

REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION AND THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INSECURITY IN WEST AFRICA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on various debates on regional security cooperation, this article uses security community theory to examine patterns of security cooperation in West Africa against the backdrop of changing conflict and insecurity dynamics, focussing on the Boko Haram conflict. It examines how regional actors counter the threat posed by this terrorist group and which factors influence their

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effectiveness. The findings of the paper show that, despite various efforts to combat this insurgent group, Boko Haram continues to carry out several coordinated attacks and consolidate its power across the sub-region. To effectively coordinate and counter the violence of this insurgent group, the paper therefore proposes a broad-based multidimensional approach that incorporates non-military components of conflict management and counterinsurgency to complement the current state-centered or military approach and address the current realities and challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: *Security Cooperation, Conflict Management, Insecurity, Boko Haram, West Africa and Africa*

ÖZ

BÖLGESEL GÜVENLİK İŞBİRLİĞİ VE BATI AFRIKA'DA DEĞİŞEN GÜVENSİZLİK DİNAMİKLERİ: BOKO HARAM ÇATIŞMASININ ANALİZİ

Bölgesel güvenlik iş birliğine ilişkin çeşitli tartışmalardan yararlanan bu makale, değişen çatışma ve güvensizlik dinamikleri zemininde Batı Afrika'daki güvenlik iş birliği modellerini incelemek için güvenlik topluluğu teorisini kullanmakta ve Boko Haram çatışmasına odaklanmaktadır. Bölgesel aktörlerin bu terörist grubun yarattığı tehdide nasıl karşı koyduklarını ve etkinliklerini hangi faktörlerin etkilediğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın bulguları, bu isyancı grupla mücadeleye yönelik çeşitli çabalara rağmen, Boko Haram'ın çeşitli koordineli saldırılar gerçekleştirmeye ve alt bölge genelinde gücünü pekiştirmeye devam ettiğini göstermektedir. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, bu isyancı grubun şiddetini etkili bir şekilde koordine etmek ve karşı koymak için, mevcut devlet merkezli veya askeri yaklaşımı tamamlayacak ve 21. yüzyılın mevcut gerçeklerini ve zorluklarını ele alacak şekilde çatışma yönetimi ve isyanla mücadelenin askeri olmayan bileşenlerini içeren geniş tabanlı çok boyutlu bir yaklaşım önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Güvenlik İş birliği, Çatışma Yönetimi, Güvensizlik, Boko Haram, Batı Afrika ve Afrika*

1. Introduction

The escalating insecurity affecting Africa today underscores a troubling legacy of unresolved conflicts, divisive politics, ineffective leadership, social and economic marginalisation, militancy, insurgency, and terrorism. These challenges are not just historical. They carry a profound and persistent threat to the peace and stability of the entire region and require urgent and concerted action by all stakeholders. These challenges have grave implications for the socio-economic

growth and development of the region (Reno, 2009). It is concerning that these threats continue unabated given that most states in Africa appear to have failed in their mandate to protect and secure the lives and properties of their citizens (Cunliffe, 2010). Also, most of the sub-regional and regional organisations created to foster unity, cohesion, and progress to ensure that the continent is safe from this constant tension caused by insecurity have failed to address these concerns (Marangio, 2017). These changing dynamics of insecurity facing the continent have continued to embarrass not only African states but similarly the several Regional Economic Communities (RECs) established with the desire and aim of proffering “*African Solutions to African Problems*” (Møller, 2009).

This anecdote closely reflects the reality in the Horn of Africa, where the terrorist organisation Al-Shabaab has been executing a series of attacks in Somalia and Kenya. Additionally, extremist groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) are active in the Democratic Republic of Congo in Central Africa (Durmaz, 2019). The growing activities of insurgent groups across the Sahel and West Africa such as Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), the Janjaweed militia, Boko Haram, and the splinter group Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) have continued to impose their reign of terror and perform attacks with impunity with no signs of a resolution. This situation has led many scholars to claim that most African states are weak with ‘zero-capacity’ to tackle these challenges. Moreover, the inability of multilateral organisations to cooperate and ensure that this changing tide of insecurity is managed has led many to believe that they lack the structural, institutional capacity, and competence to deal with these threats and complex security problems (Woldemariam, 2011).

Although these security challenges have their own origins, intricacies, dynamics, and appear to be different, they have a single denominator: they all threaten the peace, security, stability, development, and growth of societies (Afolabi, 2009). It has been highlighted that no society that seeks to be progressive in the areas of governance, economy, human capital development and compete with other players in the global system will be able to achieve that when saturated with toxic, contentious, inter and intra-ethnic conflict, as well as regional and sub-regional insecurity (Wilén, 2009). These issues have a significant impact on slowing down the growth and development of any society and region (Kieh & Kalu, 2013). Therefore, multilateral organisations play a crucial role in managing insecurity and conflicts.

International organisations like the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the various RECs across Africa continue to show their concerns and misgivings regarding the constant extortions to peace and security in the region. Even though these actors have attempted to establish instruments to address these challenges, they have yielded minimal results in terms of effective implementation and execution (Kangdim, Yorgancıoğlu & Bulus, 2022). For example, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) has been established by the AU to help proffer solutions to African problems and address challenges associated with insecurity and conflict (Berhe, 2017). Since its establishment over a decade ago, the APSA security framework has been facing a series of challenges which has slowed down its effective operationalisation (Tiruneh, 2010).

This article adds to the discussion on regional security cooperation in West Africa, focusing on the Boko Haram conflict in northeastern Nigeria and its impact on the Lake Chad region. The article utilises Karl Deutsch's security community theory to examine the following questions: What role has regional security cooperation played in combating the Boko Haram insurgency? How have the various actors responded to managing the conflict? What challenges do these regional actors face in containing the threat posed by this radical group? To achieve the research objectives, this article employs a qualitative research methodology that involves reviewing both academic and non-academic literature, as well as conducting face-to-face interviews and discussions with academics, security sector members, and policy experts. These key informants serve to complement other relevant sources for the study (YDÜ/SB/2018/302). The interviews were conducted between January 2019 and December 2020.

The article includes six sections. It starts with an introduction, followed by an analysis of theoretical perspectives on regional security cooperation concerning Boko Haram in West Africa. Next, it provides an overview of the Boko Haram conflict and its security impacts, along with the countermeasures taken by national, sub-regional, and regional actors. It then addresses the challenges these actors face and concludes with a summary of the study's findings.

2. Contending Theoretical Debates on the Politics of Regional Security Cooperation and the Boko Haram Question in West Africa

Regional Security Cooperation as a concept is shrouded with ambiguity and vague definitional challenges. This is because the concept of region, regionalism, and to an extent, regional security cooperation, is not insulated from these contested definitional and operational ambiguities (Buzan & Waever, 2003). There are studies that have shown that some groups of scholars contextualize a region to connote a geographical enclave where different continents such as Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania exist. However, others contest the assertion that the regional concept is not limited to the geographical understanding of continents but depicts and represents a form of identity and ideational social construct of imagined economic, political, social, and cultural communities that share certain fundamental values and norms (Buzan & Waever, 2003, p. 304). This form of disambiguation is vital to enable one to have a clearer picture and perspective as to what regional security cooperation entails.

To further understand regional security cooperation, supporters of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies modelled this construct and understanding of Regional Security Cooperation into four distinct categories or typologies (Buzan & Waever, 2003, p. 93). This categorisation is in the form of “*alliances, collective security, security regimes, and security communities*”. *Alliances* represent the traditional concept of military security, which underpins the offensive and defensive capabilities of states against any form of threat or threat perception. According to proponents of this school, the alliance could be in the form of cooperation by states who are not united by geography but share a similar ideological stance and unite against a common aggressor (Buzan & Weaver, 2003, p. 93). The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact are examples of the category of security cooperation that work together for the security of their own ideological positions and thus want to control not only themselves but also the other side.

The second part of security cooperation is the paradigm of collective security. *Collective Security* draws most of its philosophical undertones from the 20th Century League of Nations and the broader framework of the UN. This text clarifies strategic security cooperation among states in response to threats, highlighting actions that promote global, regional, and sub-regional stability and peace (Kupchan & Kupchan, 1995). *Security regimes* form the third aspect of regional security cooperation. Security regimes represent “non-security” norms and components, which regulate certain acceptable universal standards and

behaviours amongst various states and non-state actors in the international system (Jervis, 1982; Koblenz, 2013). This security regime could be within the larger framework of laws governing international trade, international law, human rights, etc. The fourth component of this Regional Security Cooperation is framed within the context of what Karl Deutsch referred to as the Security Community.

Security community is conceptualised as a process whereby states that are aligned geographically or through the process of an imagined socio-economic, cultural and political communities come together and form a union or an organisation that will help strengthen and promote their geostrategic and security interests against any form of threat and threat perception capable of threatening their stability and development (Adetula, 2016). Based on the precedence that states who belong to or share certain political, economic, and socio-cultural membership will not fight each other. This is because, whenever conflicts arise, the community has a structured mechanism to manage and resolve disputes without resorting to violence. This approach is crucial, as violence can have severe consequences that threaten the peace and stability of the community (Deutsch, 2015). This categorisation of regional security cooperation further broadens the horizon and understanding, thus enabling one to form clearer picture and perspective in explaining why and how nations cooperate and unite in dealing with any form of threat to their collective peace and stability.

Following the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945, international politics underwent a significant transformation, particularly in regional security communities. Many nations, grappling with the extensive aftermath of the conflict, understood the need to create an institution dedicated to collective security. This initiative aimed to safeguard the international system and prevent another war from breaking out (Rathbun, 2011). This growing concern led to the establishment of several multilateral organisations (Bah, 2005; Nathan, 2016; Schoeman, 2002). In Africa, for example, these forms of community existed under the umbrella of the defunct OAU, which transformed into the AU, and the various RECs committed to helping African states manage conflicts and insecurity (Schoeman, 2002).

Even though these international institutions pursued certain objectives and aims, they all had one basic irreducible feature or characteristic, which was to ensure the collective security of all members and that their interests are protected and defended against any form of threat (Patrick 2008; Richmond 2019). Most of

these multilateral institutions also sought to enhance economic, political, and socio-cultural cooperation by engaging and encouraging actions that would ensure peace, security, and stability in their various regions. Through integration, the members are required to unite and combat any threat and threat perception to their development (Acharya, 2014; Cunliffe, 2013; Gelot, 2012). Many regional and global multilateral institutions, and in the region, have experienced a certain evolution in terms of their mandate to promote political, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation. Increasingly, they are also becoming more engaged in roles that will further strengthen security ties and prevent the outbreak of conflicts that could destabilise these regions (Tavares, 2009; Taylor, 2015).

These patterns of security arrangement in Africa deal with a wide range of issues tailored around the resolution and management of conflicts and other multiple threats and threat perceptions in the continent. Most countries in the continent have experienced several cases and incidences of conflicts and insecurity ranging from Civil Wars, coups and counter-coups, inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-religious conflicts, and politically instigated and instrumentalised conflicts (Adebajo, 2002; Baumann & Clayton, 2017; Fitz-Gerald, 2017). These security challenges have triggered certain regional and sub-regional security responses to these conflicts leading to the deployment of forces by the AU, ECOWAS, and ECOMOG in these troubled areas affected by conflicts. Examples of these conflicts in West Africa include the long-protracted Civil War in Liberia in 1997, and the 1999 conflict in Guinea Bissau. Furthermore, the Ivorian Civil War in 2002, the political crises in Guinea Conakry in 2006 and 2012, and another dimension of the conflict saw the emergence of an ethnic militia under the guise of the Tuareg militia taking over certain parts of Mali and declaring their independence (Makinda, Okumu, & Mickler, 2015). Intervention by sub-regional and regional actors saw the deployment of peacekeeping troops in Central, East, and Horn of Africa due to the long-lasting conflicts in Somalia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Civil War in Sudan and South Sudan saw responses by the AU and the EAC (Brosig, 2010; Wilén, 2012).

The end of the Cold War further changed the dynamics of these conflicts and insecurities, not only in Africa but also around the world (Crocker, Hampson & Aall, 2014; Kaldor, 2013). These conventional security threats were seen within the context of the breakdown of the political and democratisation process in most

transitioned societies, which often leads to instability and political uncertainty in such countries (Kaldor, 2013). These emergent security threats were considered to be the effects of the post-Cold War climate, where multiple socio-economic forces and cultural factors of change clash (Huntington, 1993). These clashes in civilisation and cultural forces resulted in violent responses from members of the society and powerful interests who galvanised, mobilised, and instrumentalised these forces of change as pernicious for violence, conflicts, and insecurity (Hagg & Kagwanja, 2007). It is this informed narrative that explains the rise of violent extremism and terrorist activities of groups like Boko Haram across West Africa (Olanrewaju, 2015).

To further justify the application of the *security community approach* in addressing the Boko Haram conflict in this article, is premised on the following points. Examining the threat posed by Boko Haram, which spans across Nigeria and member states of the Lake Chad community such as Chad, Cameroun and Niger. These states understood the fact that the threat posed by this group does not require a unilateral response but a multilateral counter-response, hence the need for collaboration and engagement by these sub-regional and regional actors to effectively combat the Boko Haram threat (Henneberg & Plank, 2020). Secondly, the ‘security community framework’, enabled these sub-regional and regional actors to easily create a common security mechanism to effectively combat complex transnational threats (Panke & Stapel, 2023). This framework saw the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) involving the member states of the Lake Chad Basin for effective counterinsurgent activities against Boko Haram (Adela, 2023). The third justification for this theoretical approach is based on the fact that the actions and influence of Boko Haram pose a common existential threat not only to Nigeria but also to the sub-regional and regional levels. Therefore, addressing this threat at the multilateral level through joint intelligence gathering, sharing, and developing a joint security policy for effective counterinsurgent response is possible under a security community sub-regional and regional arrangement (Mutah, 2021; Panke & Stapel, 2023). It can also be said that a security community framework to combat the presence and activities of Boko Haram will not only lead to regional peace and stability, it will further strengthen the process of trust and confidence building by members of the community at the sub-regional and regional level because security community

framework prioritises peace and stability across regions over national differences of states (Opongo, 2022).

To conclude this section, despite the challenges facing these security communities in confronting security problems of the twenty-first century, they play a vital role in regional integration and maintaining stability in the international system. The next section seeks to address the Boko Haram and insecurity question in West Africa.

3. Boko Haram and the Insecurity Question in West Africa

Boko Haram, which means “Western Education is forbidden”, also known in Arabic nomenclature as “*Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lid da’awati Wal-Jihad*” (Murtada, 2013), is an organisation considered by many as nameless and amorphous given the fact that initially, the identity of those who were members of Boko Haram was not known to members of the public (Matfess, 2016). As an organisation, Boko Haram abhors “Western Civilisation” and all its imprints in Northern Nigeria. It aims to see the enthronement of an “Islamic Caliphate” in Northern Nigeria under the principles, tenets, and codes of Sharia Law (Waldek & Jaysekar, 2011). The actions and activities of the organisation became prominent in 2009 when it engaged in a fierce battle with Nigerian security agencies leading to the death of its founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf (Weeraratne, 2017). After its engagement with the Nigerian security forces, many believed that the organisation had been neutralized. In 2011, the group resurfaced and carried out a series of high-profile attacks, starting with the inauguration day bombing at the Police Headquarters in Abuja, followed by other attacks, which involved the UN building in Abuja, the bus park bomb blast in Nyanya Market in Abuja, the kidnapping of prominent personalities, children, schoolgirls, etc. among other attacks, and conducted raids with precision and lethality (Onuoha, 2012; Sieff, 2016; Tunde, 2014).

Due to the transnational character of this insurgent group, the conflict now presents a complex security dilemma not only for Nigeria, but its impact transcends the various sectors of security and also has sub-regional and regional implications (Kangdim, Yorgancıoğlu, Bulus, Muazu & Danladi, 2022; Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). The conflict has not only increased the level of insecurity in Nigeria, but has wider security implications across the Lake Chad Region and West Africa. The conflict has destroyed and stalled economic activities in the

northeastern part of Nigeria and the Lake Chad region¹ accounting for around \$9 billion. At the humanitarian level, the conflict has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, with over 2.4 million people displaced across the region, creating a serious humanitarian crisis. The environmental impact of the conflict cannot be overemphasized, because many have argued that the activities of this group have affected the agricultural business as well as the “blue-economic” or fish trade, fish-farming, maritime transport, and other sustainable water resource activities taking place in the Lake Chad region. The insurgents exploit these natural resources to their advantage as against most of the populace who were engaged in economic activity in the region. The debilitating effect of climate change, which has further increased conditions for the insurgents to exploit and galvanize to their advantage further, precipitated this. At the societal level, the continued negative misrepresentation and instrumentalisation of religion (Islam) by this group has been used as a tool for radicalisation and brainwashing, which has further increased the volatility of the conflict (CGTN Africa, 2017; de Montclos, 2014; IEP, 2017; Matfess, 2017; Oluwadare, 2016; Onyia, 2015; Premium Times, 2017; UNHCR Report, 2017).

At the sub-regional, regional, and global levels, the conflict falls within the larger context of the “Global War on Terrorism” narrative, given the fact that the group’s activities, rules of engagement, and transnational links with other designated Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs), makes it one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world (IEP, 2017). Analysis of the consequences and high impact of the continued activities of this group shows that because of these high stakes attacks, the reconstruction, rehabilitation, and rebuilding of the North East alone amounts to over 2 trillion naira (\$9billion) a task Nigeria and other multilateral institutions believe will be daunting and challenging based on the dwindling fortunes of Nigeria’s economy, which is dependent on oil, and other challenges confronting most of these multilateral institutions (Rebuilding North to Cost, 2016).

Given the significant impact and complex threats posed by this terrorist group's ongoing attacks in the region, it is essential for national, sub-regional, and regional actors to respond collectively to combat this dangerous organisation. The

¹ Lake Chad Region in this article is used to refer to countries comprising Chad, Cameroun, Niger and Nigeria.

responses of these various actors will serve as the basis for the analysis in the next section of the article.

4. Regional Forces Response against Boko Haram

The activities of radical insurgent groups in Africa further complicate the existing security challenges of many states in the region, forcing national and regional actors to reconsider and reassess these activities (Bertram & Ellison, 2014; Boukhars, 2017; Maiangwa, 2013). The conflict in the Horn of Africa, where the EAC is battling with groups such as Alshabaab operating along the coast of Somalia and part of Kenya, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, and the Central African Republic (Menkhaus, 2013; Robinson, 2014). Across West Africa and the Sahel region, terror groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, the Janjaweed Militia, the Tuareg rebels, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) among other militant groups operating in the region (Dowd & Clionadh, 2013).

The presence and activities of these terrorist organisations have sub-regional and regional security implications for the stability and development of the continent (Walther & Retaille, 2010). To combat this problem, a series of multilateral responses were initiated by national, sub-regional, and regional actors such as the AU, ECOWAS, the Lake Chad Basin, and the G5 states in the Sahel region (Boukhars, 2017). This form of cooperation aimed at tackling these challenges was in line with the AU's policy principle of "non-indifference", which justified the intervention of these multilateral actors in line with the mantra of "Responsibility to Protect" (Berhe, 2017; Maathai, 2011; Makinda et al., 2015).

Most counterinsurgent responses against terrorist organisations in the region complied with the provisions set out by the African Union's Peace and Security Council led initiative of the African Peace and Security Architecture (Berhe, 2017; Makinda et al., 2015). At the regional level, the African Union has continued to show significant commitment in responding to the threat posed by the Boko Haram terror group, which culminated in the establishment of the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF) in 2015 by member nations of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. At the time of its establishment, the MNJTF was mandated with the responsibility of ensuring that the activities of this terrorist organisation (Boko Haram) were contained (MNJTF, 2024). The AU supported the MNJTF with an additional 7,500 troops (Boko Haram crisis, 2015), further

extended the mandate of the task force (AU, 2019), and provided financial assistance to the MNJTF through the African Peace Facility (African Peace Facility, 2019). Furthermore, this regional actor, continues to support these forces with strategic, technical, and operational support and ensures that the presence and threat of terror groups are eliminated (MNJTF, 2024).

Sub-regional actors, notably the ECOWAS, the LCBC, and the G5 States at the Sahel², have all shown commitment and resolve to tackle the threat posed by not only Boko Haram but other terror-related groups operating across the sub-region (Athie, 2018). Promoted synergy, coordination and harmonisation in the effective exchange and collection of intelligence and supported cooperation between the MNJTF and the Task Force established by the G5 countries in the Sahel (Rupesinghe, 2018). This engagement is meant to further strengthen better coordination in the counterinsurgent efforts against Boko Haram and other terror-related groups operating in the region.

At the national level, the Nigerian government set up the “*National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*” in 2017 (UNODC Country Office Nigeria, 2018; UNODC Country Office Nigeria, 2022). This four-point strategic plan was aimed at strengthening inter-agency cooperation, effective community engagement, ensuring that the doctrine and principle of the rule of law were adhered to, and finally, through effective strategic partnerships between states and non-state actors. In this context, the factors and conditions that foster radical and extremist views were to be confronted and counteracted (World Alliance Club de Madrid, 2017).

The measures taken by these regional forces to confront the insurgency recorded some degree of success. These included: stifling the territorial expansion of Boko Haram to other parts of the continent, the recapture of some cities and areas previously captured by the group, the arrests and massive casualties suffered by the group, and the distortion of their combat strategy, forcing them to resort to other tactics (Okoye, 2018; LCBC, 2018; ADF, 2018). These successes led to the popular phrase by the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, that “*Boko Haram is technically defeated*” (Nigeria Boko Haram, 2015; Blanchard & Husted, 2013) because they were no longer able to carry out coordinated attacks. Further analysis

Lake Chad Region in this article is used to refer to countries comprising Chad, Cameroun, Niger and Nigeria. Niger.

also revealed these concerted efforts by sub-regional and regional actors such as ECOWAS, LCBC, AU, and national governments towards countering the presence and activities of Boko Haram through several ‘non-kinetic’, forceful initiatives and action plans. These include among others, embarking on programs that will lead to socio-economic development in the region such as vocational and technical training that will serve as an avenue for job creation for the large youth population and reduce the risk of their exposure and vulnerability to violent extremism (Comolli, 2019; McDaniel, 2020; Adelaiye & Fadason, 2024). Through the process of dialogue, mediation, and collaboration at the national, sub-regional, and regional levels, initiatives such as *Operation Safe Corridor* saw the rehabilitation of repentant members of Boko Haram after undergoing a series of psycho-social and spiritual therapy reintegrated back into the community (Ugwueze, Ngwu & Onuoha, 2022). As put forward by Adenuga & Olatunji, (2024) the interventions by states and non-state actors at various levels in the continent towards countering and combating the threat by Boko Haram further saw an increase in humanitarian aid and assistance to victims of the Boko Haram conflict. This has also led to the return, reintegration, and resettlement of internally displaced persons to their communities. The emphasis by organisations such as the AU on African states to build institutions that promote good governance and its ideals, especially in marginalized areas will not only build trust but will enhance transparency, rule of law, accountability, and legitimacy of state institutions which will invariably prevent conditions that will give rise to the presence of insurgents and other violent of non-state actors such as Boko Haram to thrive and justify their actions (Aluko, Apeloko, Chukwudi, & Paimo, 2023; Bala & Tar, 2021). Closely related to this, is also the joint effort of AU, ECOWAS, and other actors through effective border surveillance, which has resulted in disrupting Boko Haram’s illicit flow of cash and other forms of transnational organized crimes such as trafficking of drugs, persons, and arms (Ateku & Owusu-Mensah, 2023). These combined efforts have greatly reduced the impact and threats of attacks by Boko Haram.

The resurgence of attacks complicates the successes and achievements of the counterinsurgency. The group continues to carry out coordinated attacks, resulting in significant casualties. This renewed wave of violence highlights the missing components and challenges that hinder regional security cooperation in the fight against this terrorist organisation.

5. Regional Cooperation and the Boko Haram Question: The Missing Components

Despite the various efforts and attributed successes by national, sub-regional, and regional actors towards countering the activities of violent non-state actors such as Boko Haram, challenges persist, which limits the effectiveness of these counterinsurgent engagements and efforts. Therefore, this part of the article seeks to address the missing components or challenges faced by relevant actors at the regional level in addressing the Boko Haram conflict in West Africa.

Studies by terrorism experts revealed that combating terrorism and insurgency is expensive (Bjørge, 2004; Freeman, 2011). It requires adequate funding and resources to make a meaningful impact (Bolz Jr, Dudonis & Schulz, 2011; Donohue, 2008; Mehta, 2018). In an interview with a Senior Research Fellow at the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, he stated that funding for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism is essential because the operational success or failure of these efforts depends on the resources available to fund and sustain the mission (Anonymous Interview, January 26, 2019). The various measures initiated by the regional actors in combating the insurgency have been marred by inadequate funding. The MNJTF and the G5 Sahel Taskforce cannot tackle the threat of Boko Haram and other groups operating across the region because of limited funding (Belfakir, 2018). Inadequate funding due to the lack of commitment by member states in contributing to these counterinsurgency missions affects the effective operational functions of the Task Force. With an estimated budget of \$700Million, the MNJTF still faces funding challenges because of the lack of commitment of members to fund these operations, with other member countries labelling it as '*Nigeria's problem*' (Assanvo, Abatan & Sawadogo, 2016). This position was further re-echoed by the former Foreign Affairs Minister of Nigeria Dr. Geoffrey Onyeama, stating that 'since the inception of the force, Nigeria has been the major contributing nation and this has slowed down the effectiveness of the organisation in achieving her stated mandate' (NAN, 2016).

A reductive counterinsurgent, counterterrorism and peacekeeping strategy is another challenge affecting actors in their conflict management engagement in the region (Ero, 2017). The statement made by the AU secretariat, Moussa Faki Mahamat, in his maiden speech to the secretariat in 2017 indicated that conflict management and counterterrorism involve a compendium of many aspects and

approaches to make it more meaningful. This statement further reconfirmed the need for a change of strategy in conflict management by the regional actors. The current approach to confronting security challenges in the continent places more emphasis on the ‘use of force’. This approach is becoming unsustainable and may not address the complex security challenges of the twenty-first century (Ero, 2017). In an interview with a conflict resolution researcher at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, he explained that countering the monstrosity of Boko Haram through the “*military approach*” cannot end the insurgency because Boko Haram cannot be defeated with bullets (Anonymous Interview, January 18, 2019). This narrative is vital given the fact that many have criticized the current fight against these terrorist organisations for ignoring counterinsurgent initiatives such as negotiation, and the pernicious drivers and forces promoting violent extremism (Fitz-Gerald, 2017; ICG, 2017; UN SC/12679, 2017). The reductive counterterrorism strategy makes it difficult for these regional forces to counter the threats posed by the insurgents given that they have increasingly developed the resilience and adaptability to overpower officers of the MNJTF, forcing them to retreat and abandon their bases. Therefore, fighting the Boko Haram insurgency with a military approach and strategy is not only lethargic and expensive but also cannot guarantee or provide a long-term solution to the problem, as a senior researcher at the Transnational Threats and International Programme, Institute for Security Studies, ISS, Pretoria, South Africa, said in an interview (Anonymous Interview, January 7, 2020).

The lack of clarity and effective coordination in containing the threat posed by Boko Haram in the region points to another failure and dearth of strategy (Onapajo, 2017). The current counterinsurgent approach is characterised by many interconnected bottlenecks and challenges. This stems from the delay in the deployment of troops to the MNJTF, the incoherent and asymmetric chain of command structure, and the lack of any effective rules of engagement and effective coordination in intelligence gathering and sharing amongst other contending issues. In an interview with a conflict resolution researcher at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice have faulted the regional actors for not stating how each of these processes should be implemented to make any significant inroads in countering the threat posed by this group. The lack of effective coordination in regard to how the MNJTF, and the G5 states in the Sahel are carrying out their mandate has affected the smooth implementation and

success of the counter-response against the Boko Haram threat (Anonymous Interview, January 18, 2019). In another interview with a cross-cultural negotiator and lecturer (historian) at the University of Jos, Nigeria, the poor decisions of some senior officers and commanders not only reflect a systemic misrepresentation of the conflict, but also affect the operational and tactical strategies of the MNJTF (Anonymous Interview, January 11, 2019). It was further revealed that the current counterinsurgent approach aims to provide a “quick-fix” solution to the problem without addressing the inherent structural and institutional conditions that led to the emergence of this group. A senior researcher at the Transnational Threats and International Programme, Institute for Security Studies, ISS, Pretoria, South Africa highlighted that the current structural design of the counterterrorism strategy may not tackle the main grievances and factors that gave rise to violent extremism in the continent (Anonymous Interview, January 7, 2019).

In an interview with a Senior Research Fellow at the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, he stated that the role and commitment of political actors across the continent in conflict management and counterterrorism are increasingly being scrutinized. This is because the success and failure of any counterinsurgent efforts depend on the willingness, capacity, and commitment in driving the process and ensuring it yields the desired aim. However, this critical aspect of counterterrorism and the fight against Boko Haram and other extremist groups in the region is affected by the lack of cooperation and willingness by actors in this fight (Anonymous Interview, January 26, 2019). Against this backdrop, many argue that the continued presence and attacks carried out by these groups are a consequence of the lack of commitment by African leaders in taking decisive actions and policy stances in dealing with this problem (Bappah, 2016). For example, the failure of the Nigerian government under Dr. Goodluck Jonathan to take decisive steps and show serious commitment in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgents (Walker, 2014). This could further be demonstrated by the inability of the government to prosecute individuals suspected of sponsoring and financing the activities of this terrorist group (Boko Haram sponsors, 2011; Ibenegbu, 2017). The lethargic response of the state after the kidnap of over ‘200 Girls at a government secondary school Chibok’ in Bornu state among other series of attacks carried out by this terror group emphasized the leadership question and their capacity to manage conflict (Kidnappings in Nigeria, 2014).

The '*Policy versus Praxis*' challenge is another conundrum facing actors in countering the challenges of insecurity in the region. In an interview with a conflict resolution researcher at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice stated that most sub-regional and regional actors increasingly find it increasingly difficult to translate and implement initiatives meant for confronting security challenges and ensuring their actualisation in the practical sense. Theoretically, these actors do not lack programmes to address the challenges of terrorism and other cases of insecurity in the region, but translating them into actionable plans remains a major challenge (Anonymous Interview, January 18, 2019). For example, the African Peace and Security Architecture emerged as a requisite condition in helping the regional players 'proffer solutions to the problems' facing the region. However, an assessment of the functionality of the framework since its establishment over a decade ago reveals the policy versus praxis trade-off. The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACRST), the Terrorism Centre in Chad, and even the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria have yet to function and operate to their fullest capacity in terms of countering the various threats facing the region said in an interview with Retired AVM Danbaba (a Nigerian security official) (ICG, 2016; (Anonymous Interview, December 12, 2018).

Effective Civil-Military relations are important in assessing the impact of any peacekeeping, counterterrorism, or insurgency (Conley, 2017). Members of the MNJTF have been accused of not engaging with members of the communities they are tasked with protecting. There are several cases where members of the Taskforce have been accused of engaging in extra-legal activities that violate the individual rights and liberties of citizens (Nigeria: Senior members, 2015; Searcey, 2017; UN Committee tells, 2017). Because of these allegations, members of the Taskforce and the military high command have not attempted to counter this narrative, but have threatened human rights groups with sanctions and expulsion in the areas affected by the conflicts. This has resulted in many observers claiming that attacking human rights organisations is not the best platform for addressing this issue (Nigerian Military calls, 2018; Nigeria concerned over, 2018).

The resurgence of attacks by the Boko Haram insurgents further complicates the current counterinsurgent efforts against the group on the continent (Honestly, I am Worried, 2018; Nigeria: Concern over, 2018). In an interview

with a security expert and consultant in Jos said that these attacks reveal the failure of relevant actors to deal with the complexities and recent trends in the conflict (Anonymous Interview, December 11, 2018). Many have attributed this new spate of attacks to several factors such the emergence of two factions, namely Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The former is led by Abubakar Shekau while the latter is under Maman Nur (Zenn, 2019b). Second, the change in operational tactics by the two factional groups saw the MNJTF and other stakeholders grappling to understand how to respond to the conflict. This further complicates the efforts by these actors to combat the threat posed by these insurgent groups given the fact that each faction has its own style and Modus Operandi (Zenn, 2019a). With all these nuances, the group seems more organized and bolstered judging by the intensity of attacks they have carried out across the Lake Chad region (Salkida, 2019). Third, the return of over 6000 suspected ISIS fighters to the terrorist organisation has further increased their capacity to organize and carry out attacks with precision and lethality (Adepegba, Adeoye, Alagbe & Ajaja, 2017; Faye, 2019). In an interview with a group of experts (retired AVM Danbaba (a Nigerian security official), a senior researcher at the Transnational Threats and International Programme and a conflict resolution researcher at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice) highlighted that the group now controls the blue-economic and agricultural activities across the LCBC area, enabling it to raise funds. Through several other black-market channels and transnational criminal activities, it has further increased its financial capacity to expand and also change the dynamics of the conflict (Anonymous Interviews, December 12, 2018; January 7, 2019 & January 18, 2019).

The implication of this is an increase in humanitarian crises in the region leading to massive casualties suffered by members of the MNJTF in Metele village, where over 23 soldiers lost their lives and 31 were injured (Aluko, 2018). The attack on the Jakana Military base in Maiduguri killed 6 soldiers (Kelly, 2019). The recapturing of territories earlier captured by the MNJTF, as well as the massive looting of military equipment and hardware complicate the current response by the MNJTF and other regional actors in the fight (Omirin, 2018). With the culture of 'secrecy', where officers are barred from speaking to the media, reporting deaths has become so pervasive that it has become difficult to ascertain the actual number of casualties suffered by the MNJTF (Cascais, 2019).

However, a published by the Wall Street Journal revealed that over 1,000 soldiers had been secretly buried by the Nigerian military and the MNJTF in order to create the impression that they had defeated the insurgents, which showed the failure of actors to address the recent trend and dynamics in the conflict. These further questions the validity of the statement that the terrorist group has been ‘technically defeated’, rendering it nothing more than a political statement with no empirical evidence to prove that the group has been defeated (Ameh, Nwogu & Aluko, 2019; Busari, 2018; Parkinson, 2019).

1. Conclusion

Regional security cooperation is crucial in the fight against terrorism and insurgency. This is because, terrorism with all its ramifications affects every facet of human life, and combating it is the responsibility of all actors at the global, regional, sub-regional, and national levels. It was from this lens that this article examined the regional security responses in managing the threat posed by the Boko Haram terrorist organisation in West Africa.

The analysis of this article suggests that despite the various multilateral responses and efforts against Boko Haram, regional actors are still confronted with challenges in combating terrorism in the region. These challenges clearly reveal the missing components in combating terrorism, insurgency, and other transnational threats in the sub-region. The actors have been unable to address issues relating to certain operational ambiguities in their counterinsurgent efforts given that the current strategy may not deal with the recent trends and resurgence of attacks by this group. Furthermore, the failure of political actors to be decisive and committed to combating terrorism in the region is another problem. Other deficiencies are related to the inability of actors to ensure that policies are converted into actionable and practical processes within the counterinsurgent response. The current counterinsurgent initiatives set out by these actors are reductive given the fact that they negate other “non-military” aspects of counterinsurgency, as they are not designed to address the inherent and deep-rooted factors that led to the emergence of these extremist organisations in the region. The current measures in combating terrorism are structurally designed to offer a ‘quick-fix’ solution as opposed to providing a long-lasting and sustainable solution to the problems.

For an effective counterinsurgent or terrorism response, regional players need to ensure:

- i. Members are responsive to their financial commitment by contributing to their quota in the fight against terrorism, insurgency, and conflict in the region.
- ii. De-emphasize total reliance on the “use of force” to combat terrorism, but should be open to the possibility of adopting other non-military measures to complement the military strategy, which has the possibility of opening up new frontiers and vistas in conflict management in the twenty-first century.
- iii. State, sub-regional, and regional actors need to show the commitment, willingness, and operational capacity to confront the challenges of insecurity in the continent.
- iv. Stringent steps should be taken by relevant actors to cascade these non-kinetic solutions and policies practically.
- v. Relevant actors should ensure punitive measures are applied to individuals guilty of committing Human Rights Violations, as this will enhance effective community engagement, civil-military relations, and confidence building between members of the community and the military sector.
- vi. There is a need for more collaborations among national, sub-regional, and regional actors in terms of intelligence gathering and sharing for effective counterinsurgent engagements.
- vii. Relevant actors should address the root causes, drivers, and triggers of the Boko Haram conflict by addressing socio-economic problems and strengthening the institutional capacity for good governance and public trust in government policies.

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