on the state of human rights in Cameroon in 2015.<sup>134</sup>

In order to execute this three-pronged approach to countering Boko Haram, the area of operations of the Cameroon Army in the far north region was divided into two zones: Zone North and Zone South. First, Operation EMERGENCE 4, which commenced in August 2014, was executed in the northern sector. With the 41st Infantry Brigade (41BRIM) of the Cameroon Army as its nucleus, it brought together Special Forces squads, various specialized units, amphibious infantry battalions, and artillery battalions. Omar Mahmood, an expert on security issues across sub-Saharan Africa, points out that these security operations succeeded in disrupting food and ammunition supply lines between Boko Haram's strongholds and their different combating units.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, Operation EMERGENCE 4's achievements were instrumental in the reopening of certain critical regional trade routes, particularly between Fotokol and Gambaru, and even the reopening of specific cross-border corridors between Maiduguri, Bama, Banki, Amchidé, and Limani.<sup>136</sup>

Second, Operation ALPHA was executed in the southern sector and controlled the Kolofta, Limani, and Amchidé regions. In addition to the existing forces, several elite infantry Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) troops deployed in this area as the scope of the missions widened. Operation ALPHA established intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) observation posts for monitoring and reporting on activities at the borders. Moreover, Operation ALPHA opted for constructing barriers as part of its operations, digging a series of trenches over a distance of about 100 km along the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. This tactic resulted in a significant decline in cross-border insurgent activity.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> "Rapport\_Minjustice\_2015" accessed October 23, 2018, [http://www.minjustice.gov.cm/pdf\\_download/droit\\_homme/Francais/Rapport\\_Minjustice\\_2015\\_Fr.pdf](http://www.minjustice.gov.cm/pdf_download/droit_homme/Francais/Rapport_Minjustice_2015_Fr.pdf).

<sup>135</sup> Mahmood and Ani, "Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods."

<sup>136</sup> Mahmood and Ani.

<sup>137</sup> FRANCE 24, *Lutte Contre Boko Haram : Au Cameroun, Une Tranchée Contre Les Kamikazes*, l. 3:10, accessed October 19, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A778p7Dbx4&t=182s>.

BIR Special Forces were instrumental to Operation ALPHA, particularly in the Kolofata region, where Operation THUNDER and Operation ARROW II conducted multiple incursions into the Nigerian territory and numerous joint assaults into the Mandara Mountains. Furthermore, these initiatives fostered cooperation in the region. Omar Mahmood emphasizes that, in early 2018, Cameroonian BIR special unit were actively involved in security operations in the Gwoza area in Nigeria. These units expanded their activities to the neighboring local government area and supported the Nigerian troop in the re-opening of the road to Banki.<sup>138</sup>

Despite these efforts, deliberate attacks on civilians in border villages in Cameroon did not stop. The districts of Kolofata, Waza and Mayo Moskota were targeted the most, which is not surprising, given the fact that Boko Haram recruited and trained numerous young men from these densely populated Kanuri districts, many of whom joined to escape poverty.<sup>139</sup> Mahmood observes that, in the far north, sections of the population have gradually resumed their economic activities thanks to the involvement of the Army. Yet, the population was also frustrated by the lack of effective coordination between Operation ALPHA and Operation EMERGENCE 4, which undermined efficiency and results.<sup>140</sup> Cameroonian operations against Boko Haram are summarized in Figure 7.

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<sup>138</sup> Mahmood and Ani, “Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods.”

<sup>139</sup> Magrin, “Crisis and Development. The Lake Chad Region and Boko Haram.”

<sup>140</sup> Mahmood and Ani, “Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods.”

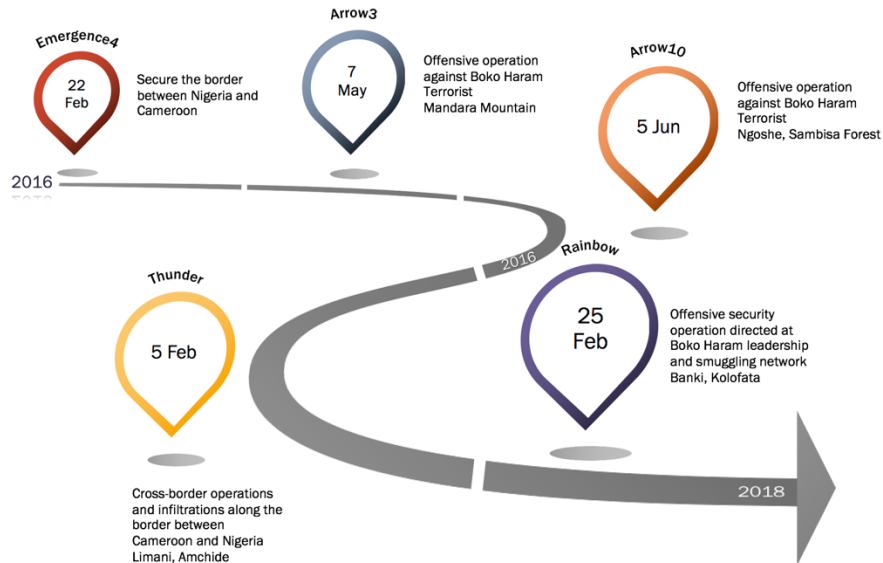


Figure 7. Major Cameroonian Operations against Boko Haram since January 2016

### 3. Niger and Chad

Beginning in 2014 onward, Boko Haram’s violence in Borno State forced thousands of refugees to flee north into Niger, specifically its far eastern Diffa region, which shares many of the same ethnic, religious, and economic characteristics of the population in northeastern Nigeria. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of September 2017, over 115,000 Nigerian refugees live in Niger’s Diffa region, and 122,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) left their villages since the beginning of the insurgency in Nigeria.<sup>141</sup> The UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, observes that, “most of the 250,000 displaced people in Diffa live in 140 informal settlements alongside vulnerable communities, which are feeling the economic and social strain of this large influx of refugees.”<sup>142</sup> For example, N’Gagam, located near the border with Nigeria,

<sup>141</sup> “Niger: ‘We Must Tackle the Root Causes of the Crisis’ - UN Humanitarian Chief,” OCHA, September 11, 2017, <https://www.unocha.org/story/niger-we-must-tackle-root-causes-crisis-un-humanitarian-chief>.

<sup>142</sup> “Niger.”

originally had a population of 1,000 but, as of 2018, accommodates around 13,500 refugees and IDPs fleeing Boko Haram attacks.

Niger, like its neighbors, has executed a number of military operations aimed at diminishing the effects of Boko Haram in its country. In the aftermath of the 2014 Paris Summit, Niger launched Operation INGAR (which means “shield” in Kanuri) in the Diffa region. The operation was designed to halt the northward advance of Boko Haram and protect the population in Diffa in particular.<sup>143</sup> Niger’s Minister of the Interior, Hassoumi Massaoudou, described INGAR as “the largest military operation ever mounted in Niger” to face the most urgent problem at that time.<sup>144</sup> Operation INGAR placed the police, gendarmerie, national guard, and military operating in the Diffa region under one command. Furthermore, Nigerian troops, in cooperation with Chadian armed forces, carried out multiple cross border offensives into Nigeria in 2014 and 2015 to prevent Boko Haram from establishing bases in the Nigeria-Niger border region. Despite the remoteness of the Diffa region, Niger was able to halt Boko Haram’s advance into the country through a dedicated, well-organized and long-term operation.

Chad also began to take military action against Boko Haram beginning in 2015. Chad has a long history of political turmoil, military coup attempts, and armed rebellions. Initially, like Niger and Cameroon, Chad had not identified Boko Haram as a significant threat until its rapid expansion and seizure of territory in 2014. The rise of Boko Haram threatened two critical assets in particular: Chad’s capital city of N’Djamena, which was less than 50 miles from Boko Haram-controlled territory in Nigeria, and several key trade routes critical to Chad’s access to the coast that ran through Borno State and the far north region of Cameroon. Beginning around 2014, the Chadian Army responded to Boko Haram’s attacks, and gained a reputation throughout Africa as a strong counterinsurgent force.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Berghezan, “Éradiquer Boko Haram : acteurs multiples, résultat incertain.”

<sup>144</sup> Africa 24, *LE TALK - Hassoumi MASSAOUDOU*, accessed October 19, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCORmo80RQA>.

<sup>145</sup> Mahmood and Ani, “Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods.”

Chad's most successful military operation against Boko Haram began on January 17, 2015, when a 2,500-man infantry brigade, commanded by General Mahamat Idriss Deby, passed through Cameroon territory and moved toward Gambaru in Borno State, Nigeria. On February 3, they launched a ground offensive and faced Boko Haram in Nigerian territory, taking over the border town of Gambaru, which had been under the influence of Boko Haram for several months. After weeks of heavy fighting and a significant bombing campaign, Gambaru together with the cities of Fotokol, Marte, and Dikwa were freed from Boko Haram. However, the cost of the operation combined with significant logistical difficulties and the lack of coordination with Nigerian units, forced the Chadian authorities to retreat by November 2015. During this operation, Boko Haram launched its first deadly assaults on Chadian soil in June and July of 2015, including multiple suicide attacks and police operations, which resulted in the deaths of at least 55 people in Ndjamena.<sup>146</sup>

In sum, the extent to which each state in the Lake Chad Basin had different security responses to Boko Haram created genuine concern over lack of coordination and cooperation aimed at successfully countering Boko Haram.<sup>147</sup> Expert in African security studies William Assanvo agrees, noting that the various countries interpreted these postures as the absence of true solidarity among the Lake Chad Basin states.<sup>148</sup> The need for a coordinated effort to counter Boko Haram became evident after each country's independent strategies failed to rid the region of the insurgent threat.

## **B. A REGIONAL MILITARY RESPONSE: THE MNJTF**

Before the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) created the Multinational Joint Security Force on March 21, 1994,

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<sup>146</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Two Suicide Bombings in Chad Target Police in Capital," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/15/two-suicide-bombings-chad-target-police-ndjamena>.

<sup>147</sup> In fact, each of the countries appear to only defend their personal interests and to react to the threat depending on how it affected their own territory.

<sup>148</sup> Assanvo, "Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram."

and mandated it to combat cross-border crime in the region.<sup>149</sup> In 1998, a Multinational Joint Security Force was put into operation; however, it remained limited to infrequent and insignificant patrols on the shores of Lake Chad. Overall, the joint security force was ineffective in achieving a genuine improvement in the overall security situation because Cameroon did not participate, given a border conflict with Nigeria since 1993 over the Bakassi peninsula. This dispute made Cameroon reluctant to cooperate with Nigerian forces and the patrols were halted in 2000.<sup>150</sup>

In reality, the security cooperation between the states affected by Boko Haram was very weak until the Paris summit of 2014, when key countries agreed to security issues of regional interest and the MNJTF appeared as the only instrument available to support these goals. The intractability of the Boko Haram insurgency compelled the LCBC member states and Benin to reactivate the Multinational Joint Security Force on October 7, 2014 to fill the gap left by the regional inertia of the past decade and was rebranded the “Multinational Joint Task Force” (MNJTF).<sup>151</sup> Although the MNJTF was created under the leadership of the LCBC, only four of the six member states—Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria—constituted the joint military force along with Benin, which is not a member of the LCBC.<sup>152</sup> The MNJTF then became a coalition of states united around a common goal: defeating Boko Haram. The MNJTF is depicted in Figure 8.

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<sup>149</sup> "Repertoire Des Decisions Des Sommes Des Chefs D'Etat et De Gouvernement." accessed October 2, 2018, [https://www.cbtl.org/sites/default/files/conference\\_chefs\\_etat.decisions.fr\\_.pdf](https://www.cbtl.org/sites/default/files/conference_chefs_etat.decisions.fr_.pdf).

<sup>150</sup> International Court of Justice. "Land and Maritime Boundary Between Cameroon and Nigeria, Judgement of 10 October 2002." Accessed October 20, 2018. <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/94/13803.pdf>.

<sup>151</sup> Tchioffo Kodjo, “Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Regional and International Efforts to Combat the Boko Haram Terrorist Group and the Way Forward-African Union - Peace and Security Department,” African Union, Peace and Security Department, accessed October 2, 2018, <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/report-of-the-chairperson-of-the-commission-on-regional-and-international-efforts-to-combat-the-boko-haram-terrorist-group-and-the-way-forward>.

<sup>152</sup> Greta Galeazzi et al., “Water and Security at Inter-Regional Cross- Roads,” Accessed November 11, 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LCBC-Policy-Brief-PEDRO-Political-Economy-Dynamics-Regional-Organisations-Africa-ECDPM-2017.pdf>

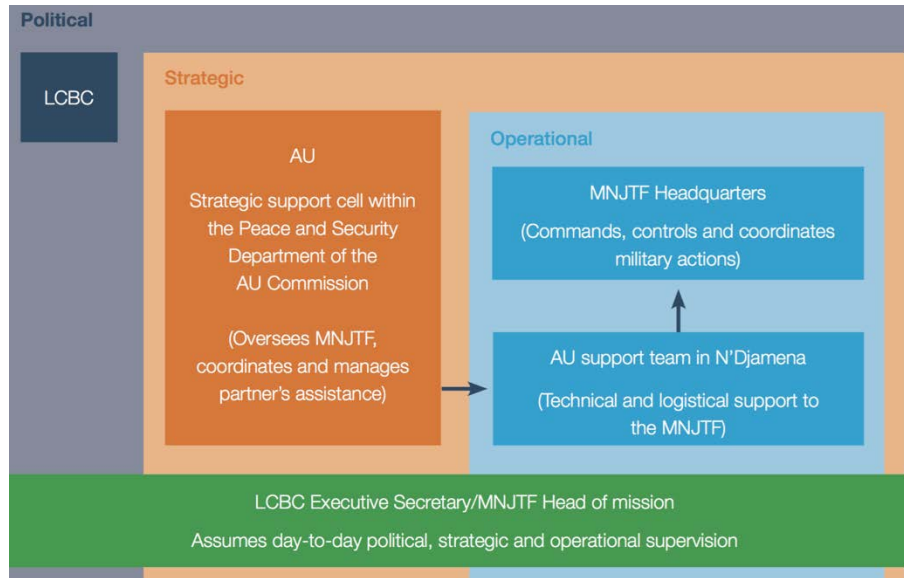


Figure 8. MNJTF Organizational Design<sup>153</sup>

At their 469th meeting on November 25, 2014, the African Union’s Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) fully endorsed the MNJTF’s activation. However, it was not until its 484th meeting, held on January 29, 2015 that the AUPSC authorized the creation of a MNJTF force strength of up to 7,500 military personnel, which it later increased to 10,000.<sup>154</sup> The MNJTF differed from classic AU peace support missions in a few critical ways. Most notably, the troops of the MNJTF primarily operated in their own country with some arrangements for cross-border operations. Furthermore, the financial agreements between the regional states were unique and mandated that contributing countries cover a large share of their own operational expenses.<sup>155</sup> The member countries established three

<sup>153</sup> Source: Assanvo, “Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram.”

<sup>154</sup> Tchioffo Kodjo, “Communiqué of the 484th Meeting of the PSC on the Boko Haram Terrorist Group-African Union - Peace and Security Department,” African Union, Peace and Security Department, accessed October 19, 2018, <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-484th-meeting-of-the-psc-on-the-boko-haram-terrorist-group>.

<sup>155</sup> Strategic Directive For MNJTF Operations.



components to the MNJTF—military, police and civilian.<sup>156</sup> However, as of 2018, only the military component had been completely activated. The member countries have struggled to put the other components in place and to receive the funding they need to activate the police and civilian components.<sup>157</sup>

The MNJTF also received financial and training support from the European Union.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom had a role in providing technical assistance to the MNJTF and region states to effectively implement the counter-terrorism initiative in the Lake Chad region.

The transformation of the LCBC from its initial mandate to a counter-Boko Haram mission received considerable skepticism because the organization had not handled a crisis of such magnitude, and the LCBC's initial mission was development and environmental policy in the Lake Chad Basin region. Assanvo points out that, although its mandate allows it to carry out and sustain security operations, the LCBC has very narrow and limited experience of military organization.<sup>159</sup> Consequently, it was necessary to provide specialized and multidimensional support to the MNJTF to improve its effectiveness as a counter-Boko Haram force. In addition to the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the European Union, the African Union (AU) became an essential partner to provide this support by offering technical assistance and coordinating partner support. It hosted

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<sup>156</sup> Tchioffo Kodjo, "Rapport de la Présidente de la Commission sur la mise en œuvre du Communiqué PSC/AHG/COMM.2 (CDLXXXIV) sur le Groupe Terroriste Boko Haram et les efforts internationaux connexes-African Union - Peace and Security Department," Union africaine, Département Paix et Sécurité, accessed October 20, 2018, <http://afcone.peaceau.org/fr/article/rapport-de-la-presidente-de-la-commission-sur-la-mise-en-oeuvre-du-communique-psc-ahg-comm-2-cdlxxxiv-sur-le-groupe-terroriste-boko-haram-et-les-efforts-internationaux-connexes>.

<sup>157</sup> Report on the Meeting Of The Council Of Ministers Of Defence Of The Lake Chad Basin Commission Member Countries and the Republic Benin held on held on 24 February 2017, Abuja, Nigeria.

<sup>158</sup> United Nations. "Security Council Presidential Statement Encourages Further Progress in Addressing Challenges to Stability, Development of Sahel Region | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12147.doc.htm>.

<sup>159</sup> Mahmood and Ani, "Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods."

several international donor conferences, including one in Oslo on February 24, 2017, which focused on tackling the unfolding human crisis in the Lake Chad Region.<sup>160</sup>

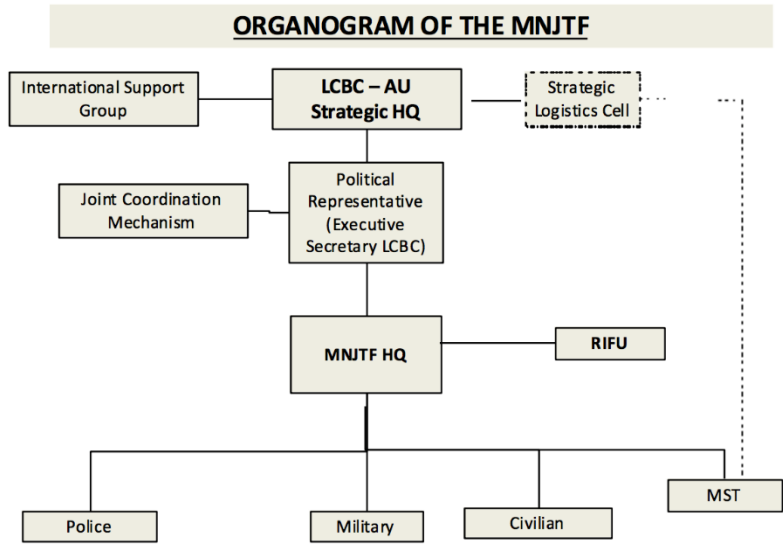
The MNJTF is organized as follows. The MNJTF operates under the control of LCBC, initially an intergovernmental organization that oversees the management of Lake Chad's natural resources and acts as forum for the member nations to cooperate on security and economic issues affecting the Lake Chad Basin.<sup>161</sup> The LCBC Secretariat is supported by the International Support Group, the Strategic Logistics Cell, and the Joint Coordination Mechanism. Beginning in 2015, the Executive Secretary hosts a quarterly council of the Minister of Defense from the MNJTF member states to assess the progress toward the goal of eradicating Boko Haram and discuss the way forward.

The MNJTF Force Commander, permanently assigned to a Nigerian officer, has day-to-day operational supervision of the MNJTF and coordinates actions in the four sectors of the MNJTF. His headquarters is organized as follows. The Deputy Commander of the MNJTF, which rotates between Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, the Office of Chief of Staff, the Civilian Advisor, the Police Advisor, the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit cell, and functional staff sections. The MNJTF headquarters provides a crucial connection between the member states' security forces that operates under their nation's command structure and the international organization involved in the fight against Boko haram. The organizational structure is depicted in Figures 9 and 10.

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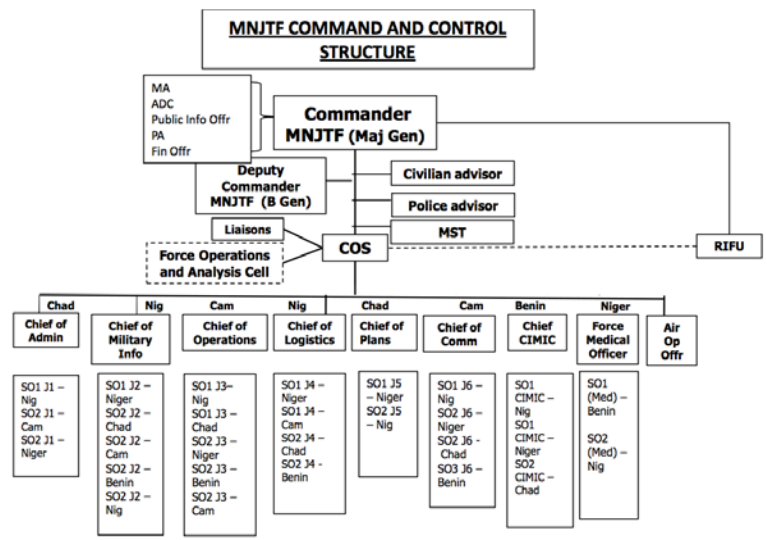
<sup>160</sup> Tor Ingar Oesterud, "Donor Conference in Oslo for Nigeria and Lake Chad Region on 24 February," *Norway Today* (blog), January 18, 2017, <http://norwaytoday.info/news/donor-conference-oslo-nigeria-lake-chad-region-24-february/>.

<sup>161</sup> The member nations of the LCBC are Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Libya. The LCBC is led by an Executive Secretary nominated and appointed by the member nations heads of state.



Source: MNJTF Official Documents

Figure 9. Organigram of the MNJTF.



Source: MNJTF Official Documents

Figure 10. MNJTF Command and Control Structure

The counter-Boko Haram mandate of the MNJTF embraces several objectives, including ensuring a safe and secure environment in the Lake Chad region, putting a stop to the violence against civilians, supporting the stabilization programs to reduce the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency in the region, and providing sufficient assistance to the affected populations.<sup>162</sup> This mandate was designed as a goal-driven process, divided into two phases. Offensive Operations: Isolate and neutralize Boko Haram factions; disrupt command and control and communication systems; cut supply lines; shut down traffic circuits; and reduce the potential for military operations. Stabilization Operations: Facilitate the return of displaced persons and refugees; support the restoration of administrations in areas where they are no longer present; support the restoration of public security missions by the security forces in areas of concern; and contribute to the initiation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process of illegally armed individuals.

Beginning in 2015, the MNJTF deployed in four sectors:

Sector 1—with the command post located in Mora in Cameroon, this sector covers a large part of the area of the 4th Joint Military Region of Cameroon, including the departments of Logone et Chari, Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga.

Sector 2—with the command post located in the town of Baga-sola, in Chad, this sector covers a large part of the area of the 4th Military Region of Chad.

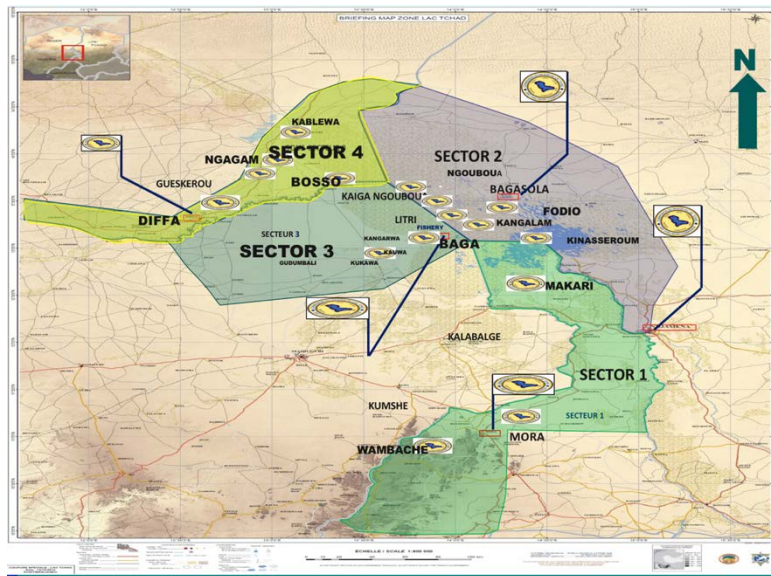
Sector 3—with the command post located in Baga, Nigeria, this sector covers a part of the area of the 7th Division in northeastern Nigeria, which includes Gubio, Mobbar, Abadam, Guzamala, Kukawa, Monguno, Marte, Baga, Ngala, Kalabalge, and Dikwa. This area remains the epicenter of Boko Haram insurgency fueled by religious extremism.

Sector 4—with the command post located in Diffa, Niger, this sector covers a large part of the area of the 5th Military Region of Niger, including Maine-Soroa, Diffa, Bosso, and Nguigmi.<sup>163</sup> These sectors are depicted in Figure 11.

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<sup>162</sup> “Multinational Joint Task Force Mandate.” MNJTF (blog). Accessed October 23, 2018. <https://www.mnjtf.org/about-mnjtf/mnjtf-mandate/>.

<sup>163</sup> Strategic Directive For MNJTF Operations.



Source: MNJTF Official Documents

Figure 11. Map of MNJTF Area of Operation

Interviews with officers deployed with the MNJTF reveal important insights into the strengths and limits of this multinational effort to counter Boko Haram. First, some have criticized Nigeria's culture of secrecy and its military leadership's determination to bypass some regional agreements as obstacles to overall progress in the MNJTF mission.<sup>164</sup> Others have reproached Nigeria for failing to consult sufficiently with the other partner states and stakeholders, and pointed out Cameroon to be exclusively in pursuit of its own national interests.<sup>165</sup> However, as one officer noted in an interview, Cameroonian and Nigerian forces have increased their collaboration, including visits by Cameroonian officers to Nigerian territory, specifically through the liaison officer exchange between Operation LAFIYA DOLE and Operation ALPHA and Operation EMERGENCE, and coordinated a clearance patrol along their common border, resulting in the release of many hostages.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Cameroon officers. Interview by authors. Skype. June 29, 2018.

<sup>165</sup> MNJTF officers. Interview by authors. Skype. July 23, 2018.

<sup>166</sup> Cameroon BIR officers. Interview by authors. Skype. July 6, 2018.

Overall, the MNJTF has had considerable success in countering Boko Haram. Some of the most successful military operations took place at the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. From February 11 to 14, 2016, a combined joint offensive as part of Operation ARROW FIVE forced scores of Boko Haram militants to surrender in the Nigerian town of Ngoshe. At about the same time, Operation DEEP PUNCH 2, a sweeping operation in Nigeria's Sambisa Forest that included 497 Cameroonian soldiers positioned in Pulka, Nigeria, completely disrupted Boko Haram's network in the area and cut its main supply routes in the southern part of Borno State.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, from May 10 to 16, 2016, in the Madawya Forest in Nigeria, the MNJTF Sector 1 offensive combined with Cameroon troops in Operation EMERGNECE 4 to secure the release of hundreds of civilian hostages. Overall, in the first five months of 2016, the MNJTF freed nearly 4,690 civilian hostages, according to figures from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).<sup>168</sup>

However, the MNJTF has also had some significant setbacks. The first occurred between January 3 and 7, 2015, in what became known as the "Baga Massacre," which included the death of 2,000 civilians at the hands of Boko Haram. The massacre was due to a number of causes, including poor planning and a lack of coordination between the regional states.<sup>169</sup> In addition to the large loss of civilian life, the MNJTF command post of the time, located in the town of Baga, Nigeria on the shores of Lake Chad, was completely wiped out by Boko Haram.<sup>170</sup> This event left the MNJTF in disarray.<sup>171</sup>

In response to the Bosso Massacre, the MNJTF initiated Operation GAMA AIKI in June 2016, its first comprehensive multilateral campaign.<sup>172</sup> A MNJTF officer explained

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<sup>167</sup> Mahmood and Ani, "Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods."

<sup>168</sup> Assanvo, "Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram."

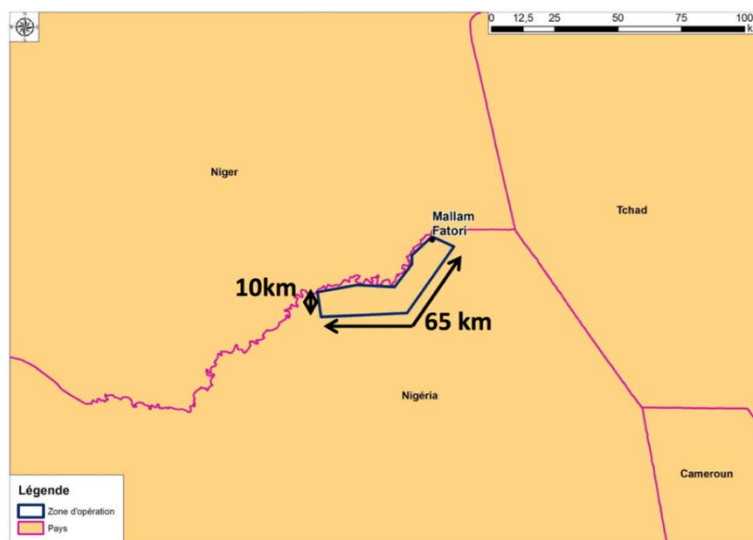
<sup>169</sup> Omar S Mahmood and Ndubuisi Christian Ani, "Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram." Institute for Security Studies, July 2018

<sup>170</sup> Assanvo, "Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram."

<sup>171</sup> Monica Mark, "Boko Haram's 'Deadliest Massacre': 2,000 Feared Dead in Nigeria," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2015, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/09/boko-haram-deadliest-massacre-baga-nigeria>.

<sup>172</sup> Mahmood and Ani, "Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods."

that GAMA AIKI's priority area of operation was a 10km-wide band of land 65 km long along the border between Niger and Nigeria, around Damasak and Malam-Fatori. It was the first time that Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria worked together on a common operation under a single command and control. Its mission was to destroy Boko Haram's last strongholds in the Damasak area. Operation GAMA AIKI took place through August 2016, with the main effort focused on disrupting Boko Haram's leadership and logistical organization and preventing fuel and small arms smuggling.<sup>173</sup> Ultimately, Operation GAMA AIKI succeeded in destroying insurgent assets in the Metele and Garere areas and completely took Boko Haram by surprise, forcing it to reassess its strategy. Assanvo notes that the concentration of MNJTF forces in a specific place made it possible to liberate the border from Boko Haram, particularly Damasak.<sup>174</sup> However, the rainy season ultimately hampered further progress. Operation GAMA AIKI is depicted in Figure 12.



Source: MNJTF Official Documents

Figure 12. Map of GAMA AIKI Target Zone

<sup>173</sup> Conflict Armament Research. "INVESTIGATING CROSS-BORDER WEAPON TRANSFERS IN THE SAHEL." Accessed October 12, 2018. <http://www.conflictarm.com/reports/investigating-cross-border-weapon-transfers-in-the-sahel/>.

<sup>174</sup> Assanvo, "Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram."

Operation GAMA AIKI 2, launched in January 2017, also known as Operation RUWAN KADA, continued with the success of Operation GAMA AIKI. It contained air strikes and amphibious maneuvers to clear Boko Haram's strongholds within the Lake Chad islands. Interviews with regional MNJTF officers reveal that the six week-long bombing campaign disrupted the Boko Haram logistics network, neutralized scores of Boko Haram militants, and freed hundreds of hostages.

However, despite these continued MNJTF efforts, Boko Haram continued to launch attacks. For example, between June 3 to 6 2016 in the town of Bosso, Niger, Boko Haram killed 32 soldiers, 30 from Niger and 2 from Nigeria, most of whom were in the process of building a bridge on the Komadugu River between Niger and Nigeria.<sup>175</sup> MNJTF efforts also failed to stop the spread of Boko Haram in Lake Chad and its islands.<sup>176</sup> On July 25, 2017, Boko Haram ambushed an oil exploration team in Magumeri, Borno State, followed by attacks on numerous military outposts and armed convoys. The February 2018 abduction of girls in Dapchi is another example of Boko Haram's continued operational strength. In April 2018, MNJTF launched Operation AMNI FAKAT, which aims to continue attacking Boko Haram's capabilities and consolidate the gains of Operation RUWAN KADA.<sup>177</sup> Despite these setbacks, the threat posed by Boko Haram made the MNJTF a more applicable and effective tool for fighting terrorism at the regional level.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

Boko Haram's rapid expansion in 2014 and its cross-border attacks into Cameroon, Niger and Chad forced the nations of the Lake Chad Basin to respond. Their initial reactions focused primarily on containing Boko Haram in Nigeria and protecting each nation's own vital interests. With the establishment of the MNJTF in 2016, the five countries of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin improved their coordination and

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<sup>175</sup> "Boko Haram Attack in Niger 'Kills 32 Soldiers,'" accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/boko-haram-attack-niger-kills-32-soldiers-nigeria-160604125912477.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Assanvo, "Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram."

<sup>177</sup> "Commander Multinational Joint Task Force Briefs Media and Strategic Partners in N'Djamena." MNJTF (blog), May 3, 2018. <https://www.mnjtf.org/commander-multinational-joint-task-force-briefs-media-and-strategic-partners-in-ndjamena/>.



operation reach significantly. However, despite some tactical successes against Boko Haram and an increase in coordinated multi-national operations, the MNJTF is still plagued with resources issues and internal conflicts. The MNJTF has been unable to fully defeat Boko Haram or IS-WA, and both organizations remain a threat to the stability of the Lake Chad region.

The next chapter will offer summary thoughts on the thesis and offer recommendations for improved counter Boko Haram operations for the MNJTF.

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## **IV. SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. SUMMARY**

This thesis aimed to investigate the following questions. What factors contributed to the rise of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria? What was the response from Nigeria and neighboring states towards Boko Haram? How has the MNJTF responded to Boko Haram and how effective has it been? How has Boko adapted and been able to remain resilient to multinational efforts to defeat it? And, finally, how can regional states and the MNJTF bring Boko Haram's insurgency to a close and prevent a similar jihadist movement from taking root in the Muslim populations of the region?

This thesis investigated these questions through a combination of examining research, including reports, scholarly journal articles, and books, along with interviewing multiple African military officers and civilian officials with experience in countering Boko Haram. Chapter II provided an overview of the underlying causes of Boko Haram's insurgency, examining how Boko Haram transformed from a mass-religious movement into a violent insurgency. The chapter demonstrated how Nigeria's heavy-handed security forces fueled the insurgency and identified how ideological differences within Boko Haram led to a fracture in the group and the emergence of Islamic State West Africa IS-WA in 2016. Chapter III analyzed Boko Haram as a regional threat and how it spread beyond the borders of Nigeria. The chapter provided an overview of countries' independent responses to Boko Haram's rapid expansion in 2014 and the formation of the MNJTF by the nations of the Lake Chad Basin. The chapter also analyzed issues with the MNJTF's organizational structure and how its operational pace and tempo affects operations against Boko Haram and IS-WA. Despite some tactical successes against Boko Haram and an increase in coordinated multinational operations, the MNJTF is still plagued with limited resources and internal conflicts that need to be resolved.

## **B. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Ultimately, this investigation found that the emergence of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria was built on a foundation of Islamic extremism and economic disparity; these two variables, combined with the “Sharia politics” of the early 2000s, produced a mass-religious movement that later became a violent insurgency. Mohammad Yusuf, Boko Haram’s founder, benefited from several changes in northern Nigeria’s religious makeup: the breakdown of the more peaceful traditional Sufi religious establishment, a move toward political Islam in northeast Nigeria that began in the late 1970s, and a growing movement of independent Salafist preachers that attacked Western influence in the region.

The economic disparity that has long divided north and south Nigeria was particularly acute in Borno State, a region that had been historically isolated from the rest of Nigeria and the home of the linguistically distinct ethnic group, the Kanuri. This disparity was exacerbated by Nigeria’s oil wealth, which brought significant economic growth to the south in the early 2000s while leaving the north continually underdeveloped. From early in its development, Boko Haram used the northeast’s poverty to its advantage by using a micro-finance program to attract and maintain adherents.

Islamic extremism and economic disparity did not produce Boko Haram’s violent insurgency on their own. However, the political climate of the late 1990s and early 2000s provided the impetus for many political Islamist groups to mobilize. After 1999, during the transition to democracy, many northern Nigerian politicians appealed to these political Islamist groups’ interests in the implementation of Sharia law to build a base of political support, and Boko Haram was originally one of these groups. Unable to achieve its objectives through political means, Boko Haram turned to violence, which was further inflamed by Nigeria’s ineffective and often heavy-handed response that legitimized Boko Haram’s narrative that Muslims were under attack by the Nigerian state.

As Boko Haram developed, the way it used violence to achieve its objectives changed. In the beginning, Boko Haram’s violence was primarily focused on attacking Nigerian security forces; however, as the movement progressed, its targeting broadened to include any elements of Nigerian society that opposed it, including religious leaders,

politicians, and educators. As the influence of its new leader, Abukar Shekau, grew over the movement, Boko Haram rapidly expanded its territory. Its violence began to include any civilian that opposed it, regardless of whether they were Muslims. Shekau's extreme views on takfir (violence against fellow Muslims) and his wholesale slaughter of Muslims caused a fracture in the movement and produced the offshoot group IS-WA.

Thus far, Boko Haram's capabilities have been greatly reduced through concerted actions by individual nations and as a coalition working as part of the MNJTF. Despite this success, however, the MNJTF has been operating with limited funds, which has persisted since its inception, hindering the efficiency of the joint operations and the ability to maximize their returns. Additionally, the organization, which is divided into four sectors, each controlled by a regional state, looks like an organization that conforms to national borders. In other words, the MNJTF reflects a lack of integration between the different national armies, which often require additional temporary authorities to conduct combined operations. Lastly, the implementation of the civil and the police components are behind schedule. The stabilization phase would have a greater chance of success were civil and police components activated.

More broadly, this analysis of the rise of Boko Haram, its fracture with IS-WA, and the multinational response yields five key findings that may assist the nations of the Lake Chad Basin in bringing an end to the Boko Haram and IS-WA insurgencies and preventing the development of another jihadist threat in the region.

### **1. Understanding the Resiliency of Boko Haram**

Boko Haram and its offshoot, IS-WA, have remained remarkably resilient since their inception. Over the past decade, Nigeria has made multiple independent attempts to eradicate the group, and a multi-national force of the region's militaries was established to combat the group. Despite multiple successful operations against Boko Haram by the MNJTF, Boko Haram remains a potent insurgency, with no signs of defeat almost four years since Boko Haram's peak of territorial control in 2014. Boko Haram's resiliency can partly be attributed to Nigeria's military-focused response, which has fueled the region's anger and resentment towards the Nigerian state. Nigeria's emphasis on killing fighters

while failing to rectify some of the underlying conditions that fueled the insurgency will only continue to isolate the Nigerian state from the civilian population and feed Boko Haram's persecution narrative.

Boko Haram's resiliency can also be attributed to the movement itself. Its beginnings as a mass-religious movement and its early micro-finance programs allowed it to build networks of support throughout the region long before the movement turned violent. The leadership has continually shown operational flexibility and a willingness to adapt to opposing security force operations. Boko Haram and IS-WA have also proven adept at going into hiding during periods of intense military pressure and returning once that pressure has lifted. This dynamic works against the cumbersome apparatus of the MNJTF, which requires several months to plan, garner resources, and coordinate among its member nations to conduct an operation. Boko Haram and IS-WA's leaders also adapt their tactics in response to MNJTF operations, with fighters abandoning the use of armored assets and large maneuver elements in exchange for motorcycles, favoring hit-and-run attacks on security forces.

To be successful against the ever-adapting Boko Haram and IS-WA, the MNJTF must streamline its processes and increase its operational pace to prevent Boko Haram and IS-WA from simply fleeing its current area of operations. Regrettably, after almost two decades of existence in northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram and now IS-WA are firmly established in the region and cannot simply be eradicated through military operations alone. In many ways, the situation is similar to Afghanistan where the Taliban is firmly established as a part of Afghans' daily lives and the Taliban is also willing to preserve their force by hiding during periods of military pressure. However, the difference between the Taliban and Boko Haram is that Boko Haram is incapable of effective Islamic governance even at a local level. In the end, Boko Haram's inability to provide any kind of services to the population almost certainly will be its downfall.

## 2. Bringing the Conflict to a Close

The conventional wisdom on how to end the violence in northeast Nigeria is typically some combination of military operations to eradicate the fighters along with economic aid to address the region's grievances of endemic poverty and underdevelopment.<sup>178</sup> However, military operations and economic development will not fully address the underlying political causes of the movement and the mistrust the region's population feels toward the Nigerian state. Nigeria has not seized multiple opportunities to de-escalate the violence between it and Boko Haram. While the current leader, Shekau, is unlikely to moderate his extreme ideology to reconcile with the Nigerian state, there are likely elements within the movement open to reconciling.

A regional reconciliation plan that addresses some of the political and religious underlying causes of the movement could bring some members of Boko Haram and those in IS-WA's factions back into the political process. As part of this plan, Nigeria and its regional partners must fully address the role of Islam in the northern states, limit the identity groups and patronage networks that dominate the politics of northern Nigeria, acknowledge and address the mistakes Nigerian security forces have made over the past decade, compensate those it wrongly victimized, and lay out a clear vision for how Boko Haram fighters will deradicalize and be reintegrated into Nigerian society. In the past, Nigeria has failed to take similar actions, and the jihadist vigor in the region has only increased.

While the MNJTF is not currently in a position to conduct this reconciliation, the members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission could fund and man the civilian and police components of the MNJTF. In turn, civilian and police components could provide the logistical and organizational backbone to establishing and implementing a successful deradicalization, demobilization, and reconciliation (DDR) program that spans the entire region and that is evenly administered across all the nations of the Lake Chad Basin.

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<sup>178</sup> Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 2017, 303.

### **3. Exploiting Fractures in Boko Haram through a Unified MNJTF**

Although a military solution will not defeat Boko Haram on its own, it is an important component to bringing Boko Haram's insurgency to a conclusion. The fracture between Boko Haram and the IS-WA in 2016 has divided the movement along both ideological and geographic lines. The Boko Haram faction under Shekau dominates southern Borno State, the Mandara Mountains, and the border zone between Nigeria and Cameroon. IS-WA under Abu Mus'ab Al Barnawi has taken root in northern Borno State, Lake Chad, and the border regions between Niger, Chad, and Nigeria.

Despite their separate geographic zones of influence, the two groups remain in direct competition for resources, recruits, and financing. The weakening of one faction may inadvertently empower the other in a way that is detrimental to the overall security of the region. As the MNJTF develops its strategy to combat extremism in the Lake Chad Basin, it will need to treat IS-WA and Boko Haram as two separate problem sets and be aware of the impact this treatment could have on the MNJTF coalition cohesion.

Boko Haram under Shekau will likely remain, in the words of Alexander Thurston, a "mobile jihadist gang" for the foreseeable future.<sup>179</sup> Shekau's ideology is too extreme to spread beyond its current area of influence. However, it will remain firmly ingrained in the Mandara Mountains and the remote border regions between Cameroon and Nigeria. The MNJTF should isolate Boko Haram from the population by securing the population centers, launching an information operations campaign that educates the population on Shekau's extremism, and implementing a defection campaign similar to the campaign used against the Lord's Resistance Army in Central Africa. This strategy would require close coordination between Nigeria and Cameroon and would need to be combined with economic and political reforms that incentivize the population to reject Shekau.

IS-WA is the more dangerous long-term threat to the region; it is both ideologically and geographically positioned to connect and integrate with other jihadist organizations in Mali and Libya. Additionally, IS-WA has an intractable haven in the islands of Lake Chad

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<sup>179</sup> Thurston, 304.



and broader support among the population, who view them as more moderate than Shekau's Boko Haram. The MNJTF, as with Shekau's Boko Haram, needs to control the population centers in northern Borno State, and limit IS-WA's movements on Lake Chad through the establishment of integrated maritime forces under the MNJTF using flat-bottomed boats. To date, the MNJTF has been successful at containing the violence from IS-WA and preventing it from spilling over into Chad or Niger; however, to fully quell the military threat from IS-WA Nigeria requires securing and reintegrating its population centers along the Niger-Nigeria border.

Despite multiple internal issues, the MNJTF has had success at recapturing and holding territory from Boko Haram and IS-WA. Throughout this period, the goals of the MNJTF's contributing nations have generally been inline. However, the split between Boko Haram and IS-WA could weaken the MNJTF as each member nation prioritizes combating the group that most affects their national interests. Boko Haram under Shekau would be the priority for Cameroon, while Niger and Chad would prioritize operations against IS-WA. Both threaten Nigeria's security. However, Western interests, which view IS-WA as the greater regional threat, will likely exert pressure on Nigeria to prioritize combating IS-WA over Boko Haram. Early identification of a possible divergence of objectives in the coalition will assist the MNJTF in managing each member nation's expectations and assisting in the way the MNJTF allocates its limited resources as it moves forward.

#### **4. Responding to New Threats**

Long before Boko Haram transformed into a violent insurgency and terrorist organization and a threat to regional security, the movement established networks of supporters throughout the region, which allowed it to spread rapidly from 2013 to 2015. While the extreme ideology of Abubakar Shekau is unlikely to spread beyond its current area of influence, the ideology of IS-WA has the potential to spread to other parts of the Sahel or Lake Chad basin beyond its current area of operation. The MNJTF should implement an intelligence program and warning measures to anticipate and properly respond to any indication of the expansion of IS-WA beyond its current area of influence.

Each nation could conduct this intelligence and monitoring on its own while regional efforts under the MNJTF could facilitate the identification of trends that span the entire region and provide analysis beyond the capabilities of the individual nations. These measures would involve better intelligence collection, analysis of information on the populations (not just the enemy) and areas potentially at risk. In this context, the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit of the MNJTF should expand its responsibilities beyond the MNJTF's boundaries and develop analytical tools required to anticipate and identify emerging threats.

## **5. Limiting and Preventing Boko Haram and IS-WA Operations**

A critical aspect of the MNJTF's mission is protecting the civilian population from Boko Haram's and IS-WA's terroristic violence. To fully accomplish this protection would require even closer proximity between the security forces and the local population; the activation, manning and resources of the police and civilian components of the MNJTF would greatly assist in this. Furthermore, increased, timely intelligence sharing among all Boko Haram affected countries and the international community would help multiply the MNJTF's efforts and allow it to prioritize its operations properly. The analysis and exploitation of these intelligence reports within reasonable operational deadlines could be a factor of success in future operations. Protecting the population also means limiting Boko Haram's operational reach and operational tempo. Boko Haram's funding has contributed towards its resiliency. Its sources of income include ransom payments, taxes, extortion of local populations, donations, smuggling and trafficking of livestock and drugs. To counter these sources of funding the MNJTF should increase its counter-finance capabilities and take immediate action in areas it currently has control over, such as cross-border smuggling and trafficking to limit Boko Haram's access to funding.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

The conflict in northeast Nigeria is similar to the conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria, where jihadist groups have remained resilient against significant military operations to defeat them. While military operations can achieve temporary security, they do not address the underlying causes and grievances that produced the insurgency. A

political solution is required for that. This does not mean, however, that the military cannot be part of the solution, or even lead the way. The activation of the MNJTF's civilian and political components may provide the MNJTF with the additional capability required to fully assist in bringing this violent conflict to a close.

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