

# West Africa Report

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## Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram

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### Summary

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), established by the Lake Chad Basin countries to combat Boko Haram, still struggles to demonstrate its effectiveness. Observers also continue to question to what extent it is operational. Yet despite the numerous political, logistical, technical and financial challenges it has been facing, the MNJTF is gradually gaining ground.

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OVER THE PAST few months the forces of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger have scored some gains in the fight against Boko Haram.<sup>1</sup> While these successes have strengthened hopes of its elimination, this optimism is regularly tempered by the group's persistent attacks, such as the one that took place on 3 June 2016 in the town of Bosso in the south-east of Niger.

Originating in north-east Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has been ongoing for the past seven years, gradually spreading to other parts of the country as well as to a large portion of the Lake Chad Basin. In response to the scourge, which threatens not only Nigeria's territorial integrity but also regional stability and the security of millions of people, the concerned countries (Cameroon, Niger and Chad) stepped up their military responses. These national initiatives then sparked off joint efforts that led to the establishment of the MNJTF, under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC).<sup>2</sup>

This report first examines the characteristics of the MNJTF and then the process that led to its creation. It analyses the challenges the MNJTF has faced during its gradual implementation and, finally, assesses its operationalisation.

This study is based on information gathered between March and July 2016 in interviews and discussions with several actors and observers – civilian and

military, representatives of countries in the region, regional and international institutions, external partners, humanitarian organisations and members of civil society. For this purpose, a research team from the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) visited N'Djamena (Chad), the headquarters of the MNJTF, in March 2016.

### The MNJTF: a unique structure

Its nature, its member states, its area of operations and the institutional architecture on which it is built determine the specific characteristics of the MNJTF.

### The nature of the MNJTF

The MNJTF is an offensive and stabilisation mechanism with the objective of combating Boko Haram and other groups labelled as terrorists operating around the Lake Chad Basin. Its establishment under its current structure was determined by the LCBC heads of state and government during the Extraordinary Summit of the LCBC member states and Benin in Niamey, Niger on 7 October 2014. On 25 November 2014 the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) fully endorsed its activation.<sup>3</sup> However, it was not until 29 January 2015 that the PSC formally authorised the deployment of the MNJTF for a 12-month period. This mandate was renewed on 14 January 2016 for an additional 12 months.<sup>4</sup>

The MNJTF is a stabilisation mechanism with the objective of combating Boko Haram and other groups labelled as terrorists

Although the MNJTF is an initiative of the LCBC, only four of the six member states –Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad, joined by non-member Benin – are part of the force. As a result, the MNJTF is a coalition of states that came into being to confront a common threat. Since the majority of the countries concerned belong to the LCBC and Boko Haram's reach has spread to the shores of the Lake Chad Basin, the organisation appeared as the 'natural' or 'default' institutional framework to take on this effort.

The mandate of the MNJTF is to:

create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups ... facilitate the implementation of overall stabilization programmes by the LCBC Member States and Benin in the affected areas, including the full restoration of state authority and the return of IDPs [internally displaced people] and refugees; and facilitate, within the limit of its capabilities, humanitarian operations and the delivery of assistance to the affected populations.<sup>5</sup>

Its mandate includes, among others, conducting military operations to prevent the expansion of the group's activities; conducting patrols; preventing all



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transfers of weapons or logistics to the group; actively searching for and freeing all abductees, including the girls kidnapped from Chibok in April 2014; and carrying out psychological actions to encourage defections within Boko Haram ranks.<sup>6</sup> The MNJTF has also been tasked to undertake specific actions in the areas of intelligence, human rights, information and the media.<sup>7</sup>

Recognising the complexity of its mission, three components – military, police and civilian – were to be established. However, the ambitious scope of the MNJTF’s mandate and scale of operations, as well as of its key tasks, may raise some scepticism about its ability to take concrete and efficient action.

Still, the MNJTF should in no measure be perceived as the exclusive framework for combating Boko Haram. Its existence does not negate the actions of the national

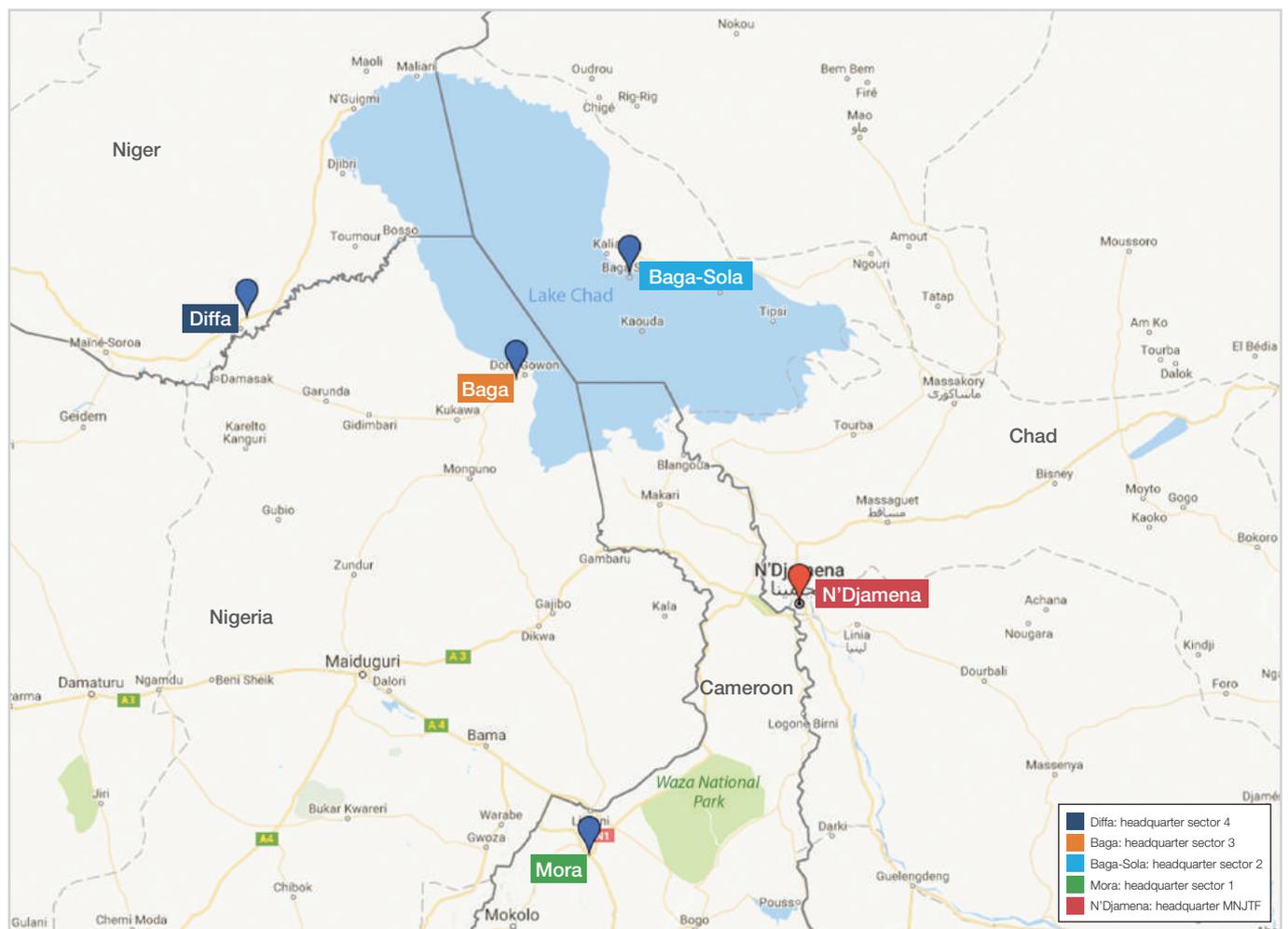
troops of the contributing countries or the likelihood of bilateral arrangements. Rather, it should be seen as a framework for coordinating actions in order to obtain a multiplier effect.

Regarding the MNJTF’s area of operations, each of the country contingents is deployed within its own country’s national boundaries and operates as a matter of priority within this space.<sup>8</sup> As a result four sectors were defined: Sector 1, with the command located in Mora (Cameroon); Sector 2, located in the town of Baga-Sola (Chad); Sector 3, based in Baga (Nigeria); and Sector 4, based in the town of Diffa (south-east Niger).

### MNJTF institutional architecture

The MNJTF operates under the direct authority of the LCBC and the heads of state and government, to whom it reports on the execution of its mandate.

**Figure 1:** Locations of the MNJTF



Source: Google map.

Its institutional architecture is structured around the LCBC, which is responsible for political oversight, while the AU, as a strategic and technical partner in close collaboration with the LCBC Executive Secretariat, contributes to its effective operation and the headquarter officials are responsible for directing operations and commanding the various national contingents.

The LCBC's political authority is ensured on a daily basis by LCBC Executive Secretary Sanusi Imran Abdullahi. He was designated as MNJTF head of mission following the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the LCBC and Benin, held in Abuja, Nigeria on 11 June 2015. Abdullahi works in close collaboration with the force commander, who regularly updates him on actions undertaken.<sup>9</sup>

Although its mandate also includes the preservation of peace and cross-border security in the Lake Chad Basin, the LCBC has limited experience in this field

In fact, however, the LCBC Secretariat, in its capacity as organ in charge of implementing the institution's activities, plays no specific role in the MNJTF's operations. This resulted in an institutional vacuum, because of the absence of an organisation on which the MNJTF could rely. In fact, the LCBC's capacity to carry out and manage an operation of this scale was questioned from the outset.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, although its mandate also includes preserving peace and ensuring cross-border security in the Lake Chad Basin,<sup>11</sup> the LCBC has limited experience in this field. It was therefore considered necessary to provide the MNJTF with support in specific areas such as administrative and financial management, information technology (IT) and communications resources, logistics, health services and infrastructure. Consequently, the AU became an essential partner to provide this support.

The AU's involvement has followed two logics that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. First, the LCBC countries and Benin were required to provide the burgeoning force with a legal framework by obtaining formal authorisation from the PSC for its activation. This was all the more necessary as the LCBC countries and Benin were seeking a United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution recognising and endorsing the MNJTF's deployment. In October 2014 a draft resolution was prepared and, by the end of that year, diplomatic efforts were initiated to get the support of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. The AU's agreement was a prerequisite for achieving this.

Given the increased international mobilisation in the fight against Boko Haram, the second factor that directed the AU's involvement was the institution's willingness to exercise its prerogatives on peace and security issues on the continent.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, during the second ministerial follow-up meeting after the May 2014 Paris Summit convened in Washington DC on 5 August 2014, the AU announced its intention to contribute to the fight against Boko



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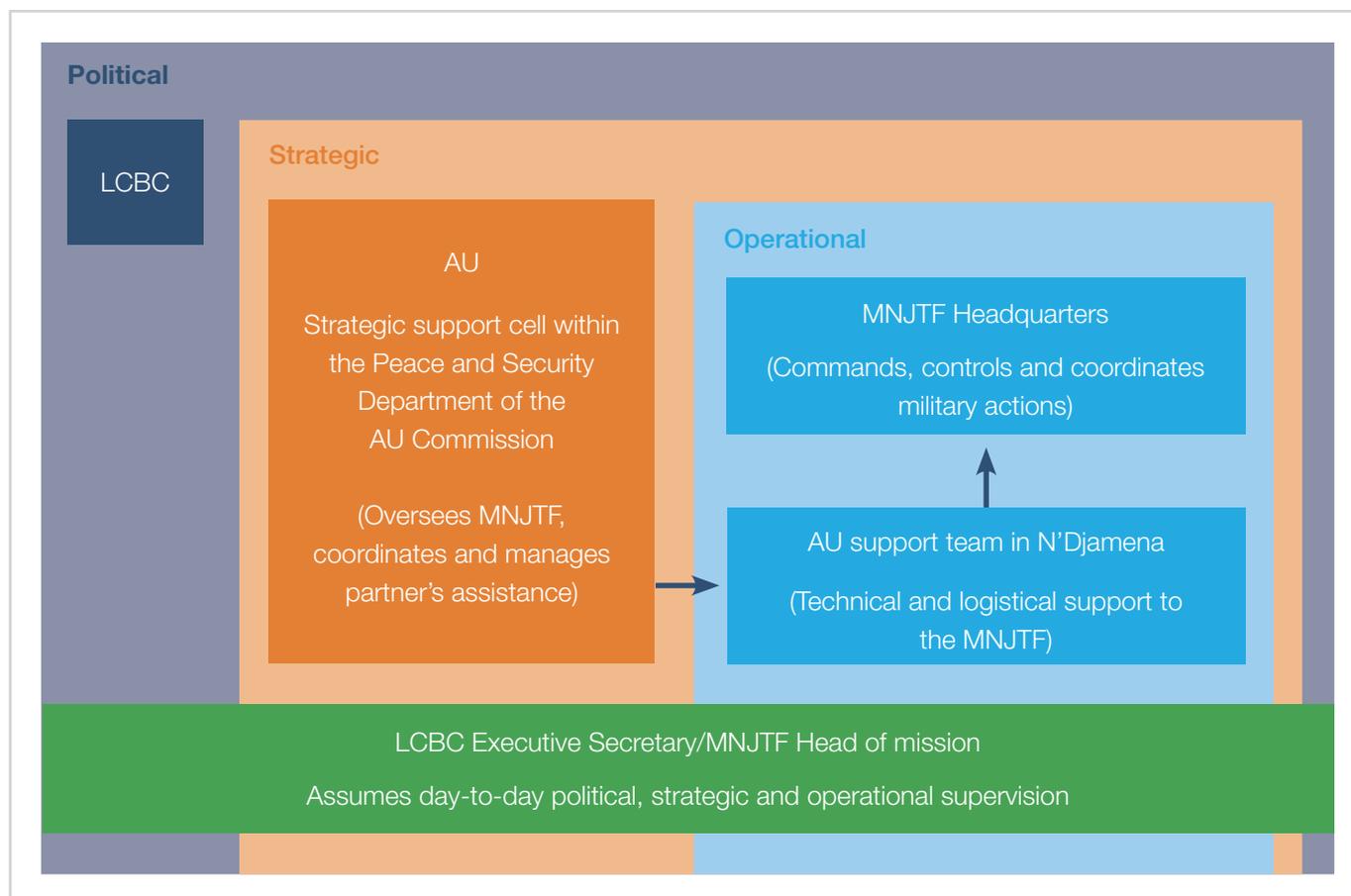
Haram by putting in place a regional force. Although this was welcomed by the LCBC countries and Benin, they nevertheless expressed concerns about the proposal.

Once these initial reservations and hesitations had been overcome in the face of what was considered by some actors to be interference or a form of opportunism,<sup>13</sup> the AU finally emerged as the principal partner in the establishment of the MNJTF. Its assistance had led to a certain degree of frustration on the part of those who may have wanted a more important role for the LCBC Executive Secretariat and a strengthening of its capacities.<sup>14</sup> In the end, the AU's experience in the deployment and management (political, administrative and financial) of peace operations tipped the balance in its favour.<sup>15</sup> That being the case, the prospect of the MNJTF's being financially dependent on the AU, which is often criticised for its bureaucracy,<sup>16</sup> raised concerns about what impact this would have on the force's functions, or even its efficiency.

The AU is in charge of the strategic piloting of the MNJTF. A Strategic Support Cell, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, provides oversight of the MNJTF, and coordinates and manages donor assistance.<sup>17</sup> All financial contributions to the MNJTF are to be channelled through the AU. A technical team (the Mission Support Team) in N'Djamena provides daily support to the MNJTF, notably in terms of logistics: supplying transport, and IT and communications equipment.<sup>18</sup>

With regard to the military component, the operational headquarters of the MNJTF are based in N'Djamena (Chad) and consist of personnel from the various force-contributing countries. They exercise command and control of the force and coordinate the military actions of the troop-contributing countries. Doubts still remain regarding the capacity of the MNJTF command to fully play its role considering the risk of interference from national commanders. It remains uncertain whether the force commander will have the leeway needed and the space required to operate freely in relation to sector commanders.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 2:** MNJTF institutional architecture



## The slow and gradual establishment of the MNJTF

The establishment of the MNJTF has come up against various challenges and constraints that have resulted in its delayed set-up.

### An effort dictated by pragmatism...

From the outset the establishment of the MNJTF was an LCBC initiative. Efforts to try to counter the insecurity perpetrated by Boko Haram go back to 2012. During their 14<sup>th</sup> ordinary summit on 30 April 2012 in N'Djamena, the LCBC heads of state and government decided to reactivate and operationalise the MNJTF and to expand its mandate to the fight against Boko Haram.<sup>20</sup>

The decision to establish such a force to combat organised crime and banditry in the region had first been taken in 1994,<sup>21</sup> but it was only four years later, in 1998, that it was effectively established. However, this decision was to have very little tangible effect. The force remained relatively lethargic, restricted to the organisation of a few patrols.<sup>22</sup> Cameroon was not a part of this mechanism, given the strained relations with Nigeria at the time over border disputes, and territorial issues concerning the Bakassi Peninsula and in the Lake Chad region.

The deterioration of the regional security situation, beginning in 2014, accelerated efforts to establish the multinational force

The worsening regional security situation was the reason why, at the beginning of 2014, the actual reactivation of the multinational force began. Thus, following their second meeting organised on 17–18 March 2014 in Yaoundé, the ministers of defence and chiefs of staff of the LCBC countries approved the creation of a multinational force with the mandate to 'ensure peace and security in the Lake Chad Basin in order to guarantee the free movement of goods and persons and economic and social development'.<sup>23</sup> Each country was called upon to contribute a battalion of up to 700 troops.<sup>24</sup> Troops from Niger and Chad were deployed<sup>25</sup> alongside Nigerian soldiers to the city of Baga in Nigeria, where the headquarters were to be established.

On 7 October 2014 the LCBC countries (Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad) that were faced with the Boko Haram insurgency met at an extraordinary summit in Niamey. Benin joined the summit. The objective of this meeting was to discuss modalities for the deployment of the multinational force and the establishment of the command headquarters to coordinate its operations. During this gathering the heads of state and government decided to deploy the national contingents that were to make up the force by 1 November 2014, while its headquarters would be established by 20 November 2014.<sup>26</sup> None of these deadlines was met.

### Important dates:

**21 March 1994:** The LCBC decides to establish the MNJTF

**30 April 2012:** The MNJTF's mandate is expanded to the fight against Boko Haram

**17 May 2014:** Paris Summit on Security in Nigeria

**7 October 2014:** Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of LCBC Member Countries and Benin in Niamey establishes the MNJTF

**29 January 2015:** PSC authorises MNJTF deployment

**3 March 2015:** PSC validates the MNJTF CONOPS

**25 May 2015:** Inauguration of MNJTF command headquarters in N'Djamena

**11 June 2015:** Heads of state of the LCBC and Benin adopt the MNJTF CONOPS

**14 January 2016:** PSC renews the MNJTF mandate for 12 months

**3 February 2016:** Donor's conference in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)

While endeavouring to operationalise the MNJTF, the LCBC countries also tried to garner international support (political, diplomatic, technical and financial). These efforts sparked off a number of demands – expressed by external partners, in particular – aimed at elevating the MNJTF to a certain standard. They mainly focused on the need to define strategic objectives, structure and the rules of engagement. Constraints relating to respect for international humanitarian law also emerged. This led to technical work on formulating the strategic, legal and operational frameworks of the MNJTF, which in turn gave rise to the various concepts of operations (CONOPS) pertaining to strategy, operations and logistical support being defined. The AU played a key role in organising this process.

During the meeting of experts on 5–7 February 2015 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the Strategic CONOPS of the force and its rules of engagement were adopted.<sup>27</sup> Details of the CONOPS modalities were later given in a planning meeting held on 23–27 February 2015 in N'Djamena.<sup>28</sup> The Strategic CONOPS was validated by the PSC on 3 March 2015.<sup>29</sup> It defined, inter alia, the mandate of the force, its objectives, its specific tasks, the command, control and coordination structures and composition, its troop strength, and its zones of operation, notably the operational sectors, etc.<sup>30</sup> It also determined the right of pursuit, which is essential for cross-border operations. The CONOPS was approved by the heads of state and government of the LCBC and Benin during the Extraordinary Summit of 11 June 2015 in Abuja,<sup>31</sup> nearly four months after its adoption by the experts and three months after its validation by the PSC.

### The establishment of the MNJTF was constrained by technical, political, financial and logistical challenges

This latest summit was a major milestone in the establishment of the MNJTF, as it was here that a compromise was reached about the force's command structure. In reality – without minimising the importance of having the countries concerned make their contingents available and other technical aspects – the establishment of the command headquarters, which is the essential pillar of the structure, was a key element in the effective start-up of the force.<sup>32</sup>

Nigeria was given command of the force for the entire duration of its mission. This decision – which was not contested by any of the other countries<sup>33</sup> – reflected Nigeria's commitment to eliminate Boko Haram and its determination to reassert its leadership. From an operational perspective, it undoubtedly acknowledged the fact that the fight against Boko Haram was mainly likely to occur on Nigerian territory, making it judicious for Nigeria to assume this office. The force deputy commander was assigned to Cameroon and the decision to establish the command headquarters in N'Djamena – adopted at the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs and defence in Niamey on 20 May 2015 – was endorsed. A 30 July 2015 deadline was set for the deployment of the various contingents. Like the previous deadlines, this was not met.

These missed opportunities not only reflected the scope of the technical work that had to be done but also showed the need to lay the groundwork for and determine the features of this multinational apparatus. They also highlighted the political, financial and logistical constraints.

### ... but faced with multiple constraints

The efforts aimed at adopting a regional response to Boko Haram had been preceded by national responses. 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. Faced with an identical phenomenon, these countries had adopted either offensive or defensive positions.<sup>34</sup>

These different postures restricted the regional cooperation needed. Speeches aside, they were interpreted as the absence of true solidarity among the countries of the region.<sup>35</sup> In fact, each of the countries seemed willing to only defend their own interests and to react to the threat depending on how it affected their own territory. Only the urgency of the situation, compounded by the geographical expansion of Boko Haram, finally forced them into joint action.

Besides, with Nigeria remaining at the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency, its commitment and willingness to collaborate were crucial. Yet its attitude was felt to be

an impediment to any progress in regional cooperation.<sup>36</sup> This was particularly the case under the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015) who was criticised for his weak leadership, his lack of political will and his inability to effectively combat Boko Haram.<sup>37</sup> Under his mandate, cooperation with his neighbours left a lot to be desired.<sup>38</sup>

Elected as Nigeria's new president in May 2015, Muhammadu Buhari changed things around by making the fight against Boko Haram one of his priorities. He immediately began strengthening cooperation with the country's neighbours. Proof of this is the visits that he made as soon as he was installed in office: 3 June to Niger, 4 June to Chad, 29 July to Cameroon, and 1 August to Benin. Buhari brought new impetus to the joint response efforts, as illustrated both by his commitment to contribute up to US\$100 million to establishing the MNJTF<sup>39</sup> and his decision to take on its leadership.

Cameroon and Chad's realisation of the looming threat the insurgency posed to their stability and geo-economic interests had also convinced them of the need to acknowledge that Boko Haram was more than a purely Nigerian problem.

### Nigeria's attitude was felt to be an impediment to progress in regional cooperation

Although these developments did contribute to removing some of the constraints to improved cooperation between Nigeria and its partners, they were of limited scope. In fact, the situation was everything but a honeymoon. Some critics continued to complain about Nigeria's tendency to take action without consultation, the absence of its army when it came to occupying towns retaken from Boko Haram and, more broadly, its difficulties in consolidating the reverses made against the group by the other countries.<sup>40</sup> With regard to the relations between Nigeria and its external partners, despite appearing more favourably disposed<sup>41</sup> they still reflected a certain mistrust when it came to collaborating directly with the Nigerian army.<sup>42</sup>



BUHARI EMBARKED  
ON REGIONAL TOUR TO  
STRENGTHEN COOPERATION  
WITH MNJTF CONTRIBUTING  
COUNTRIES:

3 JUNE 2015: NIGER  
4 JUNE 2015: CHAD  
29 JULY 2015: CAMEROON  
1 AUGUST 2015: BENIN

### The financial challenge

Financial constraints have delayed the operationalisation of the MNJTF. Before it was able to occupy its current premises, the LCBC Secretariat in N'Djamena hosted its command. Similar difficulties were encountered in setting up the various MNJTF sectors of operations in the field. This weighed even more heavily on the troop-contributing countries because they were already burdened by the considerable financial costs of the human and material resources pitted against Boko Haram.<sup>43</sup>

These difficulties continue to act as a constraint. Although the MNJTF commander, Major General Lamidi Adeosun, is determined to carry out his mission with the means at the MNJTF's disposal, he regularly recalls<sup>44</sup> the lack of tangible effect given to the pledges of financial support<sup>45</sup> required to meet

the initial budget requirements of the MNJTF, estimated at nearly US\$700 million.<sup>46</sup>

The financial support the MNJTF is meant to receive is not directed at the procurement of weaponry or military equipment, but is instead meant to meet its logistical and material needs and cover a part of its human resources costs. This mainly covers land and air transport requirements; secured communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; equipment for the command headquarters and the camps in the sectors of operations, and bonuses for the troops (estimated at US\$90 per day, per soldier).<sup>47</sup> This is what the 50 million euros promised by the European Union (EU) is destined for. Freeing up this contribution has taken a long time due to administrative reasons<sup>48</sup> attributed, primarily, to difficulties following an audit of AU procedures.<sup>49</sup> The AU and EU's signing on 1 August 2016 of an implementation agreement to this commitment<sup>50</sup> should remove the final obstacles to the effective release of this aid.

For now, according to the available information, only the financial contributions by Nigeria, the United Kingdom (UK) and the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) have materialised, while Nigeria is said to have contributed at least US\$30 million to the force command headquarters.<sup>51</sup> The UK is said to have disbursed an estimated US\$3.5 million at the level of the AU.<sup>52</sup> CEN-SAD, for its part, announced on April 2015 that it had contributed US\$1.5 million to Chad, Niger and Benin to prepare their respective contingents. The MNJTF has been able to obtain utility vehicles and communications and IT equipment, and to install operational infrastructure.<sup>53</sup>

The financial costs of the MNJTF's operations are currently borne mostly by the countries concerned.<sup>54</sup> This raises questions about their ability to maintain such an engagement over the long term. Yet, this being a crucial moment in the fight against Boko Haram, any operational slackening caused by a lack of financial resources could jeopardise the MNJTF's operations.

### **Is the MNJTF operational?**

Despite official statements about the MNJTF's actually being up and running, several observers continue to question whether it has really been deployed and to what extent it is operational.

### **Is the MNJTF in place?**

To assess the MNJTF's deployment, one need look no further than the degree to which the command headquarters and the different areas of operations are in place, and the extent to which troop commitments have been honoured by the countries concerned. These aspects tend to show that the MNJTF's deployment has achieved a certain level of effectiveness. However, it is difficult to ascertain this to any degree of certainty and to assess the extent of the gap between official discourse and the reality on the ground. Double-checking information about military mechanisms that are spread out across several countries is a difficult task.

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Going strictly by official statements, the MNJTF is operational.<sup>55</sup> This applies to its command headquarters, which were inaugurated on 25 May 2015. Yet there is some indication that as at 1 April 2016 it was not fully staffed. In fact, on that day the Chiefs of Army Staff of the LCBC member states and Benin launched an appeal to countries that had not already done so to appoint their representatives to the MNJTF command headquarters.<sup>56</sup> Although no current staffing lists are available, many officials have already been appointed and are effectively in their posts in N'Djamena.<sup>57</sup>

There is still some vagueness over the total number of MNJTF personnel. Several adjustments have been made over time. Thus, on endorsing the 29 January 2015 LCBC decision to deploy the force, the PCS recommended a total staff complement of 7 500 military personnel, police and civilians.<sup>58</sup> This number was later adjusted to 8 700 during the meeting of experts in Yaoundé on 5–7 February 2015, and then to 10 000 on 3 March 2015 during the 480th meeting of the PSC.<sup>59</sup>

In August 2015 the full component of national contingents announced following the meeting of the chiefs of staff of the LCBC countries and Benin raised the MNJTF's numbers to nearly 11 150 personnel: 3 750 from Nigeria, 3 000 from Chad, 2 650 from Cameroon, 1 000 from Niger and 750 from Benin.<sup>60</sup> During the second Regional

Security Summit in Abuja on 14 May 2016, Buhari announced a total number of 8 500 personnel.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding individual countries' contributions, several sources<sup>62</sup> mention 2 450 troops from Cameroon. The decision taken during the meeting of the Committee of Chiefs of Army Staff of the LCBC and Benin in Yaoundé on 1 April 2016 to seek the authorisation of the Council of Ministers to increase troop numbers in Sector 1 – located in Cameroon – from 950 to 2 250 seems to support this. Chad's contribution is an estimated 3 000 troops.<sup>63</sup> According to news reports, Benin, which had initially announced a contribution of 800 men,<sup>64</sup> recently reduced it to about 200 soldiers<sup>65</sup> for financial reasons.<sup>66</sup> This country – whose force's principal mission is to secure the MNJTF command headquarters and escort humanitarian convoys and dignitaries<sup>67</sup> – ended up deploying 150 soldiers in May 2016.<sup>68</sup>

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The MNJTF's troop strength is currently estimated at 10 000 military personnel;<sup>69</sup> a number that is difficult to verify. Officially, all the national contingents were deployed to the different operational sectors.<sup>70</sup>

Although each sector of operations in which the MNJTF elements are required to operate has been presented as though it is already operational,<sup>71</sup> several events have brought the reliability of this information into question. One such was the Boko Haram attack on 3 June 2016 on the town of Bosso. Although this part of Niger is within the operational sphere of the MNJTF – which has a base in the city of Diffa – and the country had pledged to provide nearly 1 000 soldiers, the attack was so violent that it seemed doubtful that there had actually been any deployment. It also raised questions about the effectiveness of Niger's security apparatus. The attack took place within the context of a deteriorating security situation in the south of Niger. Since the beginning of 2016 this part of the country has seen over 40 attacks.<sup>72</sup> In fact, this sector was initially meant to be a sub-sector of Sector 3, based in Baga, Nigeria, but had experienced delays in becoming operational.<sup>73</sup> The recent decision to transform it into a full sector, coupled with the operations conducted by the Niger army since June, has undoubtedly contributed to speeding up its actual establishment.

The operationalisation of MNJTF Sector 3 – located in the Nigerian city of Baga – illustrates the Nigerian approach in the fight against Boko Haram. Its efforts which, are essentially national in nature, are underpinned by regional cooperation, particularly within the MNJTF framework. The 3 000 military personnel who make up Nigeria's contribution to the MNJTF do not seem to be operating under the authority of the force, but under national



THE PSC AUTHORISED THE DEPLOYMENT OF UP TO 10 000 MILITARY AND OTHER PERSONNEL

command instead.<sup>74</sup> However, on several occasions Nigeria's troops have worked together with those of neighbouring countries, including units operating under the MNJTF's mandate.

Since Chad does not have a land border with Nigeria, this may have given the impression that Sector 2, based in Baga-Sola, was not as affected. This is far from being the case. Although the attacks on Chadian territory attributed to Boko Haram elements have decreased over the first six months of 2016,<sup>75</sup> the attacks in previous months around Kaiga Ngouboua – in the region of the lake – reveal the persistent nature of the threat. The deteriorating security situation along the border between Nigeria and Niger has made the Chadian authorities all the more aware of this reality.<sup>76</sup> As a result the country has sent troops to the MNJTF and operationalised the Baga-Sola base.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, Sector 1, located on Cameroonian territory, seems operational. Proof of this is the numerous operations undertaken by the military in this sector. Of the 2 450 troops pledged by Cameroon, an initial 950 appear to have been provided within the MNJTF framework.<sup>78</sup> Plans are underway to raise the troop numbers to 2 250.<sup>79</sup>

## The force only truly swung into action at the beginning of 2016

At the moment only the military component of the MNJTF has been installed. With regard to the police force, although provision for one was made in the CONOPS,<sup>80</sup> nothing seems to indicate its imminent establishment. In the final analysis, this responsibility should primarily fall on the national authorities of the concerned countries.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the deployment of such a force, irrespective of the framework within which it will operate, depends on an improvement in security conditions.

It seems more likely that a civilian component will be set up. Its establishment was recommended during the special session of the Committee of Chiefs of Army Staff of the LCBC Member States and Benin in Yaoundé on 1 April 2016. This team will be responsible for assisting the LCBC executive secretary to carry out his duties as

head of mission for the MNJTF, notably in managing the political, administrative and financial aspects.<sup>82</sup>

### Assessing the MNJTF operations

For a long time the MNJTF appeared to be an empty shell. During the second Regional Security Summit on 14 May 2016 in Abuja, Nigeria, Idriss Déby Itno, the President of Chad, stressed that it was urgent 'for the force to become operational before the rainy season sets in'.<sup>83</sup> After the 3 June 2016 attack on Bosso he once again deplored the state of affairs.<sup>84</sup>

One of the difficulties in assessing the MNJTF's actions lies in the fact that for a long time there was very little information on its existence. In addition, by not always stating that their troops are operating under the MNJTF flag the troop-contributing countries are preventing the structure from getting due credit. The presence of both MNJTF troops and soldiers of the various national armies in the same theatre of operations also complicates the assessment of each player's contribution.

Events show that even if the first patrol by elements of sector 1 – located on Cameroonian soil – took place in November 2015,<sup>85</sup> the force only truly swung into action at the beginning of 2016. It was from February 2016 onwards that the first large-scale operations were carried out by MNJTF troops or with their participation.

There have also been at least four large-scale military operations by the MNJTF alongside the national units of the relevant countries: from 11–14 February 2016 in the Nigerian town of Ngoshe (as part of Operation Arrow Five); on 24 February 2016 in the town of Kumshe in Nigeria near the Cameroonian border, considered to be a support base for Boko Haram; on 16 March 2016 in the Cameroonian and Nigerian localities of Djibrili and Zamga (within the framework of Operation Tentacule); and on 10–16 May 2016 in the Madawya forest in Nigeria, in a joint action conducted by troops from the MNJTF's Sector 1 and soldiers from the Cameroonian Operation Émergence 4, supported by the Nigerian army. These reports confirm that the MNJTF's Sector 1 is operational.

More recently, in June Operation Gama Aiki ('finish the job' in Hausa) was initiated by the MNJTF.<sup>86</sup> Involving coalition countries, its purpose was to destroy the

group's last strongholds. Action was multi-pronged, along the Nigerian and Niger borders and around Lake Chad. The arrival of soldiers from Niger into Nigerian territory at the end of July made it possible to liberate the border towns from where Boko Haram was launching attacks, particularly Damasak.<sup>87</sup>

It is still too early to assess the latest operations' impact on Boko Haram. However, all forms of triumphalism should be avoided. There is a real risk that the belief that it has completed the job may lead to the coalition's lowering its guard.

With that in mind, through its presence and its actions the MNJTF has contributed to achieving a relative improvement in the security situation in several zones around the Lake Chad Basin.<sup>88</sup> According to official reports in the first five months of 2016, its interventions have led to the 'neutralisation' of at least 675 presumed Boko Haram members, the arrest of 566 others and the dismantling of nearly 32 training camps and alleged factories for the manufacture of improvised explosive devices and mines. It is also claimed that nearly 4 690 of the group's hostages have been freed.<sup>89</sup> However, in the absence of a precise assessment of Boko Haram's capacities (human and material), it is difficult to measure the impact of the regional efforts.

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The establishment of the MNJTF command headquarters offers a framework that contributes to improved coordination between the different sectors of operations and with the troops under national command.<sup>90</sup> Yet we must stress the continuing weaknesses in cooperation or, at the very least, the continuing difficulties along those lines.<sup>91</sup> In fact, coordination has until now been more of an exception than the rule. The MNJTF's actions also depend on the political will of the LCBC leaders, which is still lacking in many instances<sup>92</sup> and which prevents it from achieving its potential.

Until now the MNJTF has suffered somewhat from the fact that certain members of the coalition prefer national or bilateral actions. This is a constraint that it may continue to face in the future. Niger's request for bilateral assistance from Chad after the attack on Bosso is a case in point.<sup>93</sup> In fact, such arrangements do have the merit of offering faster reaction times and more flexibility, and could be viewed as more efficient.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, the required diplomatic and military consultations in preparing for, planning and implementing actions in the framework of a multinational mechanism such as the MNJTF are time consuming. In the final analysis, the challenge here is the need to opt for the best levels and frameworks of action, depending on which hold the most comparative advantage.

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4 690

THE NUMBER OF BOKO HARAM HOSTAGES FREED BY THE MNJTF IN THE FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF 2016

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## Conclusion

The persistent threat posed by Boko Haram makes the MNJTF ever more relevant. However, this force alone is no panacea. A lot still remains to be done to secure and stabilise those regions affected by the insurgency. These are the preconditions for the return of millions of displaced persons and refugees who are living in extremely vulnerable conditions, and for the necessary rebuilding efforts. Total victory over Boko Haram does not seem imminent, however. Instead, advances will be measured against progress in terms of security and humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and the socioeconomic development of the affected, ravaged regions. The psychosocial reintegration of certain population groups – former fighters, relatives, supporters and victims of Boko Haram – also represents an area that should not be ignored.

## Recommendations

- 1** Countries engaged in the fight against Boko Haram should stay mobilised given the persistence of the threat and the group's capacity to adapt, as well as its resilience.
- 2** The MNJTF must become fully operational and play its role. To do this, the troop-contributing countries should take full ownership and participate in making it functional.
- 3** The MNJTF's partners should give concrete effect to their pledges of material, financial and technical assistance in order to strengthen operational capacities (mobility, communications, intelligence) that would enable it to operate effectively.
- 4** The MNJTF should step up its efforts in the fields of external communication and civil–military relations to better inform public opinion about its actions and to benefit from the support of local populations located in its areas of operations.
- 5** The nature of Boko Haram and the environment in which it operates pose operational challenges to the armies combating it. These realities make it all the more necessary for the MNJTF to ensure that its actions comply with international humanitarian law and, more broadly, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

## Notes

- 1 Until it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in March 2015, the group's official name was Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, which means 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'. Since its allegiance to IS, the group goes by the name of the 'Islamic State's West Africa Province, ISWAP or ISWA'. However, in this report Boko Haram, the most common name, is used.
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- 13 Telephonic interview, 22 June 2016.
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### Acknowledgements

This report was made possible with the support of the government of the Netherlands and the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC). The ISS is grateful for support from the ISS Partnership Forum: the Hanns Seidel Foundation and the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

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West Africa Report  
Issue 19

ISSN 1026-0404



9 771026 040004