A Study of the Strategic and Tactical Dynamics of *Boko Haram's* Violence around the Lake Chad Basin, 2012-2018

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ABSTRACT: The effectiveness of the *Boko Haram (Islamic terrorist group in Nigeria)* strategy had significant effect on troops and battlefield outcomes in the counter insurgency operations of the Lake Chad Basin. This paper examines the strategy of *Boko Haram* insurgents across national borders around the Lake Chad Basin from 2012 to 2018. The various phases of the insurgency attracted the responses of Lake Chad Basin states to put the group in a worsted situation. With field evidence from participants and observers drawn from soldiers and Special Forces of the Multinational Joint Task Force as well as stakeholders of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, complemented by secondary sources, the paper identified and analysed the strategy and tactics of *Boko Haram* and their effect on the duration and intensity of insurgency around Lake Chad Basin. The geopolitical challenges that make it difficult to contain the insurgency and, consequently, magnify the duration of the insurgency are examined from the lenses of the political theories of territory, ungoverned spaces and victory. The findings showed that the *Boko Haram* sect sustained the war by utilising a strategy that profits from the swath of ungoverned spaces around the fluid boundaries and borderlands of states of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB). At the operational level, the paper showed that the sect has been consistent in recruitment, training, and procurement of arms. This made the insurgency intractable and attracted the trans-border regional security commitment of states of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB).

KEYWORD: Boko Haram, security governance, counterinsurgency operations, Lake Chad.

Introduction

The *Boko Haram* insurgency has remained a burning issue for the international community, especially scholars. It has generated debates, claims and counter-claims amongst scholars of international relations, peace studies, strategic studies, war studies, conflict resolution, development studies, violence research, sociology, gender studies, history, social works, humanitarian studies, geography, as well as scientists, engineers and practitioners concerned about the security dynamics and stability of the LCB region. Previous research established that insecurity creates uncertainty and increases anxiety (Pérouse de Montclos, 2016). Earlier studies on *Boko Haram* insurgency in the LCB have focused on policies, cooperation and livelihood, security collaboration in the form of collective military coalition, threats and opportunities for regional hegemon. However, the strategic and tactical dynamics of the insurgency in the LCB, based on the findings from field interviews and participant observation, appear to have lacked adequate scholarly attention. This has compelled an examination of the strategic and tactical dynamics of *Boko Haram's* violence which has

heightened insurgency around the Lake Chad Basin and made the insurgency difficult to contain by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) around the LCB (Obamamoye, 2017).

This study made use of field evidence from soldiers and special forces of the MNJTF involved in the counterinsurgency, border security experts, scholars, residents of the area and Search for Common Ground staff. Content analysis was carried out on the speeches provided by leaders of the LCB countries at the 2018 Lake Chad Basin Commission International Conference as well as the press conference granted by Major General Lucky Irabor at Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja. The author's participation in two major international conferences on Lake Chad Basin, in Nice, France (June 2017) and Abuja, Nigeria (February 2018), as well as a workshop on the strategies and challenges of negotiating with violent extremists (July 2018) was very helpful in shaping thoughts and perspectives for the paper. These were complemented by secondary evidence from books and journal articles on the subject.

The paper proceeds in parts. First is the introduction. Second is the theoretical approach. This is followed by an examination of the strategy of *Boko Haram* and its tactics which have combined to engender the escalation of the violence. The challenges of containing the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the LCB are then examined in addition to the effect of the insurgency on the LCB.

The Lake Chad Basin: Geography and Composition

The Lake Chad Basin (LCB), one of the largest freshwater bodies in Africa, is shared by eight countries, namely Algeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, and the Sudan (Awosu, 2017). While some of these countries are distant from the lake, others are within the immediate shores of the lake, sharing boundaries. Although Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad are directly located within the lake, other countries benefit from the lake in one way or another. Consequently, any conflict that occurs within the lake area affects the four countries that are directly located around it. For instance, the shrinking of the lake and the attendant manifestation of insurgency constituted a challenge for the sustainability of livelihoods of the lake states.

The counterinsurgency operations against insurgency in the LCB have been carried out on various fronts (Baba 2020). The LCB was arguably a stable region before the *Boko Haram* insurgency and its expansion beyond Nigeria, which put it on the map as a volatile part of the world, with the attendant sharp decline in its tourist attraction, farming and fishing advantage as well as trans-frontier trade advantage. The failure of some residents to report the insurgents and their hideouts creates hostility perception between them and the state security providers engaged in the counterinsurgency. The residents have also continued to suffer the health crisis associated with displacement occasioned by insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Theoretical Approach

The analysis in this study is guided by the theories of victory, territory and ungoverned spaces. These theories are engaged in a triangulation.

Theory of Victory

The theory of victory emphasises how insurgents view the planning and ending of insurgency with positive outcomes. According to *United States Government's Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, the theory of victory upholds the belief by insurgents that "they have the capability of defeating the government on the battlefield, spark a popular uprising that forces the government to accede to the insurgents' demands, provoke international intervention on the insurgents' behalf, or prolong the conflict long enough for the government to judge that it is better to negotiate a settlement (United States Government 2012). With propaganda and documents at their disposal, insurgents tend to fantasise on how their efforts would be crowned with victory.

Whether politically motivated insurgency, militarily organised insurgency, ethnic or urban insurgency, it is often difficult to identify those that are combatants among non-combatants even when the military embark on policing activities. (Abolurin 2015). Attempting security governance in such an environment is risky for the counterinsurgents. This is because, if they are not armed during raids in residential areas, troops cannot differentiate between the two categories, and this gives the insurgents the advantage to attack soldiers searching for them. Since it is difficult for any group that is anticipating victory to give up its fight for the glory it desires after conquering its rivals, the theory of victory is arguably concerned predominantly with conviction and motivation.

Counterinsurgency, which can result in militarism, is also seen by state security providers as the coercive antidote to insurgent violence. The state is convinced that victory against the insurgents is certain with the mobilisation and deployment of the security agencies. They even go as far as issuing media reports on their readiness to put the insurgents in a vanquished situation within a specific period, and also announce the strategic points recorded against the insurgents either by arresting/killing their commanders or destroying their camps.

Protecting the lives of civilians is usually a challenge owing to the proclivity of the insurgents to hide in civilian-populated areas to avoid being apprehended by counterinsurgents during raids. Even attempting to recover illegal weapons from insurgents through search operations can be disastrous to the people they use as human shields and the villages they use for cover because most insurgents hardly surrender their arms. In this scenario, the counterinsurgents would easily be spotted by the insurgents from their hideouts, which give them strategic advantage over the troops. In the operations against *Boko Haram*, the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau, was reported to have been killed by troops on several occasions but the group also released counter-videos to dispute the claim. For the insurgents, mobilising their resources does not stop at attacking political office holders, but also focuses on the possibility of gaining part of a country's territory.

Ungoverned Spaces Theory

Ungoverned spaces refer to situations of failing or failed states, poorly controlled land, airspace or maritime borders which require state control (Taylor, 2016). According to Clunan and Trinkunas, the concept of the ungoverned space is inherent in doctrines of counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, counternarcotic, stabilisation and reconstruction, and peace building (Clunan & Trinkunas 2010). Ungoverned spaces are physical areas that are social, political and economic zones where states do not have effective control, which non-state actors can exploit to avoid state surveillance and undermine state sovereignty (Adepegba 2018). This weak capacity of states to make representation aggravates national identity crisis (Idehen, 2016). More issues on the complexities of ungoverned spaces were explained:

If spaces are effectively under the control of a functional state then violent non-state actors (VNSAs) will never have a foundation for their occupation and there will be no basis for competition. Past and present examples of VNSAs successfully occupying a space and establishing some form of government show that these spaces were legitimately ungoverned, otherwise this need would not have been created and subsequently fulfilled. No VNSA can occupy legitimately governed spaces (Olaniyan, 2017).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the weakness or failure of affected states in managing their territories creates insecurity in places controlled by non-state actors. Lack of governance within a territory engenders concerns over development, health, education, human rights and economic welfare of affected populations (Hoisington, 2018). This theory is relevant to this paper because ungoverned spaces emboldened the *Boko Haram* sect to use the Lake Chad Basin as a base to the extent that they became more sophisticated than imagined by states' security providers.

Theory of Territory in the Context of Lake Chad Basin Security

The political theory of territory emphasises how the complexities of security governance in a territory can motivate the activities of non-state actors as alternative to state security providers. Moore's political theory of territory, which identifies groups as crucial stakeholders in territorial right-holding, discusses the control over borders and resources within a geographical domain. As a result of insecurity or contestation, people's moral right of occupancy which gives them basic rights to live in a place would be threatened (Moore, 2015).

On territorial defence strategies, the need to conquer to exist has been established by archaeologists. As defensive strategies to prevent incursion by invaders between late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries, leaders of the Bamun people of Foumban (Cameroon), especially Prince Nshare Yen and some of his successors, prioritised safety by creating favourable conditions, such as securing territory and resources, installation of defence structures in the form of digging of ditches (flared ditches and trough ditches) and pitfalls, and setting up and manning of fortifications aimed at protecting (Foumban, 2018). This shows how strategy can prevent enemies from occupying a territory. If a state or group does not counter the threats to its territory or place of abode, its existence would be threatened.

The role of unrestricted migration in exacerbating insurgency cannot be downplayed, because migration concerns modern state discourse. Many states organise their security sector to develop strategic capability in countering any threat to territorial integrity by ensuring that the armed forces and the paramilitary are on top of any situation arising from eventualities in the sea, on land and in the air space. A state that has weak operational strategy in the security sector will have the problem of fragility. In fact, any state that does not prioritise her migration policies, particularly on regulating where and how people enter the country, is likely to have the threat of contested or divided territory. The MNJTF is a security regime in the form of collective security. As noted by Karunwi, the collective security principle establishes mutual responsibility of states to pool the resources of several states to maintain the peace. Such collective security arrangement is achievable through diplomacy and multilateral cooperation focused on promoting the political, economic and military interests of the states involved. (Barston 2014). This is targeted partnership that produces critical military strategies. (Schiff 2012).

The request for a unified approach against the insurgents by the United Nations Office for West Africa and Sahel, African Union and the Economic Community of West African States is an indication that the escalation of insecurity has become a source of worry owing to the incremental wave of arms proliferation that seems to be fuelling the violence (Adepegba 2018). In the context of the LCB, counterinsurgents operate as security providers to restore communities' moral entitlement to live. They have become security providers whose efforts are focused on countering the risk of insurgency and other crimes that can affect residents.

Scholars have argued that the ineffectiveness of states often makes some spaces of a territory come under the control of non-state actors, with attendant implications for the state's territorial right. In the view of Moore, any group that can impose order or demonstrate effectiveness could gain territorial right in an area, and this raises the possibility of a "might is right" argument, which is contrary to international law.

This theory is relevant to this study because the efforts of the MNJTF are focused on routing the insurgents by preventing them from using communities as safe havens within the territories of states that share borders around Lake Chad.

The Strategy of *Boko Haram* Insurgents

The strategy of the *Boko Haram* sect, as distinct from the tactics, manifested mainly in the area where the group strengthened its war of movement strategy which enabled it to gain more advantage against the state, especially in dominating and influencing the alternative provision of security option to the detriment of the government. Such strategic efforts of the group remained pronounced despite claims by the government that

Boko Haram was technically defeated in 2016 to the extent that they claimed their leader Abubakar Shekau was killed on several occasions, thereby creating the impression that he died many times. The insurgents were able to identify security governance lapses at affected enclaves to wage war with the intention of achieving the ends of the policy they desired. And the war in this regard, involved the insurgency that made it easier for them to penetrate locations that would have been difficult for them to overrun without a state of insurgency.

The strategy of *Boko Haram* between 2012 and 2018 mainly centred on launching attacks on multiple fronts using motorbikes, vehicles and sophisticated weapons. Although the incidents of *Boko Haram* began to manifest in 2009, with the security forces launching military operations against the insurgents, the insurgency became high-intensity battle from 2012, when the government increased deployment that necessitated the involvement of more external actors like other countries in Africa and Europe in areas of funding and weapons, among others.

The Tactics of *Boko Haram* Insurgents and Escalation of Violence

The lethal nature of the insurgents has been a threat to both civilians and counterinsurgents owing to their combination of terror with the guerrilla strategy to gain psychological strength. *Boko Haram*'s lethality plunged from its 2014-2015 peak, but the group still had the capacity to launch destructive attacks despite losing much of its recruiting appeal (Feldstein, 2018).

The *Boko Haram* insurgents adopted different tactics to achieve their goals. The first was the recruitment of fighters. Recruitment of new members was motivated by their efforts to exploit persuasion, coercion, reaction to abuses, foreign support, apolitical motivations and deception (Abolurin, 2015). Using ideological and religious means, the insurgents influenced their target population to accept their offer and movement. This was often easy and achieved without much delay when some conditions manifested, such as lack of basic human needs, poverty, and poor security governance by the state security providers, who are supposed to provide social control. It was also facilitated by the foreign support received by the insurgents. Some of these people have foreign currencies and digital devices at their disposal. Where these approaches fail, the insurgents would have no option other than to adopt coercive means, by threatening the local population with arms, kidnapping vocal individuals, women and other high attractive targets, or killing some youths that decline accepting the membership offer. This works out for them in areas that have low literacy level amongst the populace.

The insurgents were convinced that the geography of their enclave favours their activities to the extent that even, if military tanks are mobilised into their hideouts to dislodge them, knowledge and tactics are required (Umar & Naibbi 2015). An interviewee noted that "the *Boko Haram* members understand the terrain more than troops, because some of them were born there and collaborate with others from outside the region". The poor knowledge of the battleground by troops made it difficult for state security forces to contain the insurgents in rural areas. This complicates the counterinsurgency operations by MNJTF that still finds some remnants of insurgents in previously liberated communities, which portrays an endless sanctuary used as stronghold.

A critical study of the trends of the insurgency revealed that the activities and tactics of the insurgents have continued to change since 2012, when Goodluck Jonathan served as the President of Nigeria. The nature and pattern of the insurgency between 2012 and 2014 were different from what they were between 2015 and 2018, as new modus operandi have been adopted by the insurgents whose capability in launching attack on military bases has continued to escalate the insurgency (Okolie-Osemene, 2018). Such attacks portray the insurgency as intractable conflict that would outlive the Buhari administration if not totally contained within the next few months.

With the migratory nature of the attacks, members of the *Boko Haram* sect positioned themselves in different routes and carried out simultaneous violence in different locations, thereby making it difficult for security forces to contain their activities. They often deployed terror as part of their tactics in wreaking havoc in areas that have high footprints of the military or not receptive to their goals. As noted by Ade Abolurin, the confusion associated with insurgency arises from the use of terrorism and guerrilla tactics by insurgent movements in the form of hit-and-run raids to actualise their local results (Omenma & Hendricks. 2018). In Nigeria, for instance, both the military and paramilitary forces have lost officers in various units in such circumstances. The tactics include bombing of manned armoured personnel carriers, attack on military convoys patrolling troubled areas and mysterious disappearance of some combat vehicles and officers on duty. The insurgents have a way of withdrawing strategically with vehicles, only to relaunch attack on troops on patrol.

Table 1: Comparison of *Boko Haram* Insurgency and the MNJTF Counterinsurgency Tactics in the Lake Chad Basin[1]

S/No	Boko Haram	Multinational Joint Taskforce
1	Causes negative peace with asymmetric combat against the governments	Uses negative peace in the form of coercion to contain insurgency through asymmetric combat against the insurgents
2	Has non-state security actor status and operates as outlaw security providers	Operates with security regime mandate and collaboration of state security providers
3	Seeks to establish international partnership with extremist groups in Africa beyond	Multiregional partnership in Africa and wider world
4	Use of propaganda to recruit and train fighters	High priority for military psychology/grand strategy, training of troops/operational command
5	Multiple operational bases	Endeavours to identify strategic places for the success of special operations
6	Prioritises forest taking and control of topography	Launches offensive operations and prioritises sustained ground control
7	Makes use of people that understand the terrain in getting others acquainted with the environment / insurgent tactics	Initiates/utilises briefing of newly deployed troops
8	Engages in arms proliferation	Weapons procurement
9	Utilises/exploits porous borders and undermines border security	Initiates border security governance
10	Mobilises local population against the forces of order	Needs local communities to isolate the insurgents
11	Embraces the theory of victory through propaganda and increasing manoeuvres to capture villages/towns	Embraces the theory of social contract in the framework of security community and human security governance to neutralise *Boko Haram* and retake towns
12	Uses undercover agents in high-risk areas to access information on military conduct in the field	Responds to insurgents' tactical advantage through string operations

13	Plants landmines / IEDs for troops	Uses drones and military deployments to detect mines and armouries
14	Takes advantage of rapid migration, illiteracy and poverty in the Lake Chad Basin to perpetuate insurgent violence	Strategizes to enhance security governance as a response to the anarchy occasioned by ungoverned spaces
15	Criminality sustains their activities, as they engage in kidnapping for ransom, smuggling, bank robbery, extortion of villagers in their bid to raise funds	Budgetary allocations from the governments and international donors
16	Leadership / command structure is critical to insurgency. Different commanders are saddled with control of units.	Leadership of unit/military formation is also critical to the counterinsurgency against *Boko Haram*. Senior and junior commanders have active roles and responsibilities in the frontlines.
17	No clear operation but plans for several attacks	Launches operations with different code names in indigenous languages, with special forces units
18	Insurgents' numerical strength necessitates high demand for troops	Troops are confronted with the challenge of applying training in combat theatre and uncertainties owing to the desperation of insurgents to continuously change routes, camps and tactics.
19	Decapitation / execution of civilians and captured troops	Misconduct by troops (desertion, malingering, intoxication)

Author's compilation

Table 1 shows the activities of the *Boko Haram* insurgents and the forces of order, the MNJTF, that are rivals in the creation and containment of violence, respectively. A critical look at Mao's three stages of insurgency reveals the roles of insurgents and the security forces in the security situation of the Lake Chad Basin, which creates negative peace and undermines tourism. According to Robert Schaefer, the Maoist three-phase model are the latent or incipient stage; the guerrilla warfare stage, which is characterised by sabotage and the use of propaganda to mobilise the people; and the war of movement stage, which should alert counterinsurgency stakeholders to identify changes in tactics when necessary. The second stage points to the sophistication of the insurgents who succeeded in overstretching the security sector through attacks on security targets, which necessitated collaborative security to contain them in the area. With their tactical manoeuvres, both the insurgents and counterinsurgents aim to capture villages to establish influence.

In the case of insecurity in the LCB, many governments did not contain the shipment of weapons and the movement of criminal elements who infiltrated the security market, particularly at the latent stage. From stages one to three, the situation was aggravated by conspiracy by some agents of state who empowered merchants of violence through intelligence, access to security markets, money laundering and protection of the criminals' safe havens, which increased insecurity and trans-border risks (Albert, 2017). With its large footprints across the Lake Chad Basin, the *Boko Haram* insurgents use violence to create displacement and food insecurity.

Although *Boko Haram* has a non-state status, it has the political goal of creating an Islamic state which would give it the opportunity to change the pattern of governance and leadership values, like voting in elections, wearing shirts and trousers, or receiving secular education (Thom-Otuya, 2016). The group aims to achieve this through the use of force, with the help of weapons, to achieve the selfish political goal. It sees total violence, in the form of using weapons on civilians and security forces, as the only means of achieving the political goal. The war has been escalated by the insurgents' confrontation with the military forces, especially

from 2016 to 2022, when it became clear to the government that the insurgents were desperate to sustain their violent campaigns against the state and civilians.

A notable issue is the necessity for intelligence agents and the irony of stop-and-search operations. The capability of residents to function as intelligence agents is critical. This is because there are insurgents that cannot be detected by security forces. This shows how crucial it is for the local communities to assist security forces in intelligence gathering. It was observed that locals worked as intelligence agents for the Nigerian troops in Calabar during the Biafran war. (Alabi, 2013). Then troops delegated the task of getting information on the enemy's positions, the terrain, routes used and their number; achieving this required sighting the size of their cooking pot. The small size of cooking pot could mean two things: either the fighters were small in number or that they did not have adequate foodstuffs. In the context of the insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin, tracking the enemy's safe havens and operational oversight demands keeping surveillance on them directly and sometimes indirectly, using the efforts of the residents. Also, mapping the enemy routes is critical to the success of counterinsurgency operations because insurgents sometimes decide to follow routes that can be traced to forests and waterways rather than roads within and outside different towns and villages. This will make the stop-and-search activities more result-oriented.

Stop-and-search operations became death traps owing to the counterinsurgency that is conducted in a seemingly "corrosive environment". This is because of the fluid nature of human security in the affected areas occasioned by destructive use of Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), bombs and other explosives by both the insurgents and the troops on patrol. The corrosive nature of such spots is found in the way fatalities occur. Despite creating avenues for troops to apprehend troublemakers and recover dangerous materials, like arms and illicit substances, the stop-and-search operations conducted by the security forces proved to be an irony of situation. This is because the targets of such operations, insurgents, easily spot and identify areas with heavy-handed use of sandbags and drums to control movement of vehicles and persons along major roads. This makes it difficult for persons attempting to beat checkpoints to perpetrate crimes and endanger the lives of troops and civilians, by targeting soft or military targets. There, troops end up not getting their targets of stop-and-search, who go to peaceful areas to wreak havoc and sometimes gain strategic advantage against troops, before their arrival. Making stop-and-search to be intelligence-focused has the capacity of boosting the military strategy of the MNJTF against the tactics of the insurgents. This is because intelligence is more effective than surveillance and must precede monitoring of high-risk areas to enable special operations forces to understand the areas presented in maps and what to expect with the actions chosen.

Tactics in counterinsurgency are flexible; they change, depending on the situation on ground. According to a military police officer, "you can get to the ground and discover that what you have on paper is different from what is on the ground. The script of battle location, enemy behaviour and pattern of movement is not static" (Adepegba, 2018). Understanding the dynamics requires officers who have observed the enemies in action using weapons and those who surrender can offer information exposing their modus operandi. The flexibility of tactics is highly instrumental to the success of the counterinsurgents and the victory of insurgents over the state security providers. Definitely, a tactical change would facilitate the expected outcome of operations.

The notable tactics used by the insurgents to sustain their activities include financial inducement/bribing of villagers not to give information about them to security forces, and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in multiple attacks. Also, there are frequent change of tactics and operational base, strategic engagement of field commanders, use of ambush and propaganda, manoeuvring, and disguising in dressing. *Boko Haram*'s inducement to locals shows how poverty fuels (indirectly) the insurgency; they use money to change the mindsets of people to their advantage.

It was found that, "the pre-deployment training of troops lasted for some months before they are positioned battle-ready to confront the insurgents who are enemies of humanity. On-the-spot training also involves

tactical skills needed to overcome the changing tactics of the insurgents" (Adepegba 2018). This training is done to equip the troops with the skills required to overcome insurgents' tactics. The ability of *Boko Haram* to disguise within areas of stronghold among the local population enables them to infiltrate communities and use the instrument of propaganda to win the minds of the people. Such tactics make nonsense of the advancement of troops in their numbers, particularly in high-risk areas. An officer involved in the counterinsurgency stated that: "*Boko Haram* is terrible; they are not ready to leave Lake Chad. Nigeria would have turned to Afghanistan. Nigeria banned fishing in the area for the past five years, prohibited it, and anyone found there would be fired. The *Boko Haram* wants to die rather than leave because of water and fish. Big fishes are there" (Irabor, 2018). It is possible that insurgents see the LCB as their territory which must not be lost. They launch frequent attacks on military installations and troops on special operations, including lying in ambush, which hinders the advancement of troops. They keep changing tactics, by using vehicles and motorcycles on different occasions.

Challenges of Containing Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin

When the Lake Chad Basin Commission was created in 1964, counterinsurgency was not part of its objectives. Water management and interstate cooperation dominated its activities. Insurgency only propelled the organisation to embark on the cooperation for peace and security. State security providers have gone the extra mile to enhance their national safety and counter any form of threat to national security (Aminu 1986). The LCBC states embarked on security collaborations and formation of security communities, some of which undermined their constitutions and prestige (Awosu, 2017). Although Nigeria has ill-defined frontiers and colonial boundaries, with strategic advantage over her LCBC neighbours in terms of military capability, particularly in areas of weaponry, training and exposure (Akinyeye, 1998), the giant of Africa seriously needs their immense support in countering insurgency. Of all the member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, Nigeria is the only country that was listed as one of the 10 African countries with the largest military forces and most active troops – 124,000 active personnel and 181,000 total military personnel (Bada, 2018). Therefore Nigeria plays a leader-motivator role in the Lake Chad Basin Commission and, by extension, the Multinational Joint Task Force. The *Boko Haram* insurgency and the need for counterinsurgency contributed to Nigeria's rapid increase of military assets and capability in expeditionary operations. Chad and others are not left out in this regard.

Table 2: Crucial Factors That Influence, Hinder or Enhance Military Operations

Geographical/Physical factors	Cultural factors
Spatial relationships	Racial and ethnic roots
Topography and drainage	Population patterns
Daylight and darkness	Telecommunications
Weather and climate	Transportation networks
Oceans and seashores	Industries and land use
Geology, soils and vegetation	Social structures, languages and religions
Gravity and magnetism	Military installations

Geography is synonymous with the armed forces and stability operations. Geography is a factor in conflict and military affairs. The factors listed in Table 2 can hinder military operations in counterinsurgency, when military planners do not consider the need to address the problems associated with them or if they are not aware of their potency. The dilemma of counterinsurgents in the operations against *Boko Haram* has been the inability of troops and their commanders to comprehend how the insurgents maximise their knowledge of the geographical features in the areas to strengthen their tactics against the state security providers.

As far as operational base is concerned, the Lake Chad Basin has been helpful to the insurgents, whose planning took states unawares until they succeeded in gaining ground. Their activities in capturing some territories necessitated what Albert refers to as forest taking and forest holding, with the forces of order struggling to keep the insurgents in a vanquished situation (Kinnvall, & Mitzen, 2018). But keeping the insurgents permanently in a defeated position is not as easy as state actors imagined considering their modus operandi in procurement of arms and recruitment of fighters.

The fact that Lake Chad has proximity advantage to the countries around the Lake Chad Basin made the counterinsurgency more complex; most ungoverned spaces within these territories are distant from the security providers and are used as safe havens by the insurgents. Such places are not only forests but also isolated areas in villages that lack basic human needs. Isaac Albert provides a similar point when he identifies how *Boko Haram* effectively utilised the Sambisa Forest, making it a significant metaphor of the group's psychological warfare Kinanee, 2018). This creates public perception of how the journey to the forest is a dangerous expedition.

Efforts to put these insurgents in an unfavourable condition has cost the states huge sums of material and human resources, with budgetary allocations and funds raised annually for counterinsurgency as if though it were wartime. According to Abolurin, "bases close to national borders can be attractive when they are beyond the reach of counterinsurgents yet safe enough to avoid suspicion of the neighbouring authority or population." (Abolurin, 2015). The Lake Chad Basin communities are, no doubt, to the benefit of the insurgents considering how distant these localities are to the state authorities. This is also aided by geographical factors, such as topography and the lake. Also worsening the challenge is the equilibrium in their access to arms and use of weaponry. The insurgents are well funded and the theatre of battle is laden with landmines meant to outwit the security forces. Spotting landmines, which are usually difficult to unravel during battle, is necessary for the security forces to reduce casualties in the infantry unit. AK47 has lost potency in the counterinsurgency owing to the use of bombs and RPGs by the insurgents.

Concerning weapon procurement capability and dependence on developed states, the member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission are not self-reliant in weapons procurement needed to equip the MNJTF for response to the insurgency. Their procurement policies centre on accessing foreign weapons directly from the international security market dominated by their allies. Aminu asserts that "an important element of defence policy is the ability to properly equip the armed forces to enable them perform (sic) their assigned duties." (Aminu 1986). Without high priority for adequate weapons, security forces will fall prey to the enemies' antics. Some member states separately embark on bilateral agreements with the USA, France and Britain for the purpose of purchasing and getting delivery of arms and fighter jets. For instance, this defence need dominated the agenda of President Muhammadu Buhari's visit to USA and the press conference with President Donald Trump in 2018. A notable problem is that insurgents have been able to match the capability of the military task force using sophisticated weapons that brought about troop's casualties and destruction of weapons.

The numerical strength of the troops in the MNJTF seems to fall short of the number of the personnel required to match the ever-increasing recruitment and number of insurgents. The defence size and budget of these countries point to the fact that what they offer to the MNJTF is far below the requirement to equip the force in containing the transnational security threat.

There is information gap in the counterinsurgency. Lack of knowledge of the enemy and enemy habits, such as tactics and weapons, also creates difficulty in the counterinsurgency. According to an officer in the army, "we are not magicians; we need residents in local communities, youths, elders and women to feed us with information" (Clunan, & Trinkunas, 2010). Consequently, the troops fight in places which they do not know much about. They source information about the operational oversight of the insurgents. They endeavour to

vet information and the sources of the information to avoid enemy traps in view of how insurgents sometimes make residents to deceive troops to obstruct advancement of security forces to locations where insurgents are camping.

Most troops in the MNJTF are affected by stressors in the field while countering the insurgents most of whom disguise in different ways in desperation to cause harm to military units on patrol or at their base. Notable stressors are separation from family members, long tenures in counterinsurgency areas, uncertainty of life, difficult living condition, isolation, fatigue, and adverse climatic conditions. (Sharma, Ratnam, & Madhusudhan, 2016). The multiplicity of stressors hinders the success of the military action in the Lake Chad Basin. Many troops have spent between six months and three years fighting the enemies that are unknown, even in difficult living conditions, with the sight of death daily. Consequently, some of them engaged in substance abuse, such as use of alcohol and excessive use of tramadol, to forget the risks in battle. These stressors, if not checked, can motivate misconduct, such as intoxication, desertion, attack of unit members, suicide, malingering, mutiny and rape, which occur when coping mechanisms are either flawed or inadequate (McCormack, 2018).

All the military officers interviewed informed the author that long tenures affect the morale of troops in counterinsurgency and many are fed up with the operations. They discovered that, while some residents see the soldiers as saviours, many of them that have some of their children as insurgents are angry and not comfortable with the MNJTF troops. If some troops are fed up with the operations, this means people without zeal or enthusiasm are fighting for the governments and the danger could be loss of battle at different fronts. It was found that, while some soldiers wrote letters indicating interest to leave the military service either in the form of voluntary retirement or resignation, others decided to run away from battle (desertion), not minding the fact that the act can attract severe punishment when they are apprehended by the authorities. The environment of counterinsurgency complicated the challenges facing the insurgents. The deployment length affected the mentality of most soldiers involved in the counterinsurgency to the extent that they were very aggressive to one another. It is becoming difficult to control troops in death-ridden enclaves; it seems easier to control animals than troops who desire some moments of pleasure away from battle (McCormack, 2018). Military combat operations make troops to experience flashbacks and depression owing to post-traumatic stress disorder and increasing certainty of their demise. (Kinanee, 2018). The torturous experiences in the swampy and forest areas of the LBC were caused by the strategic advantage of the insurgents, which made them feel their future was under threat.

The insurgents have made the leading of battle by unit commanders riskier than expected. According to a respondent, "Apart from the land mass, terrain and mine clearance problems, troops cannot liberate communities and remain there. They must advance to volatile areas. The problem is that insurgents tactically regroup and retake villages that were liberated" (Obamamoye, 2017). With the purchase of bomb detectors to aid stop-and-search operations in high-risk areas, soldiers also have blue cloth added to the top of their uniforms to differentiate them from the insurgents who appear in military uniform. Given that junior commanders are instrumental to the success of counterinsurgency, especially in leadership and military psychology, the challenges encountered with unit members and the threats of insurgent tactics must be addressed by the Ministries of Defence in LCB countries.

The troops have initiated frequent clearance operations to demolish the camps of the insurgents. They sustain success by ensuring that they do not lose hold of any recovered community. They go as far as embarking on foot and vehicular patrols to prevent any strategic advantage by the insurgents. However, the soldiers must be cautious before they step on ground because of the landmines planted by the insurgents. According to the informants, armoured cars climbed bombs and exploded, killing the soldiers inside. The risk makes tanks to fire before troops advance around the Cameroonian border areas with Chad and Nigeria.

Also, the Force Commander of the Multinational Joint Task Force, Major Gen. Irabor, confirmed that the strength of *Boko Haram* is now limited to forests and islands, but the insurgents have not stopped threatening many border communities to the extent that the MNJTF initiated patrols along waterways to thwart the regrouping of the insurgents in the ungoverned spaces (Obamamoye, B. F. 2017). The strategic significance of food provision manifests in troop's escort of food supplies to mobile kitchen to secure foodstuffs and also guard those responsible for cooking the meals for the soldiers. It is done to prevent the insurgents from hijacking foodstuffs in their bid to frustrate military strategies. As identified by the high-level session on Abuja Declaration (2018), insurgency would impede data gathering efforts aimed at revitalising the LCB, especially by saving it from shrinking. This means that experts require safety guarantees before embarking on engineering projects targeted at facilitating inter-basin modern water transfer. This would stop the insurgents from driving contractors out of site when they start work.

It was found that there are variations in the intensity of the insurgency, as some areas are more peaceful than others owing to the capability of the troops to push the insurgents further away from some liberated areas that urgently need sustained security governance. The peacefulness of the communities is dependent on different factors. These include decline in recruitment rate by the insurgents, reduced arms supplies, readiness of people in communities to cooperate with troops in information sharing. The situation requires the security planners in the MNJTF to examine the counterinsurgency tactics and *Boko Haram*'s manoeuvres in the context of their dexterity in handling weapons, deployment issues, access to the security market, monitoring, and operational efficiency.

Effect of *Boko Haram* Insurgency on the LCB

The escalation of the insurgency across the territories of the LCB countries left behind over 30,000 dead people, more than 1.6 million refugees and displaced persons, and 4.2 million people in dire need of food insecurity and humanitarian assistance (Atangana, 2018). Apart from loss of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation, the insurgency-ridden LCB recorded large-scale disasters and security threats which culminated in increased migration, declined fishing activities, food insecurity and abandonment of development projects (Irabor, 2018). The misery and hopelessness associated with the violence was not limited to food; there was also loss of livelihoods and fear. The violence orchestrated by the *Boko Haram* sect, which aspires for and projects itself as the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), caused a drastic decline in health care provision across the communities in the affected areas, with many of the health centres closed down. This aggravated the health crisis among the rural poor. For instance, most parts of northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger around the Lake Chad Basin recorded poor maternal and child health indices, with rising infant and child mortality; and in Northern Cameroon, five out of the 18 health districts were shut down as a result of insurgency (Awosu, 2017). Most of these poor people could not get access to the health facilities and drugs needed to treat some illnesses. According to some counterinsurgents, some soldiers in the medical unit went as far as prescribing drugs to some local people who complain of difficulties in accessing drugs to treat their ailments. Consequently, the insurgency became synonymous with health insecurity and other humanitarian crises.

The violence increased the risk associated with migration and sustainability in the area, as the insurgents launch guerrilla attacks. They used different tactics, such as planting of landmines, use of child suicide bombers, disguising as females, destruction of public facilities, lying in ambush and mounting of roadblocks, which affect security forces and civilians. The insurgents have been emboldened by the existence of a network of similar groups which have similar interests of recruiting and exporting insurgency to peaceful enclaves through ungoverned spaces within territories of states. This has implications for humanitarian needs. According to USAID –United States Agency for International Development – (2018), donors pledged provision of over $2.2 billion worth of funding for humanitarian, development, and peace-building activities

across the Lake Chad Basin, when representatives from more than 70 countries participated in the High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region in Berlin, Germany, from September 3-4. Multilateral financial institutions also announced $467 million concessional loans for governments in the region.

Similarly, various faith-based organisations were involved in the emerging discourse by focusing on issues like the ideological framings of the insurgent groups, international interventions, human rights issues, social insecurity, elite conspiracy, and how to build community resilience in the event of killings. International scholars have also initiated special issue projects on the group. To map the dynamics, several centres of peace and strategic studies have also collaborated with international organisations in addressing the threat of insurgency and how these foot soldiers exploit the concept of Jihad and access to arms to unleash terror on the state and recruit fighters. This was instigated by the fluid nature of human security that the insurgents create across Lake Chad and the Sahel region. This has implications for territorial stability in the states located in the area. Since the escalation of the insurgency, with increased trend between 2014 and 2018, the peacefulness of the LCB has declined drastically.

Furthermore, various national interests of the member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) were undermined since the advent of the insurgency, particularly those related to military affairs, tourism, economic development and political stability. Consequently, the negative image drawn by the insurgency has manifested in travel warnings and restrictions by countries, organisations and individuals, especially from Europe and America. They stressed the need to be wary of the LCB and avoid visiting the area no matter how attractive such states may be for tourists. Even the countries around the LCB have fared negatively on the Global Peace Index since 2014, when the insurgency escalated. In a bid to address this malady, various summits have been convened at domestic, regional and international levels to enable scholars, various practitioners and policy makers to deliberate and exchange ideas on the most effective method to manage the problem.

Conclusion

The paper examined the tactical and strategic issues in *Boko Haram* insurgency around the LCB. The counterinsurgency by the MNJTF is a response to *Boko Haram*'s violence. In the past, some member states of the LCBC were engrossed in confrontational border disputes arising from territorial claims. Such disputes paved the way for the attention shifted to collaborative security for tactical and strategic advantages in the form of special operations to counter insurgents who are more cancerous to regional security than inter-state boundary threat. The denial of the likelihood of the resurgence of *Boko Haram* in some liberated communities around the Lake Chad Basin by the security forces will not help the countries concerned, as this has the possibility of discouraging actors in the international community from further assisting Nigeria and her neighbours.

The counterinsurgency will be won or lost within the Lake Chad Basin owing to the strategic nature of the area to all the countries affected. This is why the troops must prioritise intelligence-focused stop-and-search operations in partnership with the people in the communities within the area. Fishermen can be actively engaged as members of MNJTF for intelligence gathering rather than making patrol a military affair. In addition, the building of community confidence by the troops in the form of medical outreach where drugs are given to youths and elders and distribution of biscuits and fuelling of volunteer informants' motorcycles by the military task force should be sustained as an intelligence-gathering strategy. This heart-winning initiative will further isolate the insurgents from the communities in favour of the troops. This is the easiest way to reduce the mounting of roadblocks, kidnapping of women and children, as well as arson by the insurgents.

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