What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram?

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Principal Findings

What's new? Lake Chad basin countries – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – have made welcome efforts to coordinate against Boko Haram militants through a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). But their inconsistent commitment to the force, funding problems and disjointed planning have hindered its effectiveness. Jihadists often regroup when troops withdraw.

Why does it matter? A good strategy for tackling the various Boko Haram factions around Lake Chad depends not only on military operations but also on the four countries' ability to improve conditions for and gain trust among local populations. That said, a more effective joint force can contribute to such an approach.

What should be done? Lake Chad states resist fully integrating their forces into the MNJTF, but they can still boost its capacity by better sharing plans and intelligence, committing troops for longer operations and improving troops' human rights compliance. They should work with the African Union and European Union to resolve funding issues.

Executive Summary

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is an effort by the Lake Chad basin states – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – to pool resources against jihadists that threaten all four countries. The joint force has carried out periodic operations, often involving troops from one country fighting in the country next door. Offensives have won victories and helped instil an *esprit de corps* among participating troops. But nimble militant factions have regrouped fast, and the MNJTF's effectiveness has suffered from confusion over priorities, the four states' reluctance to cede command to the force itself, and funding and procurement delays. A successful response to militancy in Lake Chad will depend not only on the joint force but also on whether states can improve conditions for and inspire more trust among residents of affected areas. But an improved MNJTF could help such a strategy. Lake Chad states should boost its planning and communications capacity, intelligence sharing, human rights compliance and civil-military coordination. They should then reach consensus with donors on financing.

The Lake Chad countries, plus Benin, created the MNJTF in its current form in late 2014 and early 2015. Together they committed just over 8,000 troops to the joint force. The African Union authorised the force on 3 March 2015 and envisaged that a sub-regional body, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), would assume civilian oversight. The MNJTF established a critically important multilateral framework to combat Boko Haram insurgents, more and more of whom were launching attacks across borders.

The joint force has brought some dividends. Working together has enabled forces from different countries to learn from each other, promoted the idea of cross-border cooperation and improved tactical coordination. Joint operations, mainly involving Chadian troops deploying into the other countries, helped stem Boko Haram's spread in 2015 and 2016 and squeezed the group, resulting in its split into at least three factions. Short MNJTF offensives in 2017 and 2018, along with a more sustained operation in 2019, also reversed militant gains, freed civilians captured by them or trapped in areas Boko Haram controlled and facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Yet advances against Boko Haram and its offshoots have mostly been short-lived. Jihadist factions have consistently weathered offensives. Their resilience owes partly to their ability to escape to other areas and partly to the inability of the states themselves, particularly Nigeria, to follow military operations with efforts to rebuild and improve conditions for residents of recaptured areas. That earlier operations were not sustained likely did not help, though jihadists have bounced back from even the longer campaign in 2019 – a March 2020 militant assault on a base on Lake Chad was one of the conflict's bloodiest yet, killing some 90 Chadian troops. A subsequent Chadian operation to secure the lake was conducted mainly outside the MNJTF's auspices and militants appear likely to regroup again.

The MNJTF also suffers structural limitations. Its chain of command is weak, even by the standards of multilateral forces, because it comprises units of national forces fighting mainly in their own countries. Many MNJTF troops rotate in and out of the force as national commanders see fit. The under-resourced civilian oversight

body, the LCBC, has struggled to exert authority over the force or curb abuses by soldiers who remain accountable to national hierarchies. The AU authorises the force but also has little oversight over it, though the body has tried to forge common practice on treatment of captured militants and their associates. Funding and procurement delays – the EU funds the force through the AU, but European money was long held up in Addis Ababa – have delayed critical gear and fed recrimination among the actors involved. True, the MNJTF's shortfalls only partly explain why militancy persists around Lake Chad. Efforts against jihadists depend mostly on policies of the states themselves, of which joint operations are only one component. Still, the force's flaws limit its effectiveness.

Some shortcomings reflect national sensitivities. Abuja tends to see the MNJTF as a face-saving way to portray operations by other countries' forces, mainly Chad, on Nigerian soil as international cooperation. But it still aims to preserve primacy in counter-insurgency efforts and regards fuller integration among the forces warily. Cameroon, Chad and Niger see the MNJTF as light-touch coordination for their offensives, and some of their officials also oppose deeper integration. Indeed, national military hierarchies' resistance to greater cooperation is a reality that any efforts to reform the force will have to factor in. Chad's December 2019 withdrawal of over 1,000 troops fighting with the MNJTF in Nigeria, without fully informing other capitals, dealt the force a further blow. President Idriss Déby voices increasing frustration that Chadian troops do the bulk of the fighting with what he portrays as scant support from neighbours. All four countries' forces are stretched thin, dealing with multiple security challenges in addition to militancy around Lake Chad.

To make the joint force a more effective part of efforts to tackle the region's jihadist insurgencies, Lake Chad countries should:

- Build up its planning, coordination and intelligence sharing. Governments and military leaders should lean toward sharing more information with the joint force and give senior officials greater leeway to determine what can be shared and what should be withheld for security reasons. They should commit troops for more sustained periods and clarify when national forces are acting under MNJTF command.
- In conjunction with the AU, step up human rights training and monitoring of abuses in order to improve MNJTF units' compliance with international humanitarian law and emerging AU standards on conduct and discipline. The MNJTF should pay particular attention to the treatment of captured or surrendered Boko Haram fighters, ensuring that units hand them over rapidly to civilian authorities. Doing so will help Lake Chad states improve ties with locals who may otherwise see troops mistreating their youth.
- Enable the MNJTF to better support the AU's 2018 Regional Stabilisation Strategy, which aims to improve services and create new livelihoods in conflict-affected areas. This would entail boosting the joint force's and the LCBC's capacity to cooperate with civilian actors responsible for the strategy. To ensure improved oversight, especially on human rights, Lake Chad states should gradually shift the force's AU-funded civilian components, which now report to the military commander, into the LCBC.

The AU and donors, principally the EU, should support the above steps. They should push for making such improvements without creating a weighty bureaucracy. Also urgent is that donors, the AU and Lake Chad states reach a lasting consensus over financial support.

The regional jihadist threat shows no sign of abating and the situation in Nigeria's north east is, if anything, deteriorating. An effective response will entail not only military action, but also civilian efforts to deliver public services, improve conditions for residents in hard-hit areas, regain – or simply establish for the first time – popular trust in public authority, offer militants paths to demobilise safely and even potentially engage some in talks. Yet military operations are critical to creating space for all these activities and a reinforced MNJTF, standing as a symbol of regional cooperation, can support such an approach.

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I. Introduction

Cooperation among Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the four Lake Chad states blighted by Boko Haram's insurgency, is a critical part of tackling the jihadist threat. Battling militant factions, rebuilding trust in public authority among local communities and restoring a degree of state control in affected areas depend mainly on the national policies of governments involved. Yet in itself, national policy is insufficient to counter jihadists operating across borders. Cooperation among the Lake Chad states is important for civilian-led issues, such as dealing with former Boko Haram militants or creating alternatives to militancy around Lake Chad. It is also vital to improving military operations. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), in place in its current form since 2014 to help the four Lake Chad armies, plus that of Benin, coordinate counter-insurgency efforts, offers, in principle, just such a regional response to a regional threat. Those states have conducted a series of military operations, often involving troops from one country crossing into another, under the MNJTF's banner.

This report examines the MNJTF's achievements and shortfalls and asks what value the force adds and what improvements can be brought to bear. To account for diverging views on the force and its future held by participating states, the African Union and donors, the report is based on interviews conducted from November 2018 to May 2020 with diplomats, government officials, military officers from the region who have served in MNJTF units, military officials from donor countries, humanitarian workers active in the Lake Chad area and other informed observers.[1] Interviews took place in Chad's capital N'Djamena, where the force is based, as well as in Abuja, Yaoundé, Addis Ababa, London and Brussels. The report also draws on ten years of Crisis Group reporting on Islamist militancy, and the national and international responses to it, in the Lake Chad basin.

[1] An interlocutor in Yaoundé used the well-worn analogy of three blind men coming across an elephant to describe different perspectives on the MNJTF. One man approaches the animal's tail and concludes that it must be a rope. The second touches its flank and declares that it is a wall. The third grabs its ears and believes them to be a large fan. Crisis Group interview, September 2019.

II. The MNJTF's Origins and Early Operations

A. *A Regional Threat*

The jihadist insurgency commonly referred to as Boko Haram, now fractured into at least three competing groups, emerged and evolved primarily in Nigeria. Originally a militant group exploiting discontent with secular government and political corruption, it grew partly due to Nigeria's security forces' alternately absent and heavy-handed responses. Efforts to contain and push back Boko Haram have overall been weak.[2]

Boko Haram always had some reach into neighbouring countries, facilitated by a vibrant cross-border economy, criminal networks, arms smuggling routes and religious ties to Islamic schools in Nigeria's Maiduguri – the Lake Chad basin's largest conurbation. In 2013 and 2014, the group used toeholds in Cameroon, Chad and Niger to expand operations in those countries, where it recruited, rearmed, pillaged, kidnapped, carried out revenge attacks and, overall, promoted its idea of a West African "caliphate". It exploited cross-border family relations, as well as ethnic, commercial and religious links, to offer its young recruits economic opportunities, usually backing them up later with religious indoctrination. The group profited, at least initially, from the distrust with which communities in border areas regard state authorities.[3] It also exploited intercommunal tensions in those areas.[4] Critically, its cross-border presence enabled the group to survive in periods when it was under pressure from the Nigerian army and on the back foot.

Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED) conflict monitoring source, together with Crisis Group's own field research, confirms Boko Haram's regional expansion from 2015, even while Nigeria mostly remained the epicentre of violence. The number of attacks rose steeply, both in net terms and as a percentage of all incidents in the region, in Cameroon, and to a lesser extent in Niger and Chad, between 2015 and 2017.[5] That said, attacks in Nigeria's neighbours remained largely small-scale, involving raiding and skirmishing. Nigeria itself suffered many more fatalities.[6]

Although Boko Haram remained concentrated in Nigeria, at its peak in 2014 and 2015 the group operated in all four Lake Chad countries. Militants assaulted army units in border regions of Cameroon, Chad and Niger, briefly holding small patches

[2] See Crisis Group Africa Reports N°168, *Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict*, 20 December 2010; Crisis Group Africa Report N°216, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, 3 April 2014; and Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, 2018).

[3] See Crisis Group Africa Reports N°241, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, 16 November 2016; 245, *Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency*, 27 February 2017; and 246, *Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures*, 8 March 2017.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. The proportion of attacks in Nigeria's three neighbours relative to the combined number in the four countries jumped from 22 per cent in 2014 to 42 per cent in 2015, and then again to 79 per cent in 2016, before dropping to 61 per cent in 2017. See the ACLED databases of conflict events in the Lake Chad area.

[6] ACLED data shows that Nigeria suffered 77 per cent of deaths from Boko Haram violence in 2014, 69 per cent in 2015 and 46 per cent of a steeply declining total in 2016, as counter-insurgency operations pressured the jihadist movement in the country.

of territory and taking hostages.[7] They carried out bombings in those countries, including in N'Djamena in 2015. The group's expansion was uneven: Cameroon and Niger were worst affected, Chad less so. But in none of Nigeria's three Lake Chad neighbours was Boko Haram able to penetrate very far beyond border regions.

B. *Stop-start Bilateral Initiatives*

As Nigeria struggled throughout 2013 to contain the burgeoning insurgency, its neighbours responded slowly and unevenly.[8] At first, leaders in Cameroon, Chad and Niger reacted with caution and denial, for the most part seeing the group as a primarily Nigerian problem and refusing to acknowledge that it had gained a foothold at home. Gradually, however, their concerns about the insurgency mounted, with Chadian President Idriss Déby, worried that the violence was asphyxiating his country's economy, the most vocal.[9] Starting in 2014, the three countries gradually deployed more troops to affected areas, mobilised vigilante groups and, in Chad and Cameroon, passed draconian counter-terrorism legislation.[10] Their greater involvement drew Boko Haram's ire. Militant attacks, which Boko Haram leaders described as a response to those states' decisions to join counter-insurgency operations, escalated in 2014 and 2015.[11] The jihadist strikes, in turn, prompted the governments to further step up their efforts.

Initial military cooperation consisted of ad hoc and little publicised cross-border troop movements on the basis of rapidly concluded bilateral arrangements. In 2013 and 2014, for example, Cameroonian and Nigerien troops crossed into Nigeria in pursuit of militants, while Cameroon shelled Boko Haram positions in Nigeria. These interventions received scant publicity, partly due to Nigerian sensitivities and partly because they were often arranged by local commanders in touch with counterparts operating nearby across the border.[12]

Still, regional cooperation in this key period was patchy at best. For every successful cross-border operation, there were many requests from field commanders

[7] Ibid.

[8] The Nigerian government deployed additional forces, declared a state of emergency in May 2013, and created a plethora of local armed vigilante groups (the Civilian Joint Task Forces), which engaged in vicious tit-for-tat fighting with Boko Haram. Shorn of Western support due to human rights abuses, Abuja also turned to Moscow, and to private military companies, in an attempt to win what was now a major war in the country's north east. While security forces pushed Boko Haram out of major towns in 2014, their human rights abuses are widely blamed for making the group more determined to fight and helping it recruit. See Crisis Group Report, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, op. cit.; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, op. cit., ch. 4.

[9] "Le risque djihadiste libyen menace le Tchad, assure Idriss Déby", France 24, 8 June 2013.

[10] See Crisis Group Reports, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*; *Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures*; and *Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency*, all op. cit. See also Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, *Boko Haram, Les Enjeux Régionaux de L'insurrection* (Paris, 2015).

[11] Mustapha Muhammad, "Nigeria's Boko Haram leader menaces Cameroon's Biya in video", Bloomberg, 7 January 2015.

[12] Crisis Group interview, national officer who served in MNJTF, Yaoundé, September 2019.

that superiors rejected and many manoeuvres that were poorly coordinated.[13] Most notable was a failed attempt to mediate a hostage release from Boko Haram, led by Chad and Nigeria in 2013, which ended in acrimony between the two countries, as each blamed the other for the failure.[14] Significant mistrust among all four countries, relating in part to the different perceptions of the threat and disagreements over how to handle it, continually obstructed their ability to work together. Historic antagonisms did not help. Nigeria's border disputes with all three neighbours on Lake Chad, along with a quarrel with Cameroon on the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula to the south, meant that Abuja was instinctively less inclined to cooperate.[15] In addition, Nigerian mistrust of external intervention on its soil runs deep, informed by foreign support for Biafran rebels in the late 1960s.

While these factors did not preclude the governments from working together (and, indeed, Abuja recognises that Yaoundé supported Nigeria during the Biafra war), they created an undercurrent of distrust and initially curtailed deeper cooperation, especially among the countries' armies.

C. *Increasing Regional Cooperation*

When the four countries entered formal arrangements governing cooperation, they did so under acute pressure to respond to a growing jihadist menace and, especially in Nigeria's case, partly because of evolving domestic political calculations. The MNJTF, which emerged in its current form in 2014-2015, was the product of a delicate political consensus among those governments, all of whom had different perspectives on the nature of the threat and what the force should do to counter it.

Over the course of 2014, gradual attempts at cooperation, pushed along by political developments in Nigeria, breathed new life into the MNJTF. The four Lake Chad states had in fact created a joint force much earlier, in the 1990s, to fight criminality. It had then lain dormant for years before being resuscitated in 2012 to fight Boko Haram. It was only in 2014, however, that regional governments showed any real commitment to the force and reinforced its base at Baga, on the Nigerian shores of the lake, with more troops from each country. The four countries' defence and intelligence chiefs met in Yaoundé in March 2014, and their heads of state attended a key meeting in Paris on regional security two months later, in both instances to hammer out the details of a new-look regional force. Nigeria's then president, Goodluck Jonathan, started showing greater readiness to seek his counterparts' help in setting up the joint force as Nigeria's 2015 election loomed. He hoped to show progress in the fight with Boko Haram ahead of the campaign.

Lake Chad states also started looking for international support for regional cooperation against Boko Haram. Events on the ground at the start of 2015, especially Boko Haram militants' capture in January of the MNJTF's embryonic base in Baga,

[13] Ibid. See also "Africa's Role in Nation Building: An Examination of African-led Peace Operations", Rand Corporation and ACCORD, 2019.
[14] See Thurston, *Boko Haram*, op. cit., ch. 5.
[15] See Isaac Olawale Albert, "Rethinking the Functionality of the Multinational Joint Task Force in Managing the Boko Haram Crisis in the Lake Chad Basin", *Africa Development*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2017), p. 119.

led them to redouble those efforts. Amid steeply rising violence, the loss of the base appeared to deal regional forces a devastating blow. Cameroon's President Paul Biya made a rare public appeal for help from neighbours and international partners.[16] Increased bilateral support from the U.S., the UK and France to all three of Nigeria's affected neighbours followed shortly thereafter.[17]

Regional cooperation accelerated over that period. Chad sent a large contingent to Cameroon to help secure its north-western border in early 2015. Those forces deployed for six months, often conducting offensives deep into Nigeria through Cameroon and Niger in a pincer move against militants in Borno state.[18] Nigerien forces also took part. According to Western officials close to the file, Nigeria paid Chad directly to cover the cost of its intervention.[19] Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, who had defeated Jonathan in the May 2015 vote, initially prioritised cooperation with his neighbours, reflected in early visits to Chad, Cameroon, Benin and Niger from June to August 2015. His efforts to boost morale and effectiveness among his own troops won support among otherwise sceptical officials in Yaoundé, N'Djamena and Niamey.[20]

D. *The MNJTF's Set-up*

The new-look MNJTF was taking shape parallel to military operations. Ministers of Lake Chad basin countries plus Benin – which agreed to join the force to further cooperation with neighbours but in fact has rarely if ever participated in operations on the ground – met in Niamey on 20 January 2015 and agreed to shift the MNJTF headquarters to N'Djamena. They also pledged to draw up a full Concept of Operations, or CONOPS, a document providing details of political oversight, command structures, objectives, tasks and mission support, which the states, with AU support, finalised in March.[21] Working-level meetings on the CONOPS informed discussions between the four Lake Chad states and the AU, which authorised the force for an initial twelve months at their request at its 29 January 2015 summit. The AU's Peace and Security Committee subsequently signed off in more detail in March that year. The CONOPS identified the force's key aim as "eliminating the presence and influence of Boko Haram in the region".[22]

The AU's authorisation set out the joint force's responsibilities. It outlined three key goals: first, to create a safe and secure environment in its area of operation; secondly, to support (at that time non-existent) "stabilisation" programs and enable the return of those displaced by fighting; and thirdly, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Further tasks included preventing insurgents from obtaining

[16] Moki Edwin Kindzeka, "Cameroon president calls for greater help to fight Boko Haram", VOA, 8 January 2015.
[17] Crisis Group interviews, Western military officers, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, September 2019.
[18] "Lutte contre Boko Haram: le Tchad a envoyé des troupes au Cameroun", RFI, 16 January 2015.
[19] Crisis Group interviews, Western military officers close to the file for several years, Cameroonian officer, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, September 2019.
[20] Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°120, *Boko Haram: On the Back Foot?*, 4 May 2016.
[21] "Draft Strategic Concept of Operations for the MNJTF of the Lake Chad Basin Commission against the Boko Haram Terrorist Group 2015", African Union, unpublished.
[22] Ibid. The document cited this aim as the "strategic end state" for the force.

weapons or logistical tools, freeing abductees, encouraging defections, improving civil-military cooperation, supporting justice and respect for human rights, information operations and intelligence sharing.[23] The AU authorised the new force at a level of 11,000 troops.[24] The AU commissioner for peace and security, Smail Chergui, opened the N'Djamena headquarters in May 2015 and the force became officially operational in June.

A number of early decisions would resonate throughout the joint force's operations. First, the AU "authorised" the force but did not "mandate" it, meaning that participating states retained control over the mission. In other words, the AU provided a vital legal framework, and allowed for greater donor funding, but did not obtain the oversight or management it has over, for example, the AU mission in Somalia (which it does mandate). Indeed, over the first two or three years of joint operations, the AU's role was limited to discussions on the CONOPS, providing MNJTF civilian staff and officers some training on the protection of civilians and monitoring human rights compliance through a small AU civilian team at the MNJTF N'Djamena headquarters.[25]

Secondly, the CONOPS defined an operational area for the MNJTF that covers Lake Chad and extends some way along the border between Nigeria and Niger. This arrangement left out large expanses affected by the insurgency, notably parts of the Nigeria-Cameroon border zone and still larger swathes of Nigeria's Borno state.[26] It divided the area of operations into four sectors, each in one of the four countries, and each with its own headquarters. It also gave MNJTF units a standing right to hot pursuit 20km over borders.[27]

Thirdly, the Lake Chad states shelved their initial plans for a more integrated force. The four governments had considered putting in place cross-border sectors.

[23] See "Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the implementation of communiqué PSC/AHG/Comm.2 (CDLXXXIV) on the Boko Haram terrorist group and on other related international efforts ", AU Peace and Security Council, 3 March 2015.

[24] At first, Lake Chad basin states intended to include a police component in the force, which would have been part of the AU authorisation. But they subsequently dropped this plan, reportedly in light of deficiencies in national police services. Crisis Group interviews, Western military officers, military officer from Lake Chad state, various locations, September and November 2019.

[25] Crisis Group interviews, AU officials, national military officers, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, September 2019; Addis Ababa, November 2019. Some analysts see the MNJTF as part of the AU's peace and security architecture, de facto, by virtue of being authorised by the AU Peace and Security Council. See Matthew Brubacher, Erin Kimball Damman and Christopher Day, "The AU Task Forces: An African Response to Transnational Armed Groups", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2017), p. 275. AU officials mainly share the view that the force is, or should incrementally become, part of the AU's continental security set-up. Other analysts see it and other "ad hoc" arrangements as distinct from the AU's peace and security architecture. See Paul D. Williams, "Can Ad Hoc Security Coalitions in Africa Bring Stability", Global Observatory, January 2019. This distinction affects the role the AU plays. The link with the AU also has implications for financing, as donors, including the EU, which seeks to boost the AU's role, tend to favour forces that have AU authorisation or mandate. As a consequence, they have provided funds to the MNJTF, which they would not have done if it did not have AU authorisation.

[26] See the map in Appendix A. Benin, the fifth state contributing to the MNJTF, is not a member of the LCBC. Benin's some 700 troops have largely been occupied with securing the force headquarters in N'Djamena and have played little part in field operations.

[27] Crisis Group interviews, MNJTF officers and Western military officers, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, 2019.

Instead, they opted for sectors entirely within single countries, aiming to avoid legal and political complications that may have arisen from permanent cross-border deployments and to reassure Nigeria that such deployments into its territory would be limited.[28] The four countries' contingents thus operate almost exclusively on home soil, except during large-scale joint operations. The initial CONOPS provided for the force commander position to rotate among participating states, but this idea was later rejected, and Nigeria given the authority to appoint the force commander, in order to ensure Abuja's full buy-in.[29]

Lastly, the AU designated the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) as the mission's political component. The four Lake Chad countries set up the LCBC in the 1960s, initially to deal with environmental issues and later to coordinate the efforts to stop cross-border criminality. But it remained dormant or weakly resourced. Participating countries put it forward in 2015 as a political lead for the MNJTF due to the need to have a civilian point of contact for the AU and for donors, who were reluctant to deal exclusively with a military set-up. This move also served to assuage Nigerian concerns about mission control, as the LCBC head has always been a Nigerian national nominated by Abuja. Some AU officials saw the LCBC as a route through which they might reinforce the civilian component of the response to violence in the Lake Chad area.[30] In reality, however, the four states had long neglected the LCBC and given it neither the resources nor the clout to play this role.

E. *Early Funding Decisions*

Decisions on funding would also have longer-term implications. At first, Lake Chad countries wanted donors to fund them and the LCBC directly. They approached the EU, which was already a major funder of African peace support operations. The EU refused to fund the force directly, obliging the states to seek the AU's blessing.[31] Those countries then agreed that the AU would be the conduit for EU financial support. In reality, however, due to issues with the AU's procedures for dispersing funds (explored in Section IV.D below), European money channelled through Addis Ababa would not reach the MNJTF until two years later, in early 2017.

Meanwhile, hopes of UN money floundered. The UN Security Council "welcomed" the force in July 2015. It has since held periodic briefings on Boko Haram but gone no further in authorising or funding the MNJTF. Lake Chad countries have been unable to get UN-assessed contributions, which they and some AU officials hoped for. Nor have they been able to receive funds through a UN trust fund, an idea that the

[28] Crisis Group interviews, Western military officer with direct knowledge of 2015 period, Yaoundé, September 2019; journalist and close observer of Lake Chad region, Yaoundé, September 2019.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Crisis Group interviews, AU, EU and national officials, N'Djamena, Addis Ababa and Brussels, 2019.
[31] Crisis Group interviews, EU diplomats, Addis Ababa, 2018-2019.

AU Peace and Security Council floated in 2015.[32] As EU funds took time to come through, Nigeria had to pay for the force in its first two years.[33]

Despite the lack of UN money and slow arrival of EU funds, some individual donors offered financial and technical support in 2016, reflecting their desire to keep the MNJTF afloat. The UK provided early funding directly to the MNJTF of £5 million. France, the U.S. and the UK have deployed officers to an intelligence liaison committee in N'Djamena to act as a conduit for intelligence sharing and advice. They also provide bilateral aid to participating states' militaries, which has strengthened some units subsequently deployed to the MNJTF.

F. *First Operations*

In 2016, 2017 and 2018, the MNJTF launched short operations, which saw Chadian and, to a lesser extent, Cameroonian and Nigerien troops enter Nigeria and help push back jihadists. Chadian troops were key to these operations as they went further into Nigerian territory and stayed longer than their Cameroonian or Nigerien counterparts. But even they often struggled to consolidate gains they had made due to weaknesses in the Nigerian response and to a highly adaptable enemy. The operations, Gama Aiki (Finish the Job, in Hausa) in 2016, Gama Aiki II in 2017 and Amni Faka (Peace at All Costs) in 2018, each lasted around three months. At least some of the cost was reportedly covered by Nigerian payments made directly to the Chadian government.[34] The operations were supplemented by cross-border troop movements that had either the MNJTF's direct signoff or indirect blessing.

Despite limitations, the three operations, which added several thousand troops to larger national responses from Nigeria and Cameroon, helped weaken Boko Haram, reducing its ability to hold territory or to attack towns and large military installations. Officers involved in the operations described to Crisis Group some of the gains made in dislodging insurgents from their strongholds, freeing prisoners and securing border areas, although they simultaneously pointed out that many achievements were short-lived.[35] The operations also served to embed the principle of cross-border cooperation, which participating officers saw as a significant contribution to their counter-insurgency efforts.[36]

[32] On the expectation of UN funding, Crisis Group interview, international military officer in region, November 2018. See "Report of the Chairperson", AU Peace and Security Council, op. cit. See also Brubacher et al., "The AU Task Forces", op. cit.
[33] On Nigeria providing seed funding, Crisis Group interviews, international military official with direct insight and Cameroonian officer, Yaoundé, September 2019.
[34] Crisis Group interviews, AU official, Western military officer, various locations, 2019.
[35] Crisis Group interviews, officers who previously served in MNJTF, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, 2019.
[36] Ibid.

III. Renewed Challenges

The emergence of Boko Haram offshoots and splinter groups over the past two years adds fresh complexity to counter-insurgency efforts. At least three militant groups are now active in the Lake Chad basin, at times cooperating, at times competing and occasionally fighting one another directly.[37] Reports suggest that militant factions are seeking to gain footholds in north-western Nigeria and possibly farther west in Niger, approaching the areas of operation of Sahel jihadist groups, with whom at least one Boko Haram spin-off is reportedly seeking alliances.[38] A sustained assault by militants on an army post on a peninsula on the lake, in which some 90 Chadian soldiers were reportedly killed, illustrates the challenges still facing Lake Chad states. It prompted President Déby to launch a major new operation.

A. *New Militant Factions and Chadian Operations*

In 2018 and 2019, a new branch of Boko Haram, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), gained strength. From its inception in 2016, it adopted a more accommodating approach than its progenitor, aimed at winning support among civilians, and it has subsequently consolidated its presence among communities in Borno state, particularly on Lake Chad's islands and shores.[39] It has also staged sophisticated attacks on military targets, killing soldiers and pillaging armaments. It poses a significant new challenge.

ISWAP is not the only threat. In 2017, another Boko Haram splinter group, referred to as the Bakura faction, emerged, this time along the Niger-Nigeria border. Additionally, military officials and other close observers report that in mid- and late 2019, the original Boko Haram faction, Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'await Wal-Jihad (JAS), under Abubakar Shekau's leadership, intensified attacks in the Nigeria-Cameroon border area, operating from its base in Nigeria's Mandara mountains. Evidence points to these latter two groups being linked, with the Bakura faction reportedly pledging allegiance to Shekau.[40]

In December 2018, ISWAP overran Baga town in Nigeria and a nearby military camp that hosted the MNJTF Sector 3 headquarters, forcing the joint force to move this base to another town in Borno state. The Nigerian military later recaptured Baga, but the group has attacked other lake areas of Chad and Cameroon.[41] The on-

[37] Crisis Group interview, local political leader (*chef de canton*), N'Djamena, August 2019.
[38] See Crisis Group Africa Report N°288, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, 18 May 2020, Section IV.
[39] Crisis Group Africa Report N°273, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, 16 May 2019.
[40] Ibid. Crisis Group interviews, Western military officer, N'Djamena; journalist, Yaoundé, September 2019. Crisis Group electronic communication, Western military officer, December 2019.
[41] Sadiq Abubakar, "Army declares Baga communities safe, urges inhabitants to return home", *National Accord*, 29 February 2020. Not all attacks can be clearly attributed to ISWAP, but many can. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors, national and international military officers, Yaoundé and N'Djamena, August-September 2019. ISWAP often used sophisticated improvised explosive devices, which sap troop morale. Crisis Group interview, national military officer who previously served in the MNJTF, Yaoundé, September 2019.

again, off-again nature of military offensives, including by the MNJTF – which, as described, carried out only one three-month operation in each of 2016, 2017 and 2018 – may have created space for ISWAP. More sustained operations that would have secured areas recaptured and created space for civilian-led efforts to work with communities and improve services might have helped prevent the insurgents from regrouping, provided, of course, that those reconstruction efforts actually took place.[42]

Lake Chad states reacted by deepening cooperation in early 2019. Chadian troops reinforced their positions on the Chadian side of the lake and a contingent, eventually numbering over 1,000 troops, entered Nigeria in February. This force comprised the major component of a 2019 MNJTF operation called Yancin Tafki (Lasting Freedom, in Hausa). Lake Chad states extended that operation to the end of 2019 in an attempt to address the flaws of the previous shorter offensives.[43] Yancin Tafki reportedly put ISWAP under considerable pressure. Although Chadian troops took many casualties, their participation boosted Nigerian forces' morale and helped secure Sector 3 of the MNJTF's operational area, which covers part of Borno state.[44]

In early January 2020, however, Chad announced the withdrawal of its forces from Borno, ending the Yancin Tafki operation. Chadian authorities reportedly did not discuss the withdrawal beforehand with their MNJTF partners, or at least senior MNJTF officials were unaware of it.[45] According to one Chadian official, N'Djamena was motivated in part by the need to redeploy the units to the Chadian side of the lake, where many had previously been stationed and which has also suffered a spike in attacks, and in part by the mission's ongoing costs.[46] Reportedly, N'Djamena was also unhappy with the weak support its forces received from the Nigerian army.[47] ISWAP reacted by immediately attacking the Nigerian base at Monguno where some Chadian forces had been based. Militants failed to take the base, but the attack demonstrated their tactical awareness and ability to exploit the MNJTF's weaknesses.

B. *The Bohoma Attack and Chadian Counteroffensive of 2020*

A bloody militant attack on a Chadian army post at Bohoma, a peninsula on the Chadian side of the lake, on 23 March 2020, offered a stark demonstration of the continued menace posed by Boko Haram factions. Several hundred insurgents approached the base by boat and attacked for eight hours, killing over 90 Chadian soldiers, according to the Chadian authorities who released the figure the next day.[48] The attackers suffered losses, too, though it is unclear how many. They reportedly captured arma-

[42] Many close observers hold this view. Crisis Group interviews and email exchanges, Western military officers, Lake Chad national military officers, various locations, September and November 2019; journalist, Yaoundé, September 2019.
[43] Crisis Group interview, Western military officer, N'Djamena, February 2020.
[44] Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian agency official, N'Djamena, August 2019; MNJTF officer, August 2019; international military officers, various locations, September-October 2019. Crisis Group electronic communication, international military officer, December 2019.
[45] Crisis Group electronic correspondence, senior African officer close to events, January 2020.
[46] Crisis Group interview, Chadian official, N'Djamena, February 2020.
[47] Ibid.
[48] See "Tchad: 92 soldats tués et 47 blessés au Lac, Deby donne le premier bilan", Alwihda, 25 March 2020.

ments before withdrawing. Abubakar Shekau's JAS faction claimed the attack. It appears likely that the Bakura faction, which is present on the lake, actually carried it out, allowing JAS to claim it due to links between these two groups.[49]

Chad reacted by quickly launching a major new operation, called Wrath of Bohoma. Its offensive aimed primarily to clear jihadists from the lake area, mainly on Chadian and Nigerien territory. President Déby described the 23 March attack as the greatest loss of military life he had witnessed in a single incident. His language concerning "breaking Boko Haram" almost certainly reflected his sense that the attack required a strong response and that striking back fast was important to provide deterrence and safeguard the Chadian army's honour.[50] Déby directed operations himself from a forward base on the lake for over two weeks. Chadian authorities later claimed that the operation, which lasted around one month, killed about 1,000 militants, though that figure is likely unreliable, while 52 Chadian soldiers lost their lives, although Crisis Group sources indicate greater losses.[51] The Wrath of Bohoma operation was a purely Chadian offensive agreed upon with the government of Niger, though it was supported by a smaller MNJTF-coordinated operation involving Nigerien troops.

During the operation, on 9 April, Déby, in a seemingly unplanned outburst, criticised what he called other Lake Chad countries' inaction against jihadists, which he argued left Chad doing the bulk of the work in both the lake area and the Sahel. He also declared that "from today, no Chadian soldier will participate in a military operation outside Chad".[52] After several days of confusion, the government clarified that Chad would continue to participate in the MNJTF and other international operations, notably the UN mission in Mali.[53]

Despite the Chadian president's rhetoric and intense fighting in some areas around the lake in April, the Wrath of Bohoma operation's actual impact may be quite limited. In May, one international military assessment concluded that militants were likely already returning to cleared areas, especially on the Nigerian side of the lake.[54]

Indeed, a rapid operation by one country against militants in the lake area is unlikely to have a lasting impact on the security situation, even considered purely from a military perspective. First, militant groups are adaptable and can move away from areas where they face pressure. Already in 2019, groups were seeking to move from the MNJTF's area of operation along the Nigeria-Cameroon and Nigeria-Niger bor-

[49] See "Behind the Jihadist Attack in Chad", Crisis Group Commentary, 6 April 2020; and "Tchad: situation très tendue au Lac après des combats contre Boko Haram", Alwihda, 23 March 2020.
[50] See "Tchad : 92 soldats tués et 47 blessés au Lac, Déby donne le premier bilan", op. cit.; and "Déby : 'Je suis décidé à briser Boko Haram en lui infligeant une raclée jamais égalée'", Alwihda, 26 March 2020.
[51] Crisis Group interview, military participant in operations, N'Djamena, May 2020. Given that some Chadian government announcements concerning this operation are likely unreliable, it remains very hard to gauge the true loss of life among insurgents.
[52] "Tchad : Face aux djihadistes, les coups de colère, de com' et de bluff du président Idriss Déby", *Le Monde*, 16 April 2020.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Crisis Group electronic communication, May 2020. See also "Le succès de l'offensive éclair du Tchad contre les djihadistes sera-t-il durable?", *Le Monde*, 13 April 2020.

ders.[55] Secondly, Chad's withdrawal, re-engagement and then second pullout suggests a pattern of ad hoc planning and insufficient agreement among the countries, as well as overstretched security forces, which stymie a more effective response. Thirdly, forceful military engagement on its own is unlikely to make much sustained difference without far better coordinated planning and intelligence sharing, which would, for example, provide a better sense of jihadists' movements or, at the very least, help prevent injury and death by friendly fire. Such incidents have occurred several times in operations around the lake, and stopping them is a role that the MNJTF should, in principle, be playing.[56]

More broadly, Déby's threat to withdraw his forces demonstrates the fragility of the consensus underpinning the MNJTF. Most observers saw his threat in part as an attempt to pressure donors and possibly Nigeria to pay more for Chadian deployments.[57] But it also illustrates the limits of Chad's readiness to lead MNJTF offensives without what it sees as strong support from the other three countries, and an overreliance on Chad's army, which is a weakness of the force.

[55] Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Yaoundé, September 2019; humanitarian agency official, international military officer, N'Djamena, September 2019. Crisis Group electronic communication, international military official, December 2019.
[56] Crisis Group interviews, international military officers, multiple locations, 2019
[57] "Tchad : Face aux djihadistes, les coups de colère, de com' et de bluff du président Idriss Déby", op. cit.

IV. Assessing the MNJTF

The fact that the MNJTF is only part of a wider response to Boko Haram makes it hard to evaluate. Any success against the various militant factions around Lake Chad depends to a large degree on the policies of each of the states themselves, of which joint operations are only one component. The MNJTF's record appears mixed. The joint force has scored some victories against militants. It has at times reversed their gains and freed civilians captured by them or trapped in areas they controlled. Moreover, working together has allowed forces to learn about and from each other, and boosted the principle of cross-border operations and cooperation. Gains have, however, tended to prove short-lived. Due partly to Boko Haram's ability to adapt, partly to the operations' intermittent nature and partly to the lack of subsequent security arrangements and stabilisation initiatives, jihadist factions have been able to regroup.

Disagreements among officials of the four countries over whether Boko Haram is a regional or a primarily Nigerian phenomenon have not helped. Many senior military officers and seasoned observers in Chad, Niger and Cameroon see their countries as suffering collateral damage from a problem that largely stems, in their view, from Nigerian incompetence.[58] In contrast, some of their Nigerian counterparts point to the toehold that Boko Haram has gained in neighbouring countries as an indication of complicity among security forces, customs agents and other officials.[59] These contrasting perceptions, occasionally expressed in finger pointing, undercut the region's solidarity and the capability of its response.

The diverse threat that militants pose in the four countries also hinders coherent regional action. Though the four countries are fighting a common enemy, in reality each has pursued a different set of goals, which are themselves subject to change. The Nigerian authorities have at times been battling a full-blown insurgency that controls large tracts of the country's north east. In contrast, Cameroon has mostly dealt with a cross-border menace, even if that has at times involved repelling well-planned and equipped attacks on its border garrisons. For its part, Chad has focused on periodic skirmishes on the lake and protecting supply routes through Cameroon. Niger has also undertaken mostly containment operations along its border and, occasionally, larger counter-insurgency operations at home or in Nigeria. The divergent objectives complicate the multilateral response as officers from each country seek different things – from limited containment operations in someone else's territory to sustained counter-insurgency in their own.

The MNJTF's shortcomings also reflect the four countries' somewhat erratic commitment, and to some degree that of donors, to fighting Boko Haram. After the 2016 and 2017 operations, attention to counter-insurgency efforts waned for the better part of two years.[60] ISWAP's resurgence in late 2018 prompted another more concerted response, with the prolonged 2019 campaign hailed by close observers

[58] Crisis Group interviews, senior officer, Niamey, October 2015; Western military officials, Abuja, December 2018; journalist, senior officers from Lake Chad basin states and Western military officials, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, September 2019.
[59] Crisis Group interviews, military officers, Abuja, December 2018; international military official with experience working in Abuja, September 2019.
[60] Crisis Group interview, Western official close to the file since 2016, Yaoundé, September 2019.

and MNJTF officers as a departure from previous shorter operations.[61] But it is far from clear whether that operation did in fact represent a turn toward more systematic cooperation, embedded in information sharing and joint planning. Indeed, the largely unilateral Chadian offensive in 2020 and Déby's impatience with his counterparts illustrate the persistent difficulties states have faced in working together.[62]

A. *The MNJTF's Added Value*

The MNJTF has allowed for greater tactical cooperation on the ground. At times, this cooperation occurred outside MNJTF zones and was not authorised through MNJTF headquarters but nevertheless drew on the spirit of cooperation brought about by the regional force.[63] Officers from Lake Chad countries who have operated in or alongside MNJTF units see the force as a symbol of regional cooperation and express pride at working with colleagues from other countries.[64] Exactly how cooperation plays out on the ground varies. In rare cases, different countries' officials have integrated their command chains for MNJTF operations for short periods. At other times, units of different nationalities have coordinated to encircle militants.[65] Most national and international officials and officers involved with the MNJTF recognise that it provides political cover to troops, especially Chadian forces, who are operating in neighbouring countries. The joint force's imprimatur allows them to pursue Boko Haram across borders and share information with neighbours.[66]

The force commander is widely seen as key to any positive impact the MNJTF can have. True, the position does not enjoy command and control over all the forces involved; one close observer argued that in reality his role was something more like "coordination and choreography".[67] He is also overburdened by a top-heavy decision-making process within the MNJTF that leaves him responsible for day-to-day management as well as strategic issues and liaison with Lake Chad governments. At the same time, contributing countries, including Nigeria, give him little room for manoeuvre and reportedly share little planning detail with him.[68] Yet the five successive military heads, all of whom have been Nigerian generals, have encouraged coordination and joint planning through regular meetings with the four sector commanders.

The MNJTF has also helped facilitate training and funding, notwithstanding disputes over the latter. It has provided an institutional vessel for donor money to flow

[61] Crisis Group interviews, Western military officers, N'Djamena, September 2019; MNJTF officer, August 2019.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Crisis Group interviews, Chadian and Cameroonian army officers, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, 2019. One study found that cross-border actions by Cameroonian forces outside the MNJTF zone were given political cover by including MNJTF troops. See RAND Corporation, "Africa's Role in Nation Building", op. cit., p. 191.
[64] Crisis Group interviews, Chadian and Cameroonian army officers, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, 2019.
[65] Crisis Group interview, national officer deployed to operations in neighbouring countries in 2016-2017, N'Djamena, September 2019.
[66] Crisis Group interviews, national army officers, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, 2019; international military observers, various locations, September and October 2019.
[67] Crisis Group interview, Western military officer, September 2019.
[68] Ibid.

into counter-insurgency operations, as well as a vehicle through which donors and the AU can press Lake Chad governments and armies to curb human rights abuses. Donors have paid for equipment and training beyond what they would have been ready to offer on a purely bilateral basis.

The AU itself sees opportunities in the joint force beyond fighting Boko Haram. AU officials view the MNJTF as a chance to disseminate the continental body's principles on how AU-authorised forces should function and the behaviour of troops involved, including, critically, their compliance with international humanitarian law.[69] The AU hopes that national units fighting under the MNJTF's banner will bring home better practice to their respective armies as they rotate in and out of the joint force.[70] Some officials hope that the AU's involvement in the MNJTF will mean that its peace and security architecture comes to incorporate other ad hoc missions, hence expanding and improving African responses to threats like jihadist insurgencies, which traditional peacekeeping operations have struggled to contain (thus far the AU plays almost no role in the other main ad hoc force on the continent, the G5 Sahel).[71] Some in the AU and in the force itself also see the MNJTF as part of "learning by doing" in African-led deployments.[72]

Humanitarian actors have also found opportunities in the joint force. They have used the MNJTF as a conduit for discussions with military officers on how to deal with captured militants or other Boko Haram members and how to protect civilians, in the hope that commanders and officials at the MNJTF headquarters will relay concerns to national units.[73] Whether commanders have actually passed along these concerns remains unclear, however, given the force's complex hierarchy. Humanitarian actors have also trained MNJTF officers.[74]

B. *MNJTF Countries' Limited Bandwidth*

The MNJTF is an expression of the willingness of the states involved to cooperate, yet their commitment to the joint force has ebbed and flowed.

Nigeria's commitment has proven particularly variable. The country faces a dizzying range of threats, from Boko Haram itself to herder-farmer violence largely in its middle belt, mounting banditry in the north west and a still unstable Niger Delta.[75] In 2016 and 2017, Abuja's attention to Boko Haram dwindled. Many top officials may have taken their eye off the ball, as President Buhari declared at the end of 2015 that militants were on the verge of defeat.[76] Many military units were redeployed for law enforcement around the country. Among the criticisms diplomats, journalists

[69] Crisis Group interviews, AU officials, Addis Ababa, December 2018 and November 2019.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and officials, N'Djamena, November 2018; Addis Ababa, December 2018 and November 2019; MNJTF officer, Nairobi, November 2019.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, September 2019.
[74] Ibid.
[75] See Crisis Group Reports, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, and *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, both op. cit.
[76] President Buhari made a statement along those lines that December. "Nigeria Boko Haram: militants 'technically defeated' – Buhari", BBC, 24 December 2015.

and other observers in Nigeria level at the government over its response to Boko Haram is Abuja's neglect of the north east and the army's weak commitment to counter-insurgency operations there.[77] Even the longer MNJTF operations over 2019 and 2020 do not necessarily show that Abuja is taking the threat more seriously. Those operations were largely spearheaded by Chad, and the most recent offensive aimed to clear militants from the lake area along Chad's border rather than entering deeper into Borno state.

The attention of other Lake Chad basin capitals has also waxed and waned. Like Nigeria, they face challenges beyond Boko Haram that have sapped attention and resources. Chad has had to tackle mounting insecurity in its north and east.[78] Since 2017, Cameroon has redeployed some units from the Far North region, where they were combating Boko Haram, to confront Anglophone separatists in its North West and South West provinces.[79] Niger is dealing with tensions on its border with Mali, and a militant threat that goes beyond Boko Haram. Attacks by jihadists in December 2019 and January 2020 killed dozens of troops.[80]

In this light, it is striking that the MNJTF not only exists nearly five years later, but is frequently operational, including its sustained efforts in 2019. The force's activity compares favourably with some other African-led military operations, such as the G5 Sahel, which has struggled since its creation to deploy on the ground amid disagreements over funding and command chains.[81] It is all the more remarkable given that the MNJTF has, overall, received little international funding. That operations have continued likely owes partly to the Nigerian government's and senior military officers' discomfort with having to call several times on Chadian forces to fight Boko Haram on Nigerian soil. The MNJTF allows them to frame such operations as multilateral cooperation.[82] Equally, while politicians' commitment has wavered, senior officials and officers in capitals, in national units in the field, and among those deployed into the MNJTF, remain committed to joint action against Boko Haram.[83] They are also convinced that the MNJTF provides vital opportunities for sharing experience and learning.[84]

C. *Operational Constraints*

The MNJTF's capacity at headquarters and in the field has increased only modestly over the past five years. Trust among national forces, on which the MNJTF ultimately

[77] Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and international military officers, Abuja, December 2018. See also "Generals on the run", *Africa Confidential*, 20 February 2020.
[78] Richard Moncrieff and Thibaud Lesueur, "Rebel Incursion Exposes Chad's Weaknesses", Crisis Group Commentary, 13 February 2019; Crisis Group Africa Report N°284, *Avoiding the Resurgence of Intercommunal Violence in Eastern Chad,* December 2019.
[79] Crisis Group interviews, national and foreign officers, Yaoundé, September 2019.
[80] "Niger: Attaque meurtrière de jihadistes contre un camp de l'armée à Chinagoder", RFI, 9 January 2020.
[81] Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°149, *The Risk of Jihadist Contagion in West Africa*, 20 December 2019.
[82] Crisis Group interviews, senior Western military officers, 2018-2019.
[83] Crisis Group interviews, national officers and officials, N'Djamena, Yaoundé and Nairobi, 2019.
[84] Ibid.

relies, remains weak. The mutual unease is hardly surprising given that the MJNTF's component units hail from different military cultures, adhere to different doctrines, use incompatible equipment (particularly communications gear) and speak different languages (English and French).

There are challenges with both equipment and personnel. Disputes over funding have often held up the delivery of kit necessary for operations – especially boats, needed for operations on the lake, and night vision equipment. When such equipment does arrive, MNJTF units have sometimes not planned for its use, due to poor foresight and internal communications.[85] Although participating states have committed to the MNJTF only a small portion of the total number of troops fighting Boko Haram, they have frequently failed to deploy them into MNJTF units in their respective sectors for sustained periods (with the exception of Cameroon, which appears to have committed forces for longer).[86] As a result, the MNJTF's troop numbers have fluctuated. When forces recapture territory from Boko Haram, they have been unable to consolidate gains through holding operations. Militants have often won back lost ground.[87]

National governments and military commands have rarely shared operational plans with the MNJTF, hindering both joint planning and civilian protection. Despite the existence of a regional intelligence fusion unit, funded by the UK, the U.S. and France, and staffed by Western and regional officers, intelligence sharing between MNJTF components is reportedly poor. Apparently for this reason, in early 2019 the force commander requested AU support in persuading Lake Chad states to provide the MNJTF with its own intelligence-gathering capacity (the AU denied the request).[88] Even beyond intelligence sharing, cooperation within the MNJTF remains sporadic and personality-driven. The formal command structure is reportedly confined in large part to developing joint operations that themselves are not part of an integrated strategy.[89] Participating armies do not always do what they have agreed to in joint plans.[90]

The MNJTF has only had a marginal impact on the capacity and behaviour of troops, whether those integrated into the joint force or those working alongside it. Since the beginning of operations against Boko Haram, security forces' abuses have angered communities and, in some cases, fuelled support for militancy.[91] The N'Djamena-

[85] Crisis Group interviews, Western military officer, regional military officer, various dates and locations, 2019.

[86] Crisis Group interviews, Western military officer, N'Djamena; national officers, Yaoundé; journalist and close observer of the Far North, Yaoundé, September 2019.

[87] A senior MNJTF officer noted that the force suffered from poor supply and that units were sometimes isolated. Crisis Group interview, N'Djamena, August 2019.

[88] Crisis Group interviews, national officers and international military officers, various locations, 2018 and 2019.

[89] Crisis Group interview, senior international military officer, 2019.

[90] Ibid.

[91] According to one well-informed source who monitors abuses in the lake area, men in uniform have committed around 40 per cent of reported abuses in the zone where Boko Haram operates. It is impossible to say how many of these men might have been operating under the MNJTF's aegis. Crisis Group interview, humanitarian sector official, N'Djamena, November 2018. See also Crisis Group Report, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, op. cit. A UN De-

based AU Support Programme, the force's main civilian component, has a human rights compliance office. But it reports not to the civilian head of the Lake Chad Basin Commission but to the force commander himself. As a result, its effectiveness is limited – senior officers seemingly are closed to its reporting and recommendations, which they fear will be critical.[92]

More broadly, the office has been unable to properly carry out its mandate of improving human rights compliance, including monitoring treatment of captured Boko Haram fighters. The reasons are many: its staffing levels are too low and resources too few to go into the field; development of a civil-military liaison office has been slow; it has encountered resistance from the four countries' military hierarchies; and army units have sown confusion by moving in and out of the MNJTF in an unprepared manner and based on orders from national headquarters.[93] In 2019, the MNJTF, supported by the AU, reportedly made some progress in coordinating policy toward Boko Haram fighters in detention, including plans for common procedures for reception centres and a shared database of those captured or surrendered.[94] Whether these steps forward signal a greater role for the MNJTF in ensuring human rights compliance – as some AU officials hope – remains unclear.[95]

D. *Financing and Procurement Problems*

When Lake Chad states revived the MNJTF in 2015, it confronted an immediate funding problem, with promised commitments bogged down in complicated bureaucracy that slowed procurement. Lake Chad countries have sought donor money to improve the joint force's headquarters, planning capacity, training and equipment. The EU prepared a funding package in 2015, but refused to offer funds to pay troop per diems as it does for the AU force in Somalia, and some officials from Western states have admitted that their countries offered little support in the force's first two years.[96] Financing has been a constant source of tension throughout the MNJTF's five years. Shortfalls and delays have led participating states to pin blame for the MNJTF's failures – and indeed those of efforts against other jihadists in West Africa – on what they see as the West's broken promises of financial support.[97]

In 2015, the EU promised to provide funds, but only through the AU. The continental body is the designated recipient of the EU's Africa Peace Facility funds, and the EU already had procedures in place for disbursing money to the AU that it wished

velopment Programme study cites abuses by security forces as a significant factor in pushing young people into violent groups. "Journey to Extremism in Africa", UN Development Programme, 2017.

[92] Such, at least, is the perception of officials close to the file. Crisis Group interviews, international military officers, AU official, various locations, 2019.

[93] Crisis Group interviews, international military officers, national officers, AU official, N'Djamena and Yaoundé, 2019.

[94] Crisis Group interviews, AU officials, Nairobi and Addis Ababa, November 2019.

[95] "Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin", AU and Lake Chad Basin Commission, August 2018.

[96] Crisis Group interviews, Western officials, 2019.

[97] See Mathieu Olivier, "À Paris, Déby, Issoufou et IBK s'agacent des 'promesses' non tenues des Occidentaux", *Jeune Afrique*, 12 November 2019.

to test and improve.[98] In August 2016, Brussels and Addis Ababa signed an agreement to support the MNJTF through a €55 million "additional support package".[99] This deal allowed the EU to incorporate funds for the MNJTF into its broader support for the AU. The EU money also complemented funds already given bilaterally by European governments to the MNJTF's participating countries.[100]

But the EU only started to disburse its funds in 2017, due to weaknesses in the AU's procurement processes.[101] After several unsuccessful attempts to circumvent those processes through outsourcing procurement to third-party contractors, the EU supported a major overhaul of AU systems, which allowed funds to flow through the AU to the MNJTF and procurement contractors.[102]

The delay did lasting damage. It left member states, mostly Nigeria, to cover the initial 2016 financing for the multinational force's headquarters, and left troops in the field undersupplied. It undoubtedly goes some way toward explaining the force's weaknesses and also fed tension and recriminations, which continue today, among donors, the AU and participating countries.[103]

Even today, some EU funds remain unspent. Though European money started reaching the MNTJF in 2017, the EU has had to twice extend its deadline for spending the funds due to delays in agreeing requirements. As of late 2019, the AU had spent or agreed on spending for a little over half of the EU's €55 million. The money has been critical, paying for medical services for the force, including a hospital in N'Djamena, communications equipment, vehicles, and infrastructure for N'Djamena and the four sectoral headquarters. But it is unlikely that much of the remainder will be disbursed before the program draws to a close at the end of 2020, again due to disagreements over what to spend it on. Both infrastructure for the sector headquarters and vehicles were subject to long disputes among the EU, the AU and participating countries on requirements.[104]

Even with EU funding flowing, disputes between the AU and Lake Chad states have hampered the procurement of essential gear. In 2018 and 2019, the AU, EU and Lake Chad governments agreed on equipment for 1) Command, Control and Communication Information Services (a system linking sector headquarters, the force's offices in N'Djamena and AU officials in Addis, referred to as C3IS); 2) aerial intelligence equipment to be attached to airplanes; and 3) air mobility, including critical medevac capacity. But in April 2019, the Lake Chad Basin Commission requested that the AU suspend the C3IS contract, voicing concerns of the four Lake

[98] Crisis Group interview, EU officials, Addis Ababa and Brussels, various dates, 2018 and 2019.
[99] "Additional" in that the money supplements support given by EU member states directly to the MNJTF or to national armies of contributing countries.
[100] Crisis Group interview, EU diplomat, Addis Ababa, November 2019. Brubacher et al., "The AU Task Forces", op. cit., p. 283.
[101] Something the AU admits. Crisis Group interview, AU official, November 2019.
[102] Crisis Group interviews, EU officials, Brussels, November 2018 and April 2019; Crisis Group interview, AU official, Nairobi, November 2019.
[103] Crisis Group interviews, national and international officials, Yaoundé, N'Djamena, Abuja, Brussels and Addis Ababa, November-December 2018 and September 2019.
[104] Crisis Group interviews, senior EU official, Brussels, November 2018; senior EU and AU officials, November 2019. Crisis Group correspondence, EU official, November 2019. Some elements of headquarters infrastructure are still at a tender stage.

Chad governments that a direct link between the MNJTF headquarters and officials in Addis would cut them out of important communications. The dispute was eventually resolved in early 2020 by creating safeguards that satisfied the participating states. The aerial reconnaissance system was settled in early 2020 following disagreements in 2019 over procurement, but has not been delivered due to COVID-19 and is now likely to be shelved.[105]

It appears that in some cases MNJTF countries have asked to use their own national procurement systems and objected to the AU being the conduit for EU funds.[106] EU and AU officials pushed back, including in the MNJTF Joint Steering Committee that meets in Addis Ababa. They believe that using national procurement structures would weaken the force and dilute its value as a regional initiative. They also fear that governments would likely use resources to boost national armies, thus failing to strengthen the MNJTF headquarters. They continue to insist that AU financing be channelled separately to donors' bilateral support to national armies, using different procurement processes.[107]

The discord has undermined the force's effectiveness. It has fuelled a sense that the joint operations are under-resourced, which filters down to the field, where most troops receive only a small nationally paid stipend, far less than what they would receive in a UN mission (the point of comparison for many), and which has not always been paid on time.[108]

These recent tensions also soured relations with international partners. In the past, donors and AU officials have been wary of demanding that the MNJTF conduct more operations or supporting roles than it can sustain, partly because they see the force as "learning by doing", and partly because they doubt it can be much more effective than national responses, which remain deficient, particularly in Nigeria. They also worry that funds or equipment for the MNJTF may later bolster national armies in geographic areas where donors have no oversight.[109] The procurement spat goes further. It jeopardises the EU's support, at a time when it and the AU are about to start discussing the future of that support.[110] In addition, the EU's Africa Peace Facility, from which MNJTF funds are drawn, is likely to be replaced in 2021 by a range of other financial instruments, in particular the new European Peace Facility,

[105] Crisis Group interviews, senior AU, EU and European officials, Addis Ababa and by correspondence, November 2019; EU official, June 2020.
[106] Crisis Group interviews, senior AU, EU and European officials, Addis Ababa and by correspondence, November 2019. The discord exacerbates tensions between member states and the AU over staffing of the AU Support Programme. Crisis Group interviews and correspondence, AU and EU officials, November 2019. Crisis Group requested further comment on these issues in December 2019, and again in early 2020, from representatives of member states who had been interviewed earlier in 2019. There was no reply.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Crisis Group interviews, officers who previously served in MNJTF units, Yaoundé, September 2019; N'Djamena, February 2020.
[109] Crisis Group interviews, senior EU official, Brussels, November 2018; EU and AU officials, Addis Ababa, November 2019.
[110] Crisis Group interviews, EU officials at the centre of discussions, Addis Ababa and by correspondence, various dates, 2019 and 2020.

raising further uncertainty over funding.[111] Whatever the rights and wrongs of the dispute, the sense that all parties seek to blame others for the MNJTF's weaknesses is pervasive. It is urgent that they work out a consensual way forward.

[111] Crisis Group interviews, EU officials, Addis Ababa and by correspondence, November 2019; February and June 2020. See also Matthias Deneckere, "The Uncharted Path towards a European Peace Facility", European Centre for Development Policy Management, March 2019.

V. Improving the MNJTF

Lake Chad basin states, lacking public support and offering weak service delivery, have struggled to counter jihadist groups operating in their peripheries. Militants have exploited states' weaknesses, denouncing corruption and neglect, intimidating populations to whom security forces offer little protection, and offering inducements or rudimentary services such as dispute resolution. Counter-insurgency efforts must involve not only military operations but also a political strategy that aims to win support among people in areas affected. At the same time, military operations are important: to create space for civilian officials and aid organisations to help people caught up in the conflict, start to rebuild public services and offer militants ways to demobilise. Also critical is to curb security forces' abuses that further alienate locals.

The MNJTF cannot solve these myriad problems on its own and will only ever be an addition to national efforts. Yet the transnational nature of militancy in the region and the importance of securing border areas mean that cooperation among Lake Chad states through the MNJTF and the LCBC is crucial. Thus far, it has been held back by uneven political commitment, disputes over funding and differences among those states, and between them and the AU and EU, over the force's priorities. Given those realities, progress toward a more effective force will be incremental. As the main donor, the EU has a strong preference for working through the AU, and the force's framework – driven by participating states but with international support channelled through Addis – is unlikely to change.

Despite the constraints, the MNJTF has made progress, both in its operations and in establishing the principle of cooperation among participating states. To build on these achievements, governments should restate their commitment to the force over the long term, aim to improve its performance and match new resources to agreed priorities. They and international partners should aim for the MNJTF to achieve a high standard in terms of cooperation, planning, mission support and respect for international humanitarian law, such that it becomes a sought-after posting for troops and officers. The MNJTF, in turn, would need to provide opportunities for leadership, and national governments would need to recognise the value of such experience in officers returning to national ranks.

In seeking to improve the MNJTF, partners must not seek to build a large bureaucracy. Several informed interlocutors pointed to the danger of fostering what one called a "per diem" culture, or of simply multiplying administrative units with little impact on the ground in the lake area.[112] Equally, donors and AU officials, who rightly have strong ambitions for the force, should avoid creating a centre of authority in the force headquarters that would not have capitals' full support, again a risk highlighted by interlocutors closely involved in supporting the MNJTF. A light touch and learning by doing have been essential to the force's relative success so far.[113]

[112] Crisis Group interviews, AU and EU officials, Western military officer, Yaoundé, Brussels and Addis Ababa, 2018-2019.
[113] Ibid. A senior AU official underlined that the MNJTF is a "unique and dynamic process" within which all parties are trying to align different and changing perspectives.

A. *Better Information Sharing and Planning*

The priority for national governments and international partners should be to help the MNJTF do the basics well, starting with communications and planning. As Boko Haram factions operate in border areas and embed within the population, better intelligence sharing and analysis is not just a necessity, but the joint force's raison d'être. Participating states can take a number of steps to boost the MNJTF's ability to fight Boko Haram and support reconstruction efforts that do not require significant new resources.

First, they should give senior officials in both the MNJTF and national structures greater leeway to determine what intelligence the joint force requires. They should allow the MNJTF's N'Djamena headquarters to receive such intelligence and analysis from units operating in the field and from national capitals. Key is to allow officials to establish what is directly relevant to the MNJTF's cross-border mission and its operational planning, while accepting that governments will withhold much intelligence, partly out of fear of it leaking and jeopardising their own operations.[114]

Secondly, national governments need to bolster staff involved in sharing and analysing intelligence at each of the four sectoral headquarters and in N'Djamena. They should also bring in tailored training in analysis, both tactical to improve operations and political to inform wider strategy. Further language training would help internal communications and enhance shared analysis.

Thirdly, national governments should allow their militaries to share operational planning more routinely and in more detail with staff at MNJTF headquarters. At present, they reportedly share no planning beyond preparations for imminent operations, which means that the MNJTF struggles to plan deployments effectively.[115] Again, governments and military commands cannot feasibly share all planning, but they should be prepared to offer the MNJTF more details than they do at present.

B. *Human Rights Compliance*

Security forces have committed abuses in the Lake Chad basin against locals whom they believe support or associate with Boko Haram.[116] Such abuses may boost support for insurgents and hinder intelligence gathering and reconstruction activities. It is critical that the MNJTF comply with both the AU's human rights standards and those defined in the AU's 2018 Regional Stabilisation Strategy for the area.

MNJTF officers, national militaries and the AU should focus on preventing the mistreatment of civilians. Participating governments and the AU should expand training on such compliance in the MNJTF headquarters and national sectors. They also need to develop and put in place procedures for monitoring the behaviour of troops and other MNJTF officials, as well as sanctions against offenders, which are almost non-existent at present. The AU and some NGOs have established some training and dissemination through the AU Support Programme. By setting a good exam-

[114] According to one officer close to MNJTF operations, in the past, intelligence shared inside MNJTF operations has leaked to Boko Haram. Crisis Group interview, location withheld, 2019.
[115] Crisis Group interviews, national and international military officers, various locations, 2018-2019.
[116] Joan Tilouine and Josiane Kouagheu, "Au Cameroun, la mort au bout de la piste", *Le Monde*, 18 February 2020.

ple, the MNJTF should have a positive impact on national armies through the units and officers who move in and out of the force.[117]

Standards should of course apply to forces' conduct with civilians, but they are especially relevant for the treatment of surrendered or captured Boko Haram fighters, former members or people suspected of involvement. Governments need to both ensure that their armed forces hand suspects over to civilian authorities and boost the capacity of those authorities to give such people due process. They also need to establish and disseminate best practice in this regard and coordinate concerning the treatment of nationals who surrender or are captured outside their country of origin. This coordination has reportedly gathered pace in 2019, including via the MNJTF and the LCBC, with AU support.[118]

C. *Civil-military Coordination*

In 2018, the AU and the LCBC drew up a wide-ranging Regional Stabilisation Strategy for the lake area.[119] Its primary intent, according to its lead author, was to shift counter-insurgency efforts in the lake area away from exclusively military campaigns toward civilian-led activities aimed at tackling underlying problems.[120] It emphasises in particular the improved delivery of public services and other livelihood support or development activities. For the plan to have lasting impact, authorities would need to engage with local populations on how to rebuild conflict-affected areas, counter widespread distrust of the state that militants often exploit and potentially even talk to insurgents themselves, though the stabilisation plan does not envisage that. None of this will be possible, however, unless regional security forces can work efficiently together, push back insurgents, secure at least some areas and support civilian work.

While progress rolling out the Regional Stabilisation Strategy has been slow, the MNJTF will have to find the right way to support it when it does take shape. The strategy primarily envisages a role for the MNJTF in helping secure areas for civilian work and support law enforcement efforts. In rare cases, MNJTF units might carry out nominally civilian work, such as building or rebuilding schools or clinics, as they occasionally do now. More commonly, they will support the civilians responsible, securing areas for reconstruction activities, sharing analysis of local situations and intervening to protect those involved if militants pose a threat. Such efforts will require close liaison between MNJTF units and force headquarters on one hand, and civilian officials and humanitarian actors on the other, where the latter request it. The AU needs to accelerate its recruitment for a new senior civil-military liaison officer to work in the LCBC, and dedicate more resources to work on civilian-led activities in liaison with the MNJTF military structures.

[117] See "African Union Policy for Conduct and Discipline in Peace Support Operations", AU, undated; and "Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin", op. cit., p. 23.
[118] Crisis Group interviews, AU officials, Addis Ababa, November 2019.
[119] "Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin", op. cit.
[120] Crisis Group interviews, AU officials, Addis Ababa, November 2018 and November 2019.

There are challenges related to civilian officials' chain of command. At present, the MNJTF's AU-supported civilian component, including its human rights office, is housed within the force. It reports only to the force commander, rather than to the LCBC executive, even though the latter is nominally the "mission head", or to the AU, which authorises the force. AU and LCBC officials deny that the LCBC's lack of control over the MNJTF's main civilian offices undercuts its oversight of the force (though that seems unlikely).[121] They also express concern that shifting oversight to the LCBC would overburden what is already a stretched commission.[122] Yet the MNJTF's military command is prone to ignore or suppress inconvenient information concerning troop behaviour.[123] There are compelling arguments, supported by some officials in Addis Ababa and on the ground, for taking the civilian components out of the military chain of command.[124] The AU and donors could use their intended boost to the LCBC's capacity to incrementally transfer civilian support functions to the body as it acquires more capability.

D. *Reaching Consensus on the International Support Framework*

Tensions among Lake Chad states, the AU and the EU have undermined the MNJTF's effectiveness. The 2019 dispute between the AU and Lake Chad states over the disbursement of EU funds is only the latest in a series of differences and misunderstandings that have beset the force's international support structures. These reflect what one AU official describes as a wider problem of conflicting expectations and vested interests around the continental body's role in supporting the ad hoc forces it authorises.[125] In particular, Lake Chad countries want financial support but expect to manage the resources, which the AU does not accept.

It is critical that all parties act quickly on their apparent resolution of the 2019 dispute. They should speed up the delivery of intelligence capacity and air support to ensure that they can evacuate injured troops; the latter is important to making the force a more attractive posting. Lake Chad states should accept and work with the AU's international procurement procedures to expedite delivery of equipment. They also should work upstream to check that equipment fits the joint force's requirements and is immediately usable, which has not always been the case in the past.[126]

If Lake Chad states and their international partners envisage the MNJTF building up its presence over five to ten years, they should aim to reach consensus about who will pay for the force and how. They will have to hash out precise details themselves. But the broad principle should be that Lake Chad states accept that the EU and AU will not fold their support for the MNJTF into bilateral European or other assistance to national armies or procured through national structures. In return, donors should commit to consistent and predictable support, potentially augmenting funds if the

[121] Crisis Group interviews, AU Support Programme, LCBC and AU officials, September and November 2019.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Crisis Group interviews, international military officers, AU official, N'Djamena, 2019.
[124] Crisis Group interviews, AU officials, N'Djamena and Addis Ababa, September and November 2019.
[125] Crisis Group interview, AU official, Nairobi, November 2019.
[126] Crisis Group interviews, national officer, Western military officer, Yaoundé and N'Djamena, 2019.

MNJTF states set out a credible vision for the force's future. Both sides need to be realistic about what is possible, especially regarding procurement.

Foreign partners have good reasons to continue supporting the joint force, even beyond the imperative of reversing the humanitarian disaster around Lake Chad. While for now jihadists in the region do not pose an immediate threat outside it, their future evolution is unpredictable and the MNJTF provides a cost-effective way of containing the menace. It also could give the AU and donors a chance to develop their thinking about how best to support ad hoc security coalitions in the future.[127]

[127] Crisis Group interviews, EU and AU officials, Addis Ababa and Brussels, various dates.

VI. Conclusion

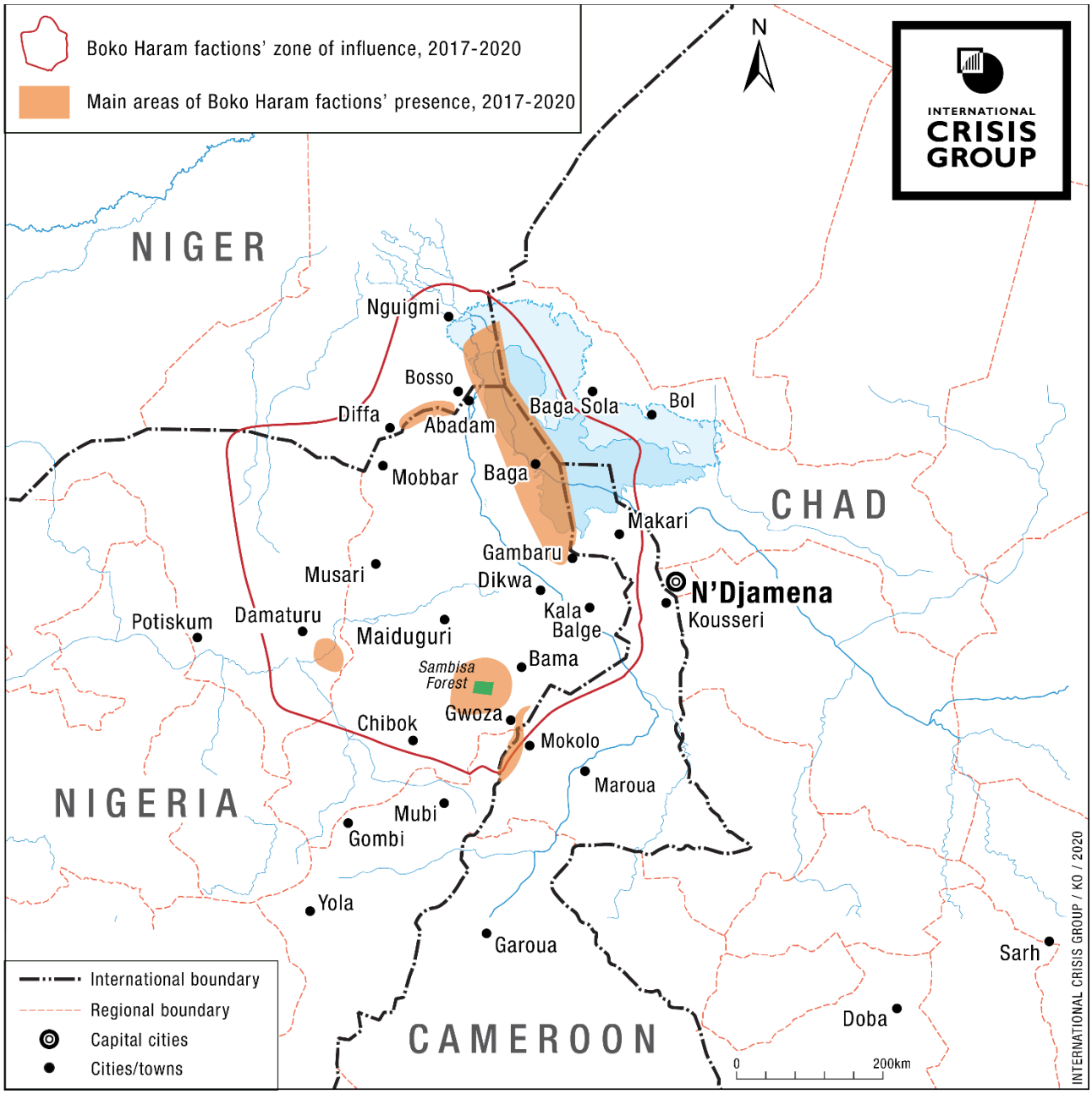
Regional cooperation is vital to battling Boko Haram and its offshoots, which have proven adaptable, persistent and able to thrive in remote border areas around Lake Chad. Over the past five years, the MNJTF has helped pressure militants, stemming Boko Haram's expansion and leading it to fracture on more than one occasion. The joint force has brought other dividends: through it or inspired by it, troops, officers, officials and politicians have made considerable strides toward multilateral cooperation despite divergent perspectives and interests. But participating states' reluctance to fully commit to the force, due partly to national sensitivities, partly to differing priorities because of the diverse threat that each country faces and partly to funding disputes, have left the force structurally and operationally weak.

Moreover, military action in itself is not enough. While operations are important, their impact will be limited unless the Lake Chad states – and Nigeria in particular, given that militants operate across a larger area there than in any of its neighbours – can establish their authority, improve their delivery of services and inspire at least some trust from communities in recaptured areas, all while offering militants paths to demobilise safely and even potentially engaging some of them in talks.

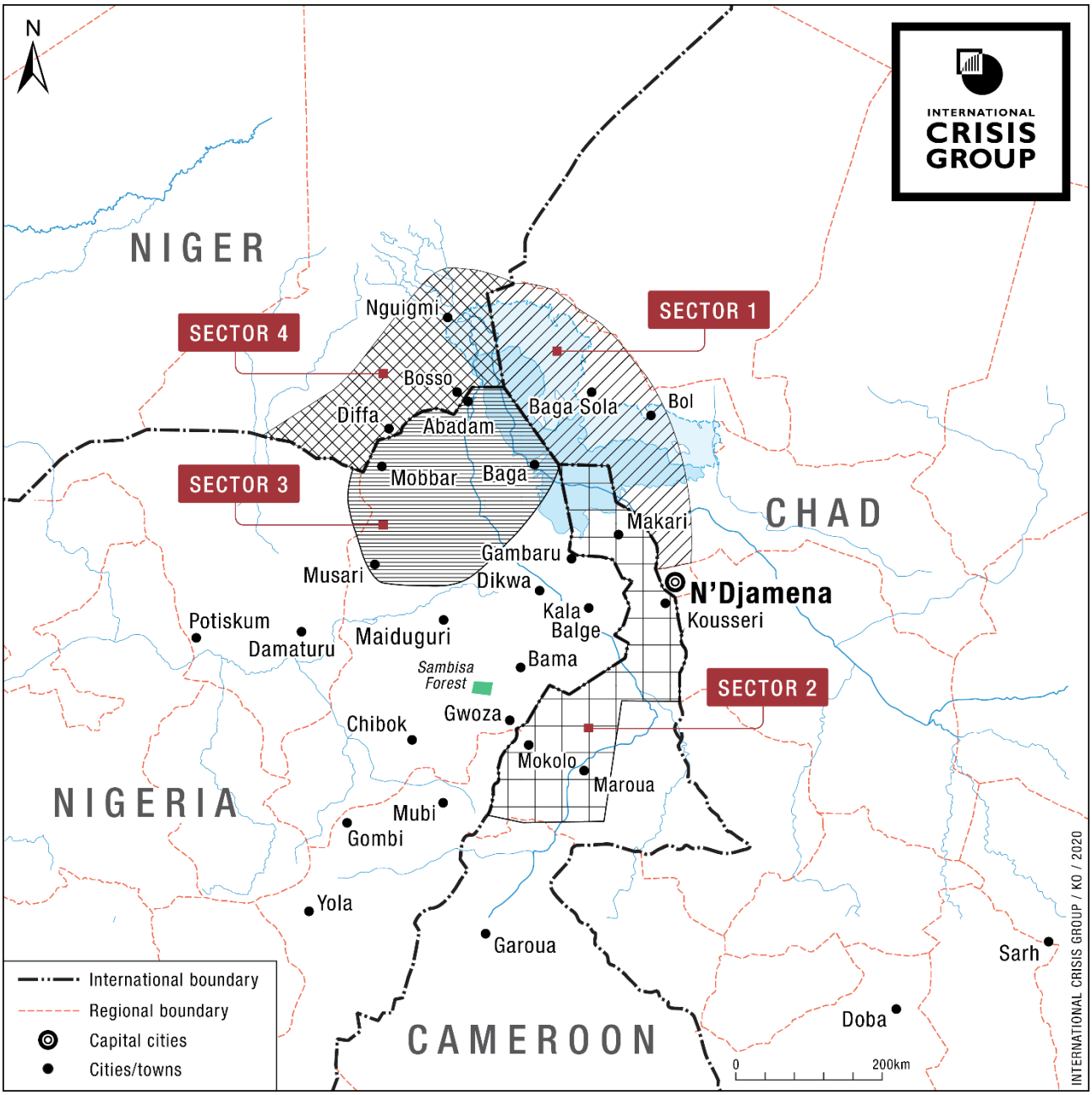
A reinforced MNJTF can contribute to such a strategy. Lake Chad governments are, not surprisingly, reluctant to create a fully integrated force. But by being more open to sharing plans and intelligence, improving human rights compliance and civilian-military cooperation, and working with the AU and EU on sustainable funding arrangements, they can improve its effectiveness. It will not be easy for the joint force to secure and hold territory to create space for reconstruction, stabilisation work and peacemaking in border areas, but the right reforms would improve its prospects of doing so.

Nairobi/Brussels, 7 July 2020

Appendix A: Boko Haram Factions, Areas of Sustained Presence and Influence



Appendix B: The Multinational Joint Task Force Sector Areas



Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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July 2020

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