

Full Length Research Paper

Is there borderline in Nigeria's northeast? Multi-national joint task force and counterinsurgency operation in perspective

Lanre Olu-Adeyemi* and Shaibu Makanjuola T.

Department of Political Science and Administration, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Received 10 September, 2019; Accepted 6 March, 2020

Borderline as a defence line is central in countering transnational insurgency. Yet, countries in African Sub-region are lackadaisical about redefining inherited colonial borders. Primarily, the study examined the origin of Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) counterinsurgency (COIN) operational mandate as well as the linkage between border, threat of insurgency and MNJTF COIN operation in Nigeria's northeastern region. It derived data from secondary sources and method of analysis adopted was content descriptive analysis; enemy-centric and population-centric COIN theories upheld this study. Interestingly, study reveals that in 1994, MNJTF was established by Nigeria to deal with insurgent from its northern borders and later expanded to include African neighbours. That in 2015, MNJTF was formally authorized under a new concept of operation to cover COIN with the mandate to: Create a safe environment in areas affected by Boko Haram activities; prevent expansion of insurgency activities and facilitate overall stabilization programme to fully restore state authority. However, study found four evidences linking the threat of insurgency to the porous/undefined nature of the shared borderland with Niger, Chad and Cameroon: (1) the overlapping pattern in community settlements on the borderland makes it difficult for MNJTF to effectively counter insurgents; (2) it favours illegal arms trafficking; (3) borderland forested area serves as shelter and factory base of the insurgents; (4) borderland ecological factor strengthens insurgent membership and operation in the terrain. Therefore, paper argues that with the present character of the shared borderland in northeastern Nigeria, countering insurgency would remain challenging. Paper recommends policy guide for effective COIN.

Key words: Arms trafficking, ecological factor, insurgency, counterinsurgency, Nigeria's northeast.

INTRODUCTION

Borderline control is essential in countering transnational insurgency, and its varying threat to humanity, territorial integrity of states as well as global peace and security. There is a growing expectation that policy makers, defence

departments and other security agencies show more concern to the nature of activities going-on around and across their borders. However, it appears that independent states are less concerned about determining

*Corresponding author. E-mail: lanre.oluadeyemi@aaau.edu.ng.

or redefining border between them and immediate neighbours. As Onuoha (2003) puts it, border is the first line of defence against transnational terrorism and the last line of a nation's territorial integrity. Besides, Cassidy (2006) confirms that borders are often used by insurgents to 'fight the war of the flea' or guerrilla warfare. It is important note that insurgent and/or terrorist organizations, have demonstrated no respect for international and national boundaries as showcased by the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States of America (USA) World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Africa and Nigeria in particular is not exempted from this threat.

Since 2009, Nigeria has been facing the crisis of Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern region. Stroehlein (2012), Institute for the Study of Violent Group (ISVG 2012) and Copeland (2013) have confirmed that its members have not only established ties with the active militant groups in North Africa, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Somali militant group Al-Shabaab but have also enjoyed training and financial support from these dreadful international terrorist organizations. Worst still, Cole et al. (2017) have testified that in 2013, USA designated Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Consequently, Nigeria, according to Adele (2013), was classified, along with Yemen, Iran and Pakistan as countries most affected by terrorism.

Nevertheless, the sophistications with which Boko Haram insurgents had carried out modern warfare in Nigeria's northeast cleared the doubt as to whether they are linked, trained and financially supported by other terrorist organizations. For instance, Onanuga et al. (2014) has disclosed that in spite of the different claims of having upper hand in the battle against insurgents by the Nigerian military, in May 2013, the insurgents hound away Local government chiefs, successfully closed down police stations, schools, other public offices and hoisted their flags, preaching openly in over 20 towns in Borno State. Accordingly, Onyemaizu in Obi and Akeregha (2014) confirmed that:

It took the Nigerian military by surprise as Boko Haram declared territorial gain in various Nigeria towns at the border area in the northeast including in Bama, Gamboru Ngala, Marte, Gwoza and Banki (Borno state); Michika and Madagali (Adamawa state) as well as Gujba in (Yobe state). This marked a turning point in the war, as a clear-cut battle line was drawn between the insurgents and the Nigerian Army.

Furthermore, Onanuga et al. (2014) has revealed that the insurgents were bold enough to attempt a takeover of an Army Barrack in Boma during an operation in which it also destroyed the town's police station, prison and abducted some officers. This put the territorial integrity of the country into question. As such, President Goodluck

Jonathan declared state of emergency, given the military power to root out the insurgents from their strongholds across three northeastern states (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe). And with this military operation, Boko Haram members fled to Nigeria borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger (Onanuga et al., 2014).

Though, these areas occupied by Boko Haram were reclaimed or recaptured, Strohlic (2020) have noted that 276 Government Secondary School (GSS) Girls in Chibok Local Government Area (LGA) of Borno State were abducted on 14th April 2014 by the insurgents and moved into Zambisa forest at the border, while about 57 escaped on transit; 103 were released through Federal government negotiation in exchange for member of the insurgents in national prisons, 112 are yet to be rescued and some are believed to be dead. Statistics from Cascais (2019) confirmed that over ten years of Boko Haram attacks, around 32,000 people have been killed and millions displaced from their homes, a unique record among contemporary terrorist organizations. However, it is important to note that Boko Haram insurgency has transcended national boundaries as Assanvo *et al* (2016) unveiled thus:

Boko Haram insurgency originated in Nigeria's northeast but it has gradually spread to other parts of the country and to a large portion of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB). The scourge threatens not only Nigeria's territorial integrity but also regional stability and the security of millions of people. Hence, 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 Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC)...in order to end the scourge.

In spite of the operation of the MNJTF in the northeast, it was another surprise on 29th February 2018 that the insurgents were able to abduct 110 Nigerian female students from Government Girls Science and Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi, in Yobe State and allegedly moved them across the borders with neighbouring African countries in the northeast (Ugoeze, 2018). Hence, the Boko Haram modern guerrilla warfare across Nigeria's northeast border area raised a vital question on the nature of border and the capability of the multinational initiative to end the menace of insurgency.

To this end, therefore, the primary aim of this study is to examine the origin of the MNJTF counterinsurgency operational mandate as well as the link between border and threat of insurgency in Nigeria's northeastern region. To achieve this, three research questions are raised: (i) what is the origin and development of the MNJTF counterinsurgency operational mandate in Nigeria's northeastern region? (ii) Is there borderline between Nigeria and her northeast African neighbouring countries? What is the nexus between border, threat of

insurgency and counterinsurgency operation in Nigeria's northeastern region?

CONCEPTUALIZING BORDERLINE, INSURGENCY AND COUNTERINSURGENCY (BICOIN)

Globally, there are no specific acceptable definitions for each of these concepts. However, the definitions adopted here are relevant to guide this study.

Borderline

Borderline, as Hornby (2005) puts it, is the part of surface area, a line that separates two countries, the land near this line, not clearly belonging to a group or a particular country. More interestingly, as earlier noted, Onuoha (2003) conceives border as the first line of defence and the last line of a nation's territorial integrity. And Jackson and Sorensen (2010) have reasoned that the responsibility to defend territory from internal and external threats lies in the authority of the state. However, the current threat to the authority of the state in the international scenery is largely insurgency.

Insurgency

Insurgency is the actions of an organized, often ideologically motivated group that seeks to effect or prevent political change of a governing authority within a region, and the actions focused on persuading or coercing the population through the use of violence and subversion (North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, 2011). In the same vein, the British Army Field Manual (AFM) defined insurgency as "the actions of a minority group within a state that tend toward forcing political change by a means of a mixture of subversion, propaganda and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate people to accept such a change" (cited in Liolio, 2013). For Metz and Millen (2004), insurgency is a strategy adopted by groups, which cannot attain their political objectives through a quick seizure of power but often characterized by protracted, asymmetric violence, ambiguity as well as the use of complex terrain such as jungles, mountains, urban areas, psychological warfare, and political mobilization - all designed to protect the insurgents and eventually alter the balance of power in their favour. Simply put, Beck (2008) conceives insurgency as a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities where the non-ruling group deliberately uses a combination of politics and violence to further its cause. However, when this happened, the state needs to take COIN measures to suppress it.

Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency is the opposite of insurgency

frequently refers as an acronym COIN. By definition, COIN is a combination of measures undertaken by legitimate government of a state or country to curb or suppress an insurgency taken up against it (Liolio, 2013). The U.S. COIN Guide (2009), defined COIN as a "comprehensive civilian-military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes." For Davidson (2016), it is "those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency". And it requires a comprehensive assessment of the root causes, strategy and technique of the insurgents. Similarly, NATO (2011) conceived it as set of political, economic, social, military, law enforcement, civil and psychological activities with the aim to defeat insurgency and address any core grievances. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents employ varied tactics and methods. These include political, military, economic, social, information and infrastructure activities (ways), in an attempt to reach a favourable outcome (ends) and within the resources available, including time (means). If this broad array is generally categorized as political and military in nature, political considerations are of much greater importance than military considerations in a struggle for the consent of the population. Anyway, this is contestable.

In comparison, Liolio (2013) notes that, while insurgents for instance try to overthrow the existing political authority in order to establish theirs, the counterinsurgent forces try to reinstate the existing political structures as well as reduce or annihilate the usurping authority of the insurgents. Hence, in this study borderline is seen as a defence line, line of demarcation between Nigeria and her northeastern African neighbours. Insurgency is viewed as the violence asymmetric strategy by Boko Haram militants aiming at gaining political authority in some states in the Nigeria's northeastern region. While, counterinsurgency is the various measures the Nigeria governments is employing in collaboration with other African neighbours to suppress the Boko Haram violence activities in the region.

ENEMY-CENTRIC AND POPULATION-CENTRIC: THEORETICAL/EMPIRICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF COUNTERINSURGENCY (COIN)

Paul et al. (2013) identifies two core theories of COIN: population-centric and enemy-centric. The former focuses on the population as "the sea" in which the insurgents "swim". According to Paul et al. (2013), the population-centric theorists assumed that if the population and its environment are sufficiently controlled, the insurgents will be deprived of the support they need and will wither, be exposed, or some combination thereof, bringing the insurgency to an end. Also, that if insurgents are denied access to and support from the population will be easily defeated as fish out of water. The enemy-

centric side, focuses on the insurgent and assumed that an insurgency ceases to exist when its ranks have been depleted and a sufficient number of its fighters have been killed or captured. It assumes insurgency as much more akin to conventional warfare and that the counterinsurgent's primary task should be to focus on the defeat of the enemy. Accordingly, Snyder (2008) sees population-centric view as indirect COIN or 'heart and minds', which places emphasis on government winning the support of the population through political concessions and aid. The terms 'hearts and minds' was coined by Field Marshal Gerald Templar, who served as a commander in the Malaya Emergency between 1952 and 1954. They postulated that counterinsurgent have to: (i) secure their population from insurgent coercion; (ii) provide competent, legal and responsive administration that is free from past abuse and broader in domain, scope and vigour; (iii) meet rising expectations with higher living standards. On the enemy-centric side which is direct COIN according to Snyder (2008), it is assumed that fighting an insurgency operates by the same general logic as fighting a war, draw and engage the insurgents into open combat and destroying them. What Waterfall (2008) refers to as 'taking COIN to the enemy', the counterinsurgent win by 'overawing the enemy by bold initiative and resolute action, whether on the battlefield or as part of a general plan of action. It is assumed that punishing insurgents and their supporters can transfer loyalty of the population back to the government or occupying army (Snyder, 2008). However, Galula (2006) pursues that, this directs military action will work well, if the insurgent's cause has little appeal or insurgent have no good cause.

Nevertheless, Paul et al. (2013) notes that both the enemy and population-centric COIN has been criticized. The population-centric COIN has been criticized as expensive, long-term nation building that forbids troops from using their weapons. On the other hand, enemy-centric COIN has been criticized as unconstrained, scorched-earth violence, so alienating the population (and the rest of the world) that for every insurgent killed, ten new recruits step up to take his or her place. Although opponents of one view or the other might wish to believe otherwise, population-centric and enemy-centric can be pursued in tandem, with the COIN force seeking to deny insurgents the support of the population while simultaneously seeking to reduce the insurgents through decisive action.

However, the enemy and population-centric COIN underpins this study. As Onyemaizu in Obi and Akeregha (2014) wrote, Boko Haram insurgent chasing away Local Government Chiefs, hoisting their flags and declaring territorial gain in various Nigeria towns at the border area in the northeast including in Bama, Gamboru Ngala, Marte, Gwoza and Banki (Borno State); Michika and Madagali (Adamawa State) as well as Gujba in (Yobe State) with objective of establishing 'Islamic Caliphate'

justify no good cause. Hence, it follows that the MNJTF, a military alliance toward tackling the threat and spread of insurgency by the LCB countries - Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroun gives credence to the enemy-centric COIN theoretical proposition. It further gives credence to the realist theory of international relations, which according to Gold and McGlinchey (2017) assumes that States partake in international alliance or organizations only when it is in their self-interest to do so, explains why Niger, Chad, Cameroon and later Benin Republic agreed to joined the MNJTF initiated by Nigeria. It equally follows Musa (2017) observations that the MNJTF operational mandate to: stabilize the situation in the Northeastern region, through continuous deployment to robustly dislocate the insurgents, rescue civilian captives, to move Internally Displace Persons (IDPs) to camp for care as well as the present bent to counter the ideology of violence through De-radicalization, Rehabilitation and Re-integration (DRR) of repentant insurgent; the Presidential Committee on the Northeast Initiative (PCNI), which covers the whole spectrum of socioeconomic development of the northeast region, all together gives credence to enemy-centric and population-centric COIN in all ramification. However, the enemy-centric COIN dominantly explains the MNJTF COIN operational stance in Northeastern region.

Empirically, there are copious scholarly contributions on COIN. However, there is a clear gap. Fundamentally, due to the scholars' areas of focus, they did not systematically addressed the questions this present study addressed which includes: What is the origin and development of the MNJTF COIN operational mandate in the Nigeria's northeast? Is there borderline between Nigeria and her northeast African neighbours? What is the nexus between border, threat of insurgency and COIN operation in the Nigeria's northeastern region? For instance, Gana et al. (2018) have investigated and analyzed the existing COIN approach of Nigeria government in combating the Boko Haram insurgent and observed that to combat the insurgency, Nigeria government in collaboration and support of foreign government have adopted numerous COIN measures but despite the consistent COIN measures, prevailing evidence suggests that the group have sustained its violence attacks unabatedly. To these authors, the repressive military action coupled with draconian laws and policies by the state created public dissension toward the COIN campaign, therefore, undermine the successes of the campaign and recommends that to effectively tackle the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria government need to shift from the enemy-centric approach to population-centric paradigm that should focus on addressing the socioeconomic factors fuelling the insurgent recruitment and support.

Accordingly, William and MacCuish (2013) have written in support of population-centric COIN paradigm, that to successfully counter Boko Haram insurgency, the

knowledge of the cultural environment is very much essential. Specifically, William and MacCuish pointed out that the first step United States of America (USA) should take in assisting Nigeria to counter Boko Haram insurgency should be to understand the existing culture and to help the government to build strong institutions that would facilitate economic development, alleviate poverty and reduce the number of disgruntled citizens in the society, who have been potential recruits for the insurgents. Secondly, that seeking USA support and engaging a large-scale military intervention may have undesired impact in the region because of the underlying suspicion of the “West”, as imperialist - a recent evidence of this perception was the reaction of several countries to the United States African Command (AFRICOM), that some opponents of AFRICOM have argued that the USA is moving toward a neo-colonialist stance and imperialist ambition. These authors concluded that without first building strong institution, deploying a large-scale force could be counterproductive to winning the hearts and minds of the population. On the contrary, Ewa (2018) acknowledged that Nigeria is presently preoccupied with multi-polar insurgency and disagreed with the population-centric view but agreed with the enemy-centric view, suggesting that to counter the insurgency, the provision of human needs should not be the central focus but the use of the military and other security agencies should be the focus of Nigeria’s counterstrategy to achieving the security of the nation. Interestingly, Eke (2017) observed a disjuncture between the policy prescription by the advocates of population centric COIN and Boko Haram’s driven objective of establishing an Islamic Caliphate and argued that whereas the implementation of socio-economic reforms can not win over potential Boko Haram recruits, dialogue nor socio-economic reforms can convince the existing Boko Haram members and leaders to stop fighting.

Form the above empirical review it is crystal clear that are convergence and divergence views on enemy-centric and population-centric COIN. Why some have holistically argued for enemy-centric, some for population-centric, some have argued for the adoption of both. Critical among all, is Eke (2017) position: that whereas the implementation of socio-economic reforms can win over potential Boko Haram recruits, neither dialogue nor socio-economic reforms can convince the existing Boko Haram members and their leaders whose primary objective is establishing Islamic Caliphate to stop fighting. However, none of the scholarly literature including that of Eke systematically addressed the nexus between border, threat of insurgency and how the status of border have made COIN operation in Nigeria's northeastern region difficult to succeed, which are addressed in this present study.

Equally, this study became crucial because despite solutions suggested in extant literature, insurgency thrived.

METHODOLOGY

Study used secondary sources including: textbooks, newspapers, magazines, journal articles, thesis, army field manuals and COIN guides written by experts and experience scholars majorly accessed or retrieved from library and electronic media. The researcher keenly read and cross confirmed information provided in these materials using comparative technique by placing them side by side. This helps the researcher grasped relevant aspects of the contents that answer the research questions. Findings are thematically and with the aid of chart as well as tables presented. Content analysis method was adopted due to the nature of the research questions and the sensitivity of the subject matter of focus (Figure 1).

Maps of study area

Map of Nigeria showing states and international boundaries are shown in Figure 2.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MNJTF COIN OPERATIONAL MANDATE IN NIGERIA'S NORTHEAST

Etymologically, Albert (2017) reveals that the MNJTF was established by Nigeria in 1994 to deal with insurgents from its northern borders but was expanded to include Chad and Niger in 1998. In 2011, existence of Boko Haram members in Nigeria’s neighbouring countries was revealed during President Olusegun Obasanjo visited Alhaji Babakura Fuggu (brother-in-law) of the late Boko Haram founder, Mohammed Yusuf to seek peace with the group. But was informed that ‘about 30 to 40% members were scattered in neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroon’ (Ajani, 2011). To deal with this phenomenon, the MNJTF role was further extended in 2012 to address the escalating Boko Haram crisis. In 2013, Boko Haram group attack on towns and villages in the Lake Chad Basin region along Nigeria’s borders with Chad and Cameroon as well as in the northern provinces of Cameroon became more frequent (African Union’s Peace and Security Council, AUPSC, 2015). In 2014, at one of the meetings of AUPSC, the Council expressed full support for the establishment and deployment of the MNJTF, as an appropriate framework for effectively neutralizing the Boko Haram insurgents. In 2015, the Boko Haram overran a military base in northeastern Nigeria that was the headquarters of the MNJTF located in Baga, Borno State and some local residents were massacred, some displaced and the towns became unsecured (Assanvo et al., 2016; AUPSC, 2015). This influenced the expansion troop numbers of MNJTF, its mandate, as well as the relocation of the Headquarters from Baga to N’Djamena in Chad. Interestingly, major structural change was witnessed. The system was expanded to include Benin Republic (Albert, 2017). Equally, the mandate of MNJTF which was meant to be a direct response to the problem of cross-border crimes and arms in-flow orchestrated by illegal aliens, was also



Figure 1. Showing Nigeria's northeast border with other African countries at cradle of Lake Chad (LCB countries).
Sources: Albert (2017).

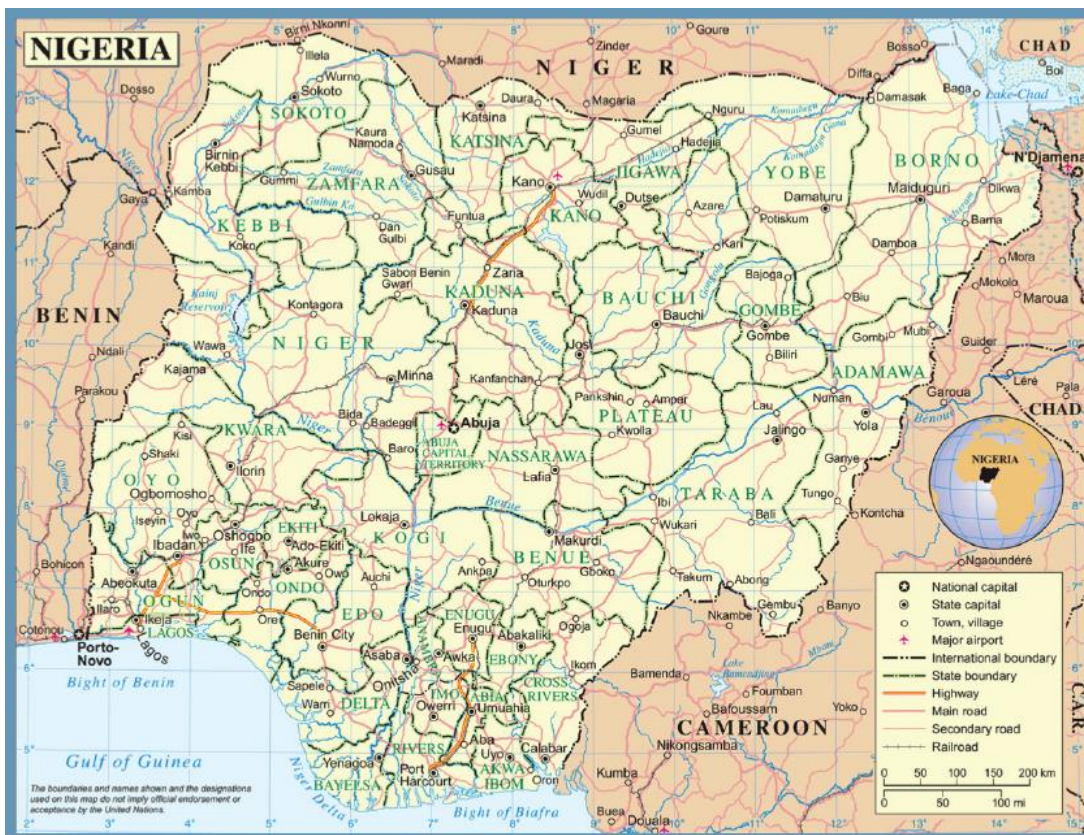


Figure 2. Map of Nigeria showing states and international boundaries.
Source: Buchanan-Clarke and Knoope (2017).

later extended to cover a new concept of operation which is COIN operations and the deployment was formally authorized by AUPSC (Mbah et al., 2017). Hence, the comprehensive ongoing MNJTF COIN mandate as specified by Assanvo et al. (2016) include to:

"create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups and 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 and refugees; and facilitate, within the limit of its capabilities, humanitarian operations and the delivery of assistance to the affected populations. Its mandate includes, among others, conducting military operations to prevent the expansion of the group's activities; conducting patrols; preventing all 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. The MNJTF has also been tasked to undertake specific actions in the areas of intelligence, human rights, information and the media. Recognizing the complexity of its mission, three components – military, police and civilian were to be established."

In view of the above, in August 2015, the full component of national contingents was announced at the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the LCBC and Benin raised the MNJTF's numbers to nearly 11,150 personnel (Figure 3).

Figure 3 shows that Nigeria has the highest percentage of personnel in MNJTF follow by Chad and Cameroon, while Niger and Benin are low in their percentage. This disparity in personnel contributed account for the fact that Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon are more affected by the activities of the Boko Haram insurgency than Niger and Benin.

Moreover, Assanvo et al. (2016) further revealed that during the second Regional Security Summit in Abuja on 14th May 2016, President Buhari announced a total number of 8,500 personnel. Regarding individual countries' contributions, several sources 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 1st April 2016 to seek the authorization 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. However, Benin Republic (in the west) was said to have recently reduced its contribution to about 200 soldiers for financial reasons but ended up deploying 150 soldiers in May 2016 for political reasons (Table 1).

Similarly, Musa (2017) categorized the COIN operations into kinetic (military approach) and non-kinetic

(non-military approach): One of the kinetic or military approach is operation '*lafiya dole*' (peace by force), this operation was carried out by MNJTF to supports the Nigerian Army to maintain pressure on Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region (LCB), particularly in the Sambisa Forest through airstrikes and ground operations in order to degraded their capability. Second, is operation stabilized the situation along the borders through continuous deployment robustly dislocated the terrorists as the general situation along the borders was characterized by incessant Boko Haram insurgents attacks which led to loss of lives and property as well as displacing a part of the populace in the affected area. Third, operation rescue of civilian captives. These have led to the successful rescue of some civilians held captive by Boko Haram insurgents at the Lake Chad. A large number of civilians were rescued and moved to IDP Camp in Monguno for care. This was when Nigerians started gaining confidence on the military operation.

Turning to the non-kinetic or non-military approach, Musa (2017) unfolds that lesson from other theaters of operations shown that military operations are not the ultimate means in ending the threat posed by non-state actors. The Nigeria's soft approach seeks to counter the ideology of violence, build trust and community resilience at the grassroots. These include operation '*safe corridor*'. An initiative to encourage willing and repentant Boko Haram insurgents to surrender and embrace peace particularly in Nigeria for subsequent De-radicalization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DRR) process. Over 900 Boko Haram combatants including men and women have surrendered to the military and to undergo the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Programme. Musa added that, efforts to strengthening bilateral and multilateral engagements with friendly countries at the sub-regional, regional, continental and global levels have led to the establishment of the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU), with Headquarters in Abuja by the cooperation between Nigeria and her immediate African neighbours - Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon for sharing timely intelligence for tactical operational needs MNJTF as well as the establishment of the Joint Coordination Planning Committee comprising of Nigeria, US, France and UK for sharing intelligence on the activities of Boko Haram insurgency since 2014. However, it is important to note that despite this dynamic COIN initiatives and efforts the insurgents have continue to carry out it asymmetry and guerrilla modern warfare in the area as at the time of this study.

Is there borderline between Nigeria and northeast neighbours?

Study findings shows that Nigeria shared in the northeast with neighbouring Country 1, 2 and 3 representing Chad,

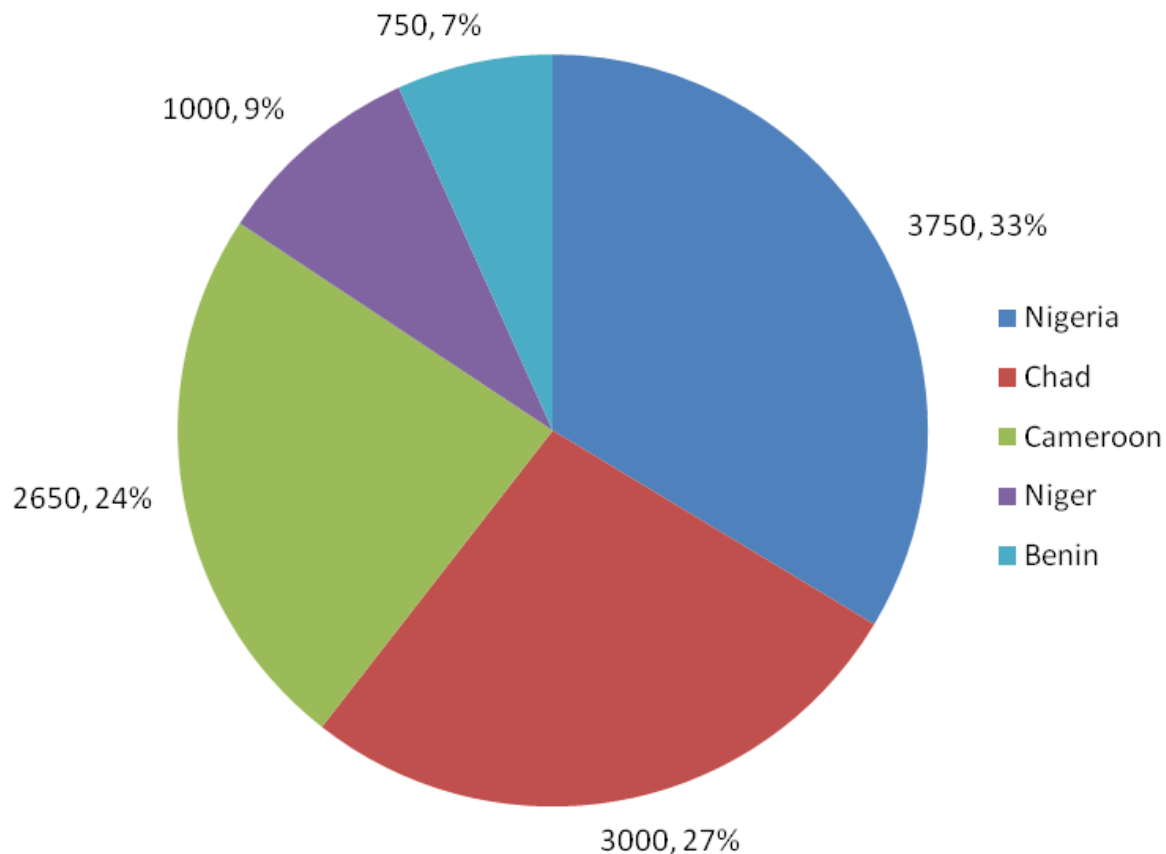


Figure 3. Percentage of MNJTF personnel contributions as at 2015.
Source: created by Authors using data provided in Assanvo et al. (2016).

Cameroon and Niger republic, a total of three thousand two hundred and seventy four (3,274 sq.km) extensive borderland as presented in Table 2.

Apart from the above, study findings equally shows that out of the total number of border routes puts between 1,483 and 2,064 only eight four are legal routes approved for exchange of goods and services between Nigeria and immediate African countries, between 1,399 and 1,980 are unmanned illegal routes. However, both the legal and illegal route are used for perpetrate cross-border crimes including smuggling and transnational trafficking of arms and ammunitions, drugs, human beings and other related crime through methods or techniques often undetected as presented in Table 3.

Nexus between status of border, threat of insurgency and coin operation in Nigeria's northeastern region

Study findings showed that the undefined and porous nature of border largely favours insurgency but making COIN operation by the MNJTF difficult to achieve success in the Nigeria's northeast region. Information from Commodore Musa (2017), a coordinator of the

counterterrorism centre, Abuja that extensive borderland between Nigeria and her neighbouring African countries in northeast which stretch over thousands of kilometers constituted a major factor imposing difficulty for adequate policing and protection by the joint forces of neighbouring states as Boko Haram insurgents are aware of this, they have taken advantage it to perpetrate their devilish attack across countries in Lake Chad Basin. In view of this, study uncovered and demonstrated nexus or link between nature of border, insurgency and COIN operation in Nigeria's northeast as thematically discussed below.

Evidence of overlapping pattern in community settlements between Nigeria and neighbours, a borderless-border phenomenon advantageous to insurgents

Borderline or border is expected to be a line that separates two country and the land near this line is also expected not to belong to a particular country on both side (Hornby, 2005). Evidence showed that there are overlapping pattern in community settlements, built-up

Table 1. Evidence of COIN operations in the Nigeria's northeastern region March-July 2017.

| Operation type | Aim | Area: Villages/towns | Outcome |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 'Lafiya Dole' (Peace by force) | To clear and neutralize BHIs in some general areas along Nigeria/ Cameroon border around Bama LGA. | Sirsya, Kote, Sigawa, Bula, Bundiye, Adeleke, Tchatile and Lanukura villages. | 8 settlements were cleared; 5 BHIs were captured; 7 done of guns and 2 motorcycles recovered. |
| 'Rawan Kada' (Crocodile operation) | To clear general area along the fringes of the Lake Chad and the area around the Nigerian-Nigerien border. | Villages along the axis: Douma, Kilewa, Damara, Abaga, Kilikali Bori, Kalibowa, Karo, Gashirgar among others. | Troops cleared 11 and recovered large cache of weapons. |
| 'Deep Punch' | To further consolidate on troops domination of Sambisa forest by | Troops progressively cleared Modube, Yiwe, Tokumbere, Lokwansa, Angwa Lawal, Nmusa, Tuatuge and Parisu villages. | BHIs were denied freedom of action in Sambisa forest general area. |
| | To stop the sporadic fire in Damboa LGA | Mangusum in Damboa LGA | BHIs were successfully repelled; 2 killed and captured 64 rounds of 7.62mm cartridge material link; 1 empty magazine of AK47, a bandolier and one 36 hand grenade recovered, among others. |
| Other Clearance Operations | To clear a town from insurgents. | Monguno town | 2 foreigners from Kolo Adam (Cameroonian) and Matta Francois Chadian) were arrested while on espionage mission in the town. |
| | To clear and neutralize BHI in some general areas in Maiduguri. | Outskirts of Maiduguri through Wanori and Kofi etc. | About 18 villages were cleared. |
| | To clear and neutralize BHI in some general areas. | Katara Gidan Dutse along Gwoza - Limankara road | 8 BHIs were killed in an encounter while one was captured alive. IED factory ran by insurgents were destroyed; and 11 rounds of 7.62 mm, 6 rounds of fabricated 7.62 mm ammunitions recovered among others. |
| 'Rescued Civilians' | To rescued civilians held hostage by BHIs. | When approaching Dikwa from Muliye and Masa villages along road Dikwa - Gulumba Gana | on the whole 19642 persons were rescued and taken to IDP Camp and 810 BHIs arrested. |

Source: Attahiru (2017).

Table 2. Evidence of extensive borderland between Nigeria and neighbours in northeast region.

| Country | Nigeria's African neighbours in northeast region | Borderland distance (sq.km.) |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 1 | Cameroon | 1,690 |
| 2 | Chad | 87 |
| 3 | Niger | 1,497 |
| Total length of borderland | | 3,274 |

Source: created by cross-comparing scholarly documentations.

structures on the 87 sq.km borderland distance Nigeria shared with Chad, Cameroon and Niger republic in the northeast (Table 2). For example, Babatola (2015) empirically identifies that:

Nigeria's northeast border area with Niger Republic: Birin Kula in Bamle village with border settlements and houses partly in Niger and partly in Nigeria; Dambata and Gunel LGAs in old Kano State and Department of Zinder in Niger Republic; Nguru, Geidam and West of Kukawa Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Borno State of Nigeria

*and Local communities in Department of Zinder in Niger Republic. Similarly, *Nigeria's northeast border area with Chad: the Local areas of Monguno, Ngala, Bama and Gwoza of Nigeria are in Chad Republic - the Lake Chad region that borders Nigeria and her neighbours. Accordingly, *Nigeria's northeast border area with Republic of Cameroun: traditional states and communities of Adamawa (Sardauna), Mandara, the Hingi, Michika, Mubi, Fufori, Ganya, Wukati and others in old Gongola State of Nigeria and neighbouring local communities are in Cameroon; Traditional communities of Kwande in old*

Table 3. Status of the Nigeria's border at a glance.

| Legality | Number of routes | Manned or unmanned | Activity | Often undetected methods used by criminals to cross border posts/routes |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| Legal routes | 84 | Manned | Exchange of goods and services. | Hiding cache of arms and ammunition in empty fuel tankers, under vehicles' engines and inside bags of grains transported mostly in large number via trucks, trailers, lorries, old model pickup vans and jeeps. |
| Illegal routes | Between 1,399 and 1,980 | Unmanned | Smuggling and transnational trafficking of arms and ammunitions, drugs, human beings and other related crime. | |
| Total border routes is put between 1,483 or 2,064 | | | | |

Source: created by cross-comparing scholarly documentations.

Benue State and neighbouring local communities are in Cameroon.

The above made it not only difficult to distinguish territorial boundaries as nationals of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon mingled together. This undefined and borderless-border phenomenon has made the area advantageous for Boko Haram activities, while counterinsurgency remains a struggle. It becomes obvious therefore, why Metz and Millen (2004) succinctly mentioned that one of the strategy of the insurgents is the "use of complex terrain..." If there have been a proper border protection in Nigeria's northeast the insurgents would not have been able to display the kind of sophistications and urban warfare.

Evidence of border routes serving as conduit for insurgents to access and traffic illegal arms and ammunition

Many scholars confirmed and agreed on the illegality going on across Nigeria's northeast borders. For instance, Osakwe and Audu (2017) uncovered that in northeast region there are evidences of armed banditry, arms trafficking and border intrusion along Nigeria's border with Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic. Similarly, Babatola (2015) agreed that Nigeria's northeast borders has been serving as conduit for illicit transnational traffic of small arms and light weapons and drugs not only due to the porous nature, but as a result of the limited presence of security and law enforcement officials. Osimen et al. (2017) added that some cows and grains merchants in the Northeast sub-region of the country have devices means of hiding cache of arms and ammunition in empty fuel tankers, under vehicles' engines and inside bags of grains mostly undetected at the border posts. The "grains" are transported in large number via trucks, trailers, lorries and old model pickup vans and jeeps with little attention given to them by security agents.

Evidence of border area serving as shelter and factory base for insurgents

Another nexus between Border, Insurgency and this time

Counterinsurgency (BICOIN) was that the Hills of Gwoza and the Sambisa Forest Reserve shelter the insurgents. Gowza Hills for example is at the northeast of the Mandara Mountains that straddle northeast Nigeria and the far north of Cameroon (Babatola, 2015). Moreover, Buchanan-Clarke and Knoope (2017) recently unfolded that despite military successes against Boko Haram, the organization remains a dangerous asymmetrical threat in both Nigeria and neighbouring states at the Lake Chad Basin (LCB). While their last significant stronghold in Sambisa forest in Borno state has been recaptured by the Nigerian military, the organization is spread diffusely across the northeast, particularly along the borders with Cameroon and Niger, into the Lake Chad region, carrying out attacks in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. However, in February 2018, the Deputy Director, Army Public Relations, Operation Lafiya Dole Colonel Onyeama Nwachukwu announces that:

"a massive Improvised Explosive Device (IED) factory operated by insurgents in Sambisa Forest was discovered by troops on operation into the Forest..." and several terrorists affiliated to the Boko Haram sect were apprehended in Sambisa Forest and region of Lake Chad after rigorous combat and the factory was taken over by the Army who recovered 88 Gas Cylinders, one laptop computer, one 100m Ultra High-Frequency Hand-Held (UHF HH) radio and two Global Positioning System (GPS) among others (cited in Kester, 2018).

The above supported: First, Galula (2006) hypothesis about border areas usually exploited by insurgent... that by moving from one side of the border to the other, the insurgent is often able to escape pressure or, at least, to complicate operations for his opponent. Second, Waterfall (2008) postulations that borders are not only use by insurgents as safe havens, border crossings have become one of the strategies adopted by the insurgents. The insurgents will seek to utilize other countries as safe havens especially for basing. And third, Metz and Millen (2004) position that one of the strategies of the insurgent is the "use of complex terrain..." and as long as this condition exists, internal stability will always be at risk; and cross border operations by counterinsurgent forces will be increasingly difficult. Hence, the need to have a

definite borderline in the northeast.

Evidence of how border climate change favoured insurgents by strengthening their membership and operation in the terrain was uncovered

As the climate is changing so too are the conditions within which non-state armed groups such as Boko Haram operate. Climate Change contributes to creating a fragile environment in which these groups can thrive. Scientists say the Lake Chad, the borders Nigeria and her northeast African neighbours has shrink by 95 percent over the past 50 years. They have also linked the Boko Haram insurgency to the Lake's situation (EnvironNews, 2017).

One major factor that further showed not only the nexus between nature of border and the threat of insurgency but as it affected COIN in Nigeria's northeast region, was that borderland ecological challenges favoured Boko Haram activities as it has contributed to improving the group membership and effective operations in the border terrain so far. How? Albert (2017) revealed that:

When the active 966,955 square kilometres Lake Chad hydrographic basin came under serious threat of drought due to climate change, its water body reduced from 25,000 square kilometres in 1963 to 2,000 square kilometres in 2010, and created the problems of water scarcity, environmental pollution, threats to biodiversity survival and unemployment amongst several other livelihood issues. Consequently, the massive number of the populations from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan and even Algeria enjoying fresh water and agricultural resources such as fisheries and pasture in the area were retrenched from their vocations around Lake Chad came to join the Boko Haram sect and they know Nigeria's borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger so well that at the initial stage of Nigeria's COIN against Boko Haram, they facilitated the use of these neighbouring countries as safe havens. This made it possible for Boko Haram members to fight in Nigeria in the daytime and run back to any of the Lake Chad Basin countries to hide in the evening.

This above revelation by Albert (2017) as regard Boko Haram insurgents having knowledge about the Nigeria's northeast border terrain with neighbours, very much agreed with Galula and Trinquier views that: the guerrilla's greatest advantage is intimate knowledge of the terrain and support from the population where he operates (cited in Waterfall, 2008).

CONCLUSION

This paper had revealed that MNJTF was established by

Nigeria in 1994 to deal with rebels from its northern borders but it has undergone structural changes including expansion to accommodate other African neighbouring countries in the northeast include Chad, Niger, Cameroon as well as Benin in the west. However, in the wake of 2015 MNJTF deployment was formally authorized by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to cover new concept of operation which is COIN operation. Its mandate under this new concept of operation include among others: to create a safe environment in the areas affected by activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups; to facilitate implementation of overall stabilization programme to fully restore State authority; to facilitate humanitarian operations; and to prevent the expansion of insurgency activities. However, study found that achieving these mandate has been problematic as borderlands/routes between Nigeria and her northeast neighbours are extensive/massive, undefined and unmanned. Hence, the nexus between the status of border and threat of insurgency in Nigeria's northeast region was revealed:

- (i) Evidence of overlapping pattern in community settlements between Nigeria and neighbours, a borderless-border phenomenon advantageous to insurgents.
- (ii) Evidence of border routes serving as conduit for insurgents' to access and traffic illegal arms and ammunition because they are unknown and unprotected by security agencies and law enforcement officials;
- (iii) Evidence of border area serving as shelter and factory base for insurgents;
- (iv) Evidence of how border climate change favoured insurgents by strengthening their membership and operation in the terrain was uncovered.

One way to win the guerrilla warfare or the war of the flea according to Lieutenant Colonel Cassidy (2006) is to deny insurgent its safe haven. But, this has been difficult due to the status of the border. It is glaring therefore, that there is urgent need to address the border challenges, if not, undefined and porous nature of the borderlands will continue to be disadvantageous to MNJTF COIN operation but advantageous for insurgency to thrive and eventually gain permanent territories in Nigeria's northeastern region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For border to stop being a challenge in Nigeria's northeast and to enhance the present MNJTF COIN operation in the area, study recommends as follows:

- (i) Presently from our findings, there is no borderline (defence line) in Nigeria's northeast. However for the ongoing overall stabilization COIN programme to fully restore state authority, and enhance economic development in order to address socioeconomic problems

including poverty, unemployment, illiteracy among others, it should be reviewed to cover border demarcations between Nigeria and her neighbours in the northeast. This will help to reduce cross-border illegality enhancing activities of Boko Haram insurgents and other criminals in the area. However, the border demarcation should be considered under the umbrella of African Union (AU) and Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). This is important, to avoid conflict emanating from border incursion and unhealthy disagreements, that would have negative impact on the present MNJTF COIN operation and make insurgency to thrive. The border demarcation is expected to take care of the overlapping pattern in community settlement based on agreements to clearly separate LCB countries political structure from each other territory accordingly.

(ii) The ongoing overall stabilization COIN programme should also be reviewed to cover climate change mitigations in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) to make the area conducive for legal business to flourish; people who want to engage in legal means of livelihood can have opportunity to do so instead of aiding insurgency. The address the ecological challenges, the LCB countries should under the umbrella of AU and LCBC collaborate with National and International Donors, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs).

(iii) Why planning to achieve the above two recommendations, there is urgent need to adequately and properly manned the northeastern illegal border routes in order for the present MNJTF to prevail strongly in the war against insurgency. Also, troops in various sectors' of operation must be conversant with the border terrain. To achieve this, selected and trusted locals or civilians in the problematic areas should be trained by professionals and experts with experience in COIN warfare to work with the MNJTF in the area since they are more familiar with the undefined border terrain, the massive illegal routes and probably may be able to identify members of the Boko Haram. They will also help to checkmate arms and ammunitions smuggling and trafficking by criminals across the massive routes.

(iv) In addition, strengthening civil-military relations would further help the MNJTF operations into the northeastern forest to discover more weapon making Boko Haram's factories in the area and destroy them accordingly.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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