INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES (IJDIEH)
Online ISSN: 3135-7296
Volume 02, Issue 05 September–October 2026, pp. 143-167
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24032824
www. ubueajournals.org

LAKE CHAD BASIN COMMISION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM (BOKO-HARAM) IN THE AREA, 2009 – 2023

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Abstract

The persistent threat of Boko Haram terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin has presented significant security, humanitarian and socio-economic challenges to Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, necessitating coordinated regional responses. This study examines the role of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in combating Boko Haram terrorism between 2009 and 2023, with particular emphasis on interstate cooperation, regional security mechanisms and the effectiveness of military and non-military counterterrorism strategies. Specifically, the study investigates the historical evolution and underlying causes of Boko Haram insurgency, assesses the contribution of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to regional security, and examines the implementation of the Regional Strategy for Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience (RSS) in conflict-affected communities. Drawing on historical and documentary analysis of relevant scholarly literature, institutional reports, regional security initiatives and policy frameworks, the study demonstrates that cooperation among LCBC member states contributed significantly to containing the geographical expansion of Boko Haram, recovering territories previously controlled by insurgents and strengthening regional security coordination. The findings further reveal that military interventions, particularly joint operations conducted through the MNJTF, achieved considerable tactical successes but remained insufficient to eliminate the underlying causes of violent extremism. Persistent poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, porous international borders, weak governance and inadequate institutional coordination continued to undermine sustainable peace and security. The study also establishes that non-military interventions, particularly humanitarian assistance, socioeconomic recovery, rehabilitation, reintegration and community resilience programmes, constitute indispensable components of sustainable counterterrorism efforts. It concludes that effective regional security in the Lake Chad Basin requires sustained political commitment, stronger intelligence-sharing mechanisms, improved border management and the integration of military operations with comprehensive development-oriented interventions. The study recommends strengthening the institutional capacity of the LCBC, consolidating interstate security cooperation and prioritising inclusive socioeconomic development to address the structural conditions sustaining terrorism in the region.

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Keywords:

Lake Chad Basin Commission; Boko Haram; Terrorism; Regional Security; Interstate Cooperation; Multinational Joint Task Force; Counterterrorism.

Résumé

La menace persistante du terrorisme de Boko Haram dans le bassin du lac Tchad a engendré d'importants défis sécuritaires, humanitaires et socio-économiques pour le Cameroun, le Tchad, le Niger et le Nigéria, nécessitant ainsi des réponses régionales coordonnées. Cette étude examine le rôle de la Commission du bassin du lac Tchad (CBLT) dans la lutte contre le terrorisme de Boko Haram entre 2009 et 2023, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur la coopération interétatique, les mécanismes régionaux de sécurité ainsi que l'efficacité des stratégies antiterroristes militaires et non militaires. Plus précisément, l'étude analyse l'évolution historique et les causes profondes de l'insurrection de Boko Haram, évalue la contribution de la Force multinationale mixte (FMM) à la sécurité régionale et examine la mise en œuvre de la Stratégie régionale de stabilisation, de redressement et de résilience (SR-SRR) dans les communautés touchées par le conflit. S'appuyant sur une analyse historique et documentaire de la littérature scientifique, des rapports institutionnels, des initiatives régionales de sécurité et des cadres politiques pertinents, l'étude montre que la coopération entre les États membres de la CBLT a contribué de manière significative à contenir l'expansion géographique de Boko Haram, à reconquérir les territoires précédemment contrôlés par les insurgés et à renforcer la coordination sécuritaire régionale. Les résultats révèlent également que les interventions militaires, notamment les opérations conjointes menées par la FMM, ont enregistré des succès tactiques considérables, sans toutefois parvenir à éliminer les causes profondes de l'extrémisme violent. La persistance de la pauvreté, du chômage, de la dégradation environnementale, de la porosité des frontières internationales, de la mauvaise gouvernance et de l'insuffisance de la coordination institutionnelle continue de compromettre la paix et la sécurité durables. L'étude établit par ailleurs que les interventions non militaires, notamment l'assistance humanitaire, le relèvement socio-économique, la réhabilitation, la réintégration et les programmes de renforcement de la résilience communautaire, constituent des éléments indispensables à une lutte antiterroriste durable. Elle conclut que la sécurité régionale dans le bassin du lac Tchad nécessite un engagement politique soutenu, un renforcement des mécanismes de partage de renseignements, une meilleure gestion des frontières et l'intégration des opérations militaires dans des interventions globales axées sur le développement. L'étude recommande le renforcement des capacités institutionnelles de la CBLT, la consolidation de la coopération sécuritaire interétatique et la promotion d'un développement socio-économique inclusif afin de s'attaquer aux facteurs structurels qui entretiennent le terrorisme dans la région.

Mots-clés : *Commission du bassin du lac Tchad ; Boko Haram ; Terrorisme ; Sécurité régionale ; Coopération interétatique ; Force multinationale mixte ; Lutte contre le terrorisme.*

Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the most formidable threats to international peace, national sovereignty, regional integration and sustainable socioeconomic development in contemporary international relations. Its increasingly transnational character has challenged traditional state-centred security arrangements and demonstrated the limitations of unilateral approaches to addressing complex security threats. Across Africa, particularly within the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, violent extremism has intensified

political instability, disrupted economic activities, weakened state institutions and generated unprecedented humanitarian challenges. The interconnected nature of these security threats underscores the importance of regional cooperation, collective security arrangements and coordinated institutional responses. Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that security challenges are frequently concentrated within geographically interconnected regions, where the security concerns of individual states become inseparable from those of their neighbours. This perspective provides an important analytical foundation for understanding the emergence of Boko Haram terrorism as a regional security challenge and the subsequent involvement of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in coordinating counterterrorism initiatives.

The Lake Chad Basin occupies a strategically important position within the African geopolitical landscape, encompassing territories shared principally by Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Historically, the region has served as a centre of agricultural production, fishing, livestock rearing, commercial exchanges and cross-border interactions among culturally diverse communities. Its extensive networks of trade, migration and socioeconomic interdependence have contributed significantly to regional integration and the livelihoods of millions of inhabitants. Asiwaju (2003) emphasises the historical importance of African borderlands as spaces of economic interaction and social integration, while Kyari (2007) highlights the relationship between human settlement, environmental resources and livelihood activities within the Lake Chad region. Nevertheless, the geographical interconnectedness that historically facilitated regional commerce and cultural exchanges has also created vulnerabilities associated with porous international boundaries, uncontrolled migration, illicit trafficking and the movement of armed groups.

The Lake Chad Basin Commission was established in 1964 by Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria through the Fort-Lamy Convention, primarily to promote the coordinated management of shared water resources, facilitate socioeconomic development and strengthen cooperation among member states. Over time, however, the Commission's responsibilities evolved in response to emerging environmental, political and security challenges. Environmental degradation, recurrent droughts, population pressures and competition over diminishing natural resources increasingly threatened the livelihoods of communities dependent on the lake. These developments contributed to migration, resource-related conflicts and socioeconomic insecurity, creating conditions that complicated regional governance and stability. The relationship between environmental vulnerability, weak institutional capacity and insecurity demonstrates the multidimensional character of the challenges confronting the Lake Chad Basin. As Ayandele (2021) observes, addressing insecurity within the region requires comprehensive approaches that extend beyond conventional military responses to incorporate governance reforms, development initiatives and community-based interventions.

The emergence of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria during the early 2000s, followed by its transformation into a violent insurgent movement in 2009, fundamentally altered the security landscape of the Lake Chad Basin. Initially associated with religious radicalism and opposition to Western-oriented political and educational institutions, the movement progressively developed into an organised insurgency characterised by attacks against government institutions, security personnel and civilian populations. The death of its founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in 2009 marked a significant turning point in the organisation's evolution, contributing to its subsequent radicalisation and expansion under Abubakar Shekau. Pérouse de Montclos (2015) situates the Boko Haram uprising within a broader context of political marginalisation, religious contestation and socioeconomic grievances in northeastern Nigeria. The movement's subsequent

expansion beyond Nigeria transformed what had initially been perceived as a domestic security problem into a transnational threat affecting neighbouring countries.

Between 2009 and 2023, Boko Haram's activities generated serious security and humanitarian consequences across the Lake Chad Basin. Attacks on civilian communities, educational institutions, markets, transportation networks and military installations contributed to widespread displacement, loss of livelihoods, destruction of infrastructure and disruptions to agricultural production and commercial activities. The insurgency also facilitated the proliferation of illicit weapons, intensified cross-border criminality and undermined public confidence in state institutions. Enobi and Johnson-Rokosu (2016) examine the socioeconomic and political implications of Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin, highlighting the interconnected consequences of terrorism for regional stability and development. Similarly, Chibuike and Innocent (2019) emphasise the damaging socioeconomic effects of terrorism, particularly its implications for investment, employment, productive activities and human security. These consequences demonstrate that terrorism constitutes not merely a military challenge but also a multidimensional development crisis requiring coordinated political, economic, humanitarian and security responses.

The persistence and geographical expansion of Boko Haram exposed the limitations of fragmented national counterterrorism strategies. Although individual states initially adopted domestic security measures to contain the insurgency, the transboundary nature of terrorist operations made unilateral interventions increasingly ineffective. The movement of insurgents across poorly monitored borders, combined with the circulation of weapons, financial resources and logistical supplies, necessitated greater cooperation among affected countries. Zabadi (2013) identifies transborder criminality as a significant challenge to African security governance, particularly where weak border-management systems facilitate illicit movements and undermine national security institutions. Similarly, Bala and Tar (2021) examine regional cooperation in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, emphasising the importance of coordinated security responses to threats that transcend national boundaries. Consequently, cooperation among Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria became an essential component of efforts to confront Boko Haram and restore regional stability.

Against this background, the Lake Chad Basin Commission emerged as an important institutional platform for strengthening interstate cooperation and coordinating regional responses to the insurgency. One of the most significant manifestations of this cooperation was the reorganisation and operationalisation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2015, with the participation of the principal Lake Chad Basin countries and Benin. The MNJTF was mandated to establish a safer and more secure environment, reduce terrorist violence, facilitate humanitarian operations and support the restoration of state authority in conflict-affected territories. Through coordinated military offensives, intelligence sharing and cross-border operations, the participating states sought to weaken Boko Haram's operational capabilities and restrict its territorial expansion. These developments reflected an increasing recognition that regional security could only be strengthened through collective action, institutional coordination and shared political commitment.

The military operations undertaken through the MNJTF recorded important tactical achievements, including the recovery of territories previously controlled by insurgents, the disruption of terrorist supply networks and the liberation of some abducted civilians. Nevertheless, the persistence of insurgent attacks, the emergence of competing extremist factions and the continued vulnerability of border communities revealed the limitations of exclusively military approaches. The structural conditions facilitating violent

extremism, including poverty, unemployment, political marginalisation, weak governance, environmental degradation and limited access to basic social services, remained insufficiently addressed. Ayandele (2021) underscores the importance of non-military actors and development-oriented interventions in addressing insecurity within the Lake Chad region. This suggests that sustainable counterterrorism strategies must combine security operations with initiatives aimed at strengthening governance, restoring livelihoods, rebuilding communities and promoting social cohesion.

Recognising these limitations, the LCBC, in collaboration with the African Union and international development partners, adopted the Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin in August 2018. The strategy represented an important transition towards a more comprehensive regional security framework that integrated military operations with humanitarian assistance, socioeconomic recovery, governance reforms, peacebuilding and community resilience. Its nine strategic pillars addressed political cooperation, security and human rights, disarmament and reintegration, humanitarian assistance, governance, socioeconomic recovery, education, prevention of violent extremism, and the empowerment of women and young people. The strategy recognised that sustainable peace requires not only the military containment of terrorist organisations but also the restoration of legitimate state authority, the rebuilding of social institutions and the creation of meaningful socioeconomic opportunities for affected populations.

Despite these regional initiatives, the effectiveness of the LCBC in combating Boko Haram remained constrained by several institutional, operational and structural challenges. Differences in national security priorities, inadequate financial and logistical resources, intelligence-sharing difficulties, weak border surveillance, governance deficiencies and the persistence of socioeconomic vulnerabilities complicated the implementation of collective security arrangements. Furthermore, the capacity of terrorist groups to reorganise, recruit new members and exploit local grievances continued to threaten the sustainability of military achievements. These challenges raise important questions concerning the effectiveness of regional institutions in addressing transnational terrorism and the extent to which cooperation among sovereign states can produce sustainable security outcomes. Within the framework of regional security analysis, Buzan and Wæver (2003) provide a useful perspective for examining how geographical proximity, interconnected threats and institutional cooperation influence security relationships among neighbouring states.

It is within this context that the present study examines the role of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in the fight against Boko Haram terrorism between 2009 and 2023. Specifically, the study investigates the historical emergence and evolution of Boko Haram within the Lake Chad Basin, examines the underlying factors responsible for its expansion, evaluates the contribution of interstate cooperation and the MNJTF to regional counterterrorism efforts, and assesses the effectiveness of military and non-military strategies implemented under the auspices of the LCBC. Particular attention is given to the relationship between collective security arrangements, regional institutional capacity and the structural conditions that continue to sustain violent extremism.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the opportunities and limitations of regional cooperation in addressing complex transnational security threats in Africa. By examining the experiences of the Lake Chad Basin countries over the period 2009–2023, the study provides insights into the relationship between regional security governance, counterterrorism operations and sustainable peacebuilding. It further highlights the necessity of integrating military interventions with socioeconomic development, institutional reforms, community participation and regional diplomatic

cooperation. Ultimately, the study argues that the long-term effectiveness of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in combating Boko Haram depends not only on the operational capacity of regional security forces but also on the political commitment of member states to address the underlying socioeconomic, environmental and governance challenges that continue to sustain insecurity in the region.

The Background and Establishment of Lake Chad Basin Commission

The Lake Chad Basin countries of Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria and Chad created the Lake Chad Basin Commission in 1964 during a historic Convention at Fort-Lamy in Chad. At first the Commission was trusted with the responsibility of managing water resources that crisscrossed the entire region. Around the 1960s, there was a drastic shrinking of the lake caused by climate change and this led to decrease of the waters in the region. The environmental crisis resulted in massive movement and displacement of people and animals which impacted negatively on the economic activities leading to security crisis among the people. In the 2000s, the region was hit by Boko – Haram terrorism and since then, not a day passed without loss of life being recorded in the region. This article assesses the role played by state cooperation particularly within the platform of the LCBC in the fight against Boko – Haram terrorism. The establishment of the LCBC was in two parts:

i. It was established with the mandate of developing the natural potentials, resolution of disputes between states and maintenance of security in the region.
ii. The emergence of Boko – Haram terrorism and the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force which was an instrument of the commission to fight against the Boko – Haram activivities.

This article is particularly concerned with the second part, that is, the role of the commission in the fight against terrorism at the LCB region. Prior to this time, the states' objective was to intensify their cooperation for the development of the Lake Chad Basin as stipulated in the preamble and the statute of the 1964 Fort-Lamy Convention. According to Moussa (1998), the founding fathers of LCBC were aware that without the help of the international community, the promotion of regional development through the economic exploitation of natural resources would be a failure. Consequently, donors and development aid organizations such as the UN Development Program (UNDP), UN Food, and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) became interested in her activities. For instance, from 1966, there was a rush into the Lake Chad Basin by these agencies for collaboration with the LCBC. As a result, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Canadian International Development Agency and the Fund for Aid and Cooperation began to intervene alongside the LCBC and assisted in the development of the basin's natural resources. Through this assistance, the LCBC was able to intervene in several fields, including agriculture, livestock and fishing.

However, the lake began to shrink due to climate change, and the challenge of solving the problems of desertification and drought sets in. The borders remained porous especially after the end of the Chadian conflict which made the task of the LCBC and its partners even more difficult. At same time, cross-border security was neglected until later in the 1990s, the region became generally unsecured especially as criminality and highway robbery broke out. As the states were struggling with these uprising, Boko – Haram terrorism busted into the region, caused chaos and desolation everywhere. At same time, soon after the creation of the LCBC in 1964, all the states of the region were faced with internal political crises and Heads of State were more concerned with the restoration of peace within their respective states while they neglected their borders resulting in

uncontrolled movements of people and armed gangs from one border to another. In all of this, Boko – Haram showed up and became the new security challenge and combating it became part of the mandate of LCBC (Adamoli, 1998).

Geographically, Lake Chad Basin is located on the southern fringes of the Sahara desert and covers a surface area of 2, 300,000 km2. It is one of the oldest lakes in Africa and supports nearly 30 million people in Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger. Some sources stipulates that it was once as large as New Jersey but had shrunk by 90% of its original size since the 1960s. It was fed by the Chari and Logone rivers shared by Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. The Lake is found within the Sudano-Sahelian region, at the coordinates 12°20 N–14°20 N and 3°00 E–15°20 E. The sailing area is situated at the altitude of 283m and has an ethnically diverse population of about 30 million people as of 2011, and growing rapidly.

The Lake Chad for many centuries has been an economically and environmentally important area particularly for countries in contact and member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The lake is the centerpiece of critical socio-economic and ecological activities within a trans-boundary zone surrounded by four countries in the likes of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Ecologically, the lake contribute to the hydrological dynamics of the trans-boundary zone in which it is located. Being home to endemic biodiversity in the Sahel, the lake also serve as source of valuable economic resources in the region. These include the lake water and its tributaries which is being used for consumption by human and cattle, and for agricultural purpose; grasses around the lake shores and intertidal zones is used as fodder, as well as raw materials for handicraft industries. Historically, the lake played a central role in the Trans-Saharan trade as it was an important meeting place between socio-economic actors in different sectors of economic and social life (Asiwaju, 2003).

The strategic importance of the Lake Chad to the economies of a number of Sub-Saharan countries cannot be overemphasized as it has been described as “the principal sustainer of life” in the Sahel, a semi-arid band that spans the width of Africa and separates the Sahara, in the north from the savanna in the south. In terms of surface area, Lake Chad is the fourth largest lake in Africa after Victoria, Tangayinka and Nyassa respectively. Because of its unique location in the heart of the arid zone, the lake provide sustenance to fishermen, pastoralists and agriculturalists living on its shores and remain a “focal point for the intermixture of peoples and cultures for centuries”. In fact, according to Kyari Mohammed (1996), the lake and its environs supported a variety of animal and plant life including man. The shore of the lake has been very important and attractive pasture lands for different pastoral groups such as the Yedina, Kanembu, Shuwa-Arabs and Fulani, hence, the concentration of these nomadic pastoral groups around the shores of the lake from the fourteenth century down to the present era. However, following the massive influx of different groups into the Lake Chad Basin after the fourteenth century, the area became an important center of commercial activities in cattle and natron. While the market towns of western Borno became well known for the cattle trade, places like Kauwa, Moduwari, Yamia and Gudimuni became famous for natron production and trade. By the nineteenth century, the strategic importance of the lake had attracted the attention of many adventurers including European explorers.

The lake has been a source of livelihood for people living in the Basin, feeding a vast farmland, fishing and livestock network. Shared by Cameroon, Chad, CAR, Niger and Nigeria, the lake is of paramount importance to other countries beyond its boundaries such as Algeria, Sudan and even Libya. These eight countries combined have an estimated population of 373.6 million, with 12% of the people living around the lake. In fact, the Lake Chad serve as a major hub of fertile economic activities for the border communities

and contribute immensely to the national growth of all the countries that make up its boundaries.

Until the lake began to shrink with about 90% of its original size in the 1960s, the farmers, pastoralists, fishermen and traders in the area enjoyed good standard of living because business was booming and there was stability in the region. Consequent upon the shrinking, food insecurity rose dramatically, with more than seven million people in the sub-region facing the threat of famine and over five hundred thousand children suffered from malnutrition. As such, the fishermen were left without any means of earning a living due to the drastic decrease in fish varieties, the farmers and pastoralists struggled to make a living due to water shortage in the lake. This led to massive migration of people in search of greener pastures which resulted in conflicts along the borders of the sub-region. As water became scarce, competition for it increased and cooperative relationships began to fall apart. Farmers started to divert water for agriculture, pastoralist diverted water for livestock raising, and fishing communities that needed the lake water to sustain their fishing practices started to have conflict. Worst of all, the activities of Boko – Haram led to a catastrophic decline in agricultural production which used to be the economic mainstay of the region. Consequently, this forced tens of thousands of people to cross borders in search of food and safety, thereby creating major humanitarian crisis and all kinds of trans-border crimes.

In terms of human existence and cultural development of the Lake Chad, MacEachern (2012) claim that human settlement of the southern Lake Chad Basin probably took place in two stages from the end of the Pleistocene onward: firstly, during the early Holocene climatic amelioration, and secondly, during the mid-Holocene regression of Megachad, which according to MacEachern, exposed wide expanses of sand and clay plains suitable for grazing and agriculture and seems to be associated with more intensive settlement.

Other available data on the emergence of human population at the Lake Chad Basin area is found in the earliest evidence of hominin occupation found in Western Africa, and it appears that the Lake Chad region had been continuously settled since 500 BC, particularly the Sao civilization; it was believed that the modern Kotoko, a fishing people on the Chari near Lake Chad, were descendants of the Sao. Other ethnic groups settled on the shores of Lake Chad in the more recent past, like the Arab settlement, dated from the arrival of the Judam peoples in the 16th century, the Fulani pastoralists who migrated into the Lake Chad lowlands on seasonal basis, and Hausa agricultural communities that can often be found along the Lake. The economy of these people was based primarily on fishing, subsistence and commercial agriculture, and animal husbandry, confirming the role of migration of different people who converged on the lake occasioned by the availability of sources that supported fishing, agriculture and grazing for fishermen, farmers and pastoralists respectively (Andrew, 2008).

However, the population of Lake Chad region was diverse and the official languages spoken in the Lake Chad basin by the countries were either English or French, which was a reflection of their respective colonial masters: the British colonized the modern state of Nigeria, while the French colonized Chad, Niger, and part of Cameroon. Most people in the Lake Chad Basin presently speak several local dialects such as Kanuri, which is also spoken in Niger and Nigeria; Fulfude, spoken in Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon, while Arabic is spoken by the Chadians.It is important to note that most people in the region also speak Hausa, which is a popular language in Northern Nigeria. The interactions between different tribes and their cultures as well as religions over the years has increased social interactions among the different ethnic groups in the basin area. This multiculturalism and pluralism in terms of cultures, languages and religions contributed to the survival and the flourishing of the zone for many decades. For example, the Kanuri

language spoken by majority dates back to the Kanem Bornu Empire, The Wadai, Bighirmi and the Peul Empire of Sokoto, reflects the historical linkage of the people before the coming of the colonial masters.

The Lake Chad Basin population is one of the fastest growing in the world. The population has been on the increase and up to 37 million in 2004 (according to UNEP report) and about 50 million in 2015 (Lake Chad Basin Commission) with projections that it may reach 80 million by 2030, mainly made up of people from the four riparian states of Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria, with up to 39 million people having direct access to the Lake and Nigerians making up about 60 percent of these riparian town's population.

Historical Background and Evolution of Boko – Haram Terrorist Group in the Lake Chad Basin Area

Before looking at the historical background of Boko-Haram, its evolution and consequences in the Lake Chad Basin, it is of importance to look at what is Boko-Haram. The term Boko – Haram denotes that Western Education is forbidden and that its influence is considered as a sin, while westernization is a sacrilege - this formed the ideological base of the group. Although the history of Boko – Haram terrorist group remains contestable, scholars such as Onuoha (2016), Pérouse de Montclos (2015), and Walker (2018) in their works traced its origins to the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri and that it gradually spread into neighboring states within the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) area. They also linked Muhammed Yusuf who was recruited by the more radical and extremist figure, Muhammad Ali as the founding father of Boko – Haram. However, Yusuf's extremist views led to his expulsion from the Indimi Mosque, Maiduguri, Nigeria. Nkwede et'al (2015) in their work claimed that Boko – Haram started as a religious group in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, North-Eastern Nigeria by Ustaz Mallam Muhammed Yusuf and that the group later moved to Kanamma in Yobe State in 2004 where it setup a camp called "Afghanistan" from where it criticized, verbally attacked and preached against the activities of civil societies, security agencies and other attributes of western education. By corroborating the above scholarly views on the origin of Boko – Haram, one thing is clear – that the group was founded by late Mallam Muhammed Yusuf, and also that the group is mainly against western education or ideology of socialization.

Investigation also show that after the death of Ali, Yusuf became the leader of Boko – Haram, under whom the group became radicalized and gained national and international recognition and collaboration especially with AI-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb. He did not only preach all over the Lake Chad region, but reorganized Boko – Haram to launch an offensive against the Nigerian state. In 2009, when Yusuf was killed, Abubakar Shekau assumed leadership of the group. Shekau maintained the essential ingredients of the ultra-salafi radicalism espoused by Yusuf and also introduced a global vision for the group when he openly identified with other global jihadist organizations by sending condolences on behalf of the mujahideen in Nigeria and the Lake Chad, to the mujahideen in the Islamic State of Iraq, Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Yahya Al-Libi (Onuoha, 2016).

However, Boko – Haram emerged as a peaceful local Salafist Islamic movement whose original aim was preaching and assisting the needy. In 2009, a dispute erupted between Nigerian authorities and the group members which led to the raiding of its complex where over 700 people were killed, and the arrest of Yusuf himself who was later killed while in police custody. This gradually escalated the group into a regional concern as its activities moved beyond the confines of northeast of Nigeria into neighboring states. In fact, Boko – Haram began to carry out its activities in the various areas of the Lake Chad region,

where the borders of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria meet, making incursions into each of these countries, thus internationalizing its activities.

Since 2009, Boko – Haram became driven by the desire for vengeance against politicians, police, and Islamic authorities for their role in a brutal suppression of the group that year. They pledged its allegiance to Al-Qaeda of I raq (AQI) and began to target government forces and civilians to impose strict Islamic rule in northern Nigeria as was reported in an article by Abimbola Adesoji in Daily Sun Newspaper of 23 June, 2010. However, there was a split within the group in 2011 that led to the creation of the Islamic State of West Africa Province, and with the creation of Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria, Boko – Haram and ISWAP took control of the vast Lake Chad region. Terrorist groups and other non-state actors exploited the route of Lake Chad for smuggling of illegal arms and illicit drug trafficking, as the area became a hub of almost daily attacks by the Islamic terrorist group. Within few years of its existence, Boko – Haram evolved from being a local insurrectionary group in northeastern Nigeria to a trans-border terrorist group with international affiliations as its operational scope enlarged beyond the confines of Nigeria.

The group's practice of killing and abducting Nigerian nationals and non-national could be considered as an attempt to export its ideologies to other countries particularly, Niger, Chad and Cameroon which have experienced Boko – Haram in its cruel form. Book – Haram established links with various terrorist formations such as Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda of Mali in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and also received human and material support from them. The group's allegiance to the Islamic States of Iraq (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its association with Al-Qaeda, the Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis-Sudan (Ansaru) are strong indications of its external expansions and linkage. It is therefore imperative to identify the root causes of Boko – Haram terrorism at the Lake Chad region. As cited in the work of Ma'azu (2011), Boko – Haram was caused by several factors among which include…

> *… (i) Repressive attack against the religious group by the government in 2009, (ii) The extra judicial killings of their Leader Muhammad Yusuf and others in 2009, (iii) Exclusion of members of the Group by mainstream Islamic groups, (iv) Failure of Governance in Borno and Bauchi states, (v) Abject poverty and high rate of unemployment in the northern states, (vi) Proliferation of arms in the north east, (vii) Chadian civil war and illegal immigration, (viii) Disconnect between elected and appointed leaders and the people, (ix) Absence of a rehabilitation program for religious fundamentalists, (xi) Indolence and negligence of the northern states governors, (xii) Misuse of security votes by states Governors,…*

To this end, the root causes of terrorism, with particular reference to Boko – Haram at the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) include the following:

Ungoverned Spaces

It is important to know that the areas where Boko – Haram terrorist activities thrived are the peripheral parts of the four states of LCB – Northeastern Nigeria, Diffa region of Niger, Far North Region of Cameroon and Lac Region in Chad. Many of these communities historically experience limited interactions with the state and reduced relationship with the power centers which bred feelings of marginalization and disconnect from the state itself. However, where the state is present, allegations of corruption, poor governance and mismanagement reinforced the narrative that government is not present to serve the

people, this further reduced people's allegiance to the state, with many prepared to "go it alone". According to report from Transparency International on Corruption Perceptions Index in 2017, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad were ranked very poor and corrupt, and at the same time, report on the accusation of civilian abuses by the security forces in the region was high and further bred resentment against the state (Zabadi, 2013).

This limited state presence, over the years enabled criminal networks to operate freely in the border regions even prior to the emergence of Boko – Haram in 2009. In fact before 2009, the region was previously known for organized crime with weak state presence leading to *de facto* havens for violent criminal groups. Smuggling of consumer product, vehicles, cigarettes, genuine and fake medicine (such as tramadol), weapons, drugs, etc, and banditry was also common, to the point that Cameroon developed a special force – The Rapid Brigade Intervention known in French acronym as (BIR) to address the issue. Other armed groups, prior to 2009 had also taken advantage of the lack of state presence to establish sanctuaries in the region, example, the Lake Chad was a stage for the Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ) which targeted the Chadian government in the 1990s. Prior to 2009, serious security threats in the northeast of Nigeria had started through the instrumentality of the Chadian rebels of the early 1980s.

This rebel groups took over the shores of the Lake Chad region to launch guerilla attacks on Chadian government and into Nigeria and extreme part of northern Cameroon in search for fund and supplies. They took advantage of the poor presence of government and the remoteness of the extreme northeastern Nigerian region and far northern Cameroon areas around the Lake Chad. In essence, the combination of limited state presence, corruption and maladministration where state was present, provided a fertile ground for criminal activities, given that the Lake Chad's watery expanses are difficult to control, the porous nature of national boundaries and the cross-border linkages, the region provide a suitable environment for actors who wish to use it as a base to challenge the state authority even before the emergence of Boko – Haram in 2009.

Unemployment and Underdevelopment

In addition to limited state presence, unemployment, underdevelopment and illiteracy also provide a veritable ground for all kinds of trans-border crime to take place in the Lake Chad region like in Cameroon's Far North Region which hosts about four million inhabitants. This is the most populated region in Cameroon and also the poorest region, with 74% of the population living below the poverty line. The underdevelopment of this region according to Ayandele (2021) affects more than 75% of young people and play a role in luring this young people to explore the opportunities provided by the terrorist groups. The rate of underdevelopment in this part of Cameroon was reflected in the inhabitant limited access to basic services such as health care and education resulting in very low literacy rate (lowest in Cameroon) according to U.N. report (2013). These communities are located along the border with Nigeria, with very poorly educated population who can only read the Quran but cannot speak either of the two official languages (English or French). Also the north-eastern part of the Nigerian border, with the highest concentration of border communities was listed as one of the most backward due to its difficult terrain, very low level of literacy, and a very high poverty, and unemployment rate.

In general, throughout Lake Chad, there has been a clear lack of economic and social infrastructure, especially in rural areas due to lack of state presence. This translate to lack of education, particularly for young girls, lack of access to basic services, lack of development, absence of a comprehensive road system, etc.—all of these combined to influence criminal activities across the borders in a bit to eke out a living due to the gradual shrinking of the lake(Osewa,2013). Osewa reiterated in his work that in an

undeveloped society where citizens lack employment, education, food, shelter, housing, clothing and have no access to social amenities, citizens become frustrated and tend to look for a way of survival at all means, therefore becoming easily brainwashed and bought over by the terrorist groups to act as an instrument of terror on the state.

Desertification and Environmental Pressure

Giving the drying up of its waters in the 1960s, the Lake Chad region suffers enormous environmental pressure which cause massive movement within the four states that have contact with the lake, resulting into demographic shifts. Additionally, scarce natural resources and significant population growth expose communities to poverty, hardship and resource conflict between pastoralists, farmers and fishers. This condition provides opportunities for non-state actors to mobilize individuals who were disconnected over livelihood, insecurities, coupled with limited alternatives and lack of government support into all kinds of cross-border criminality.

Social and Religious Dynamics

The Lake Chad Basin has a deep religious history, since the introduction of Islam dating back hundreds of years. Northern Nigeria in particular has seen a number of religious based revival movements in its history ranging from the Fulani jihad in the early 1800s, Maitatsine uprising of the 1980s in Kano, to the emergence of Mohammed Yusuf's anti-establishment preaching in Maiduguri in the 2000s. It is important to note that what emerges in one country often influences and/or has linkages throughout the region as was evident by the spread of reformist and anti-Sufi Izala Movement in Niger, and Maitatsine founder, Mohammed Marwa's roots in northern Cameroon. In addition, students from Cameroon, Niger, and Chad frequently traveled to Nigeria for religious study and education which further extend the linkage.

Mohammed Yusuf started to advocate for the resistance of western education and democratic participation and urged the path of change through a jihad. With Yusuf's death, Abubakar Shakau took over the movement and led it down towards the use of violence. In essence, the ideological roots of what became known as Boko – Haram lay in large part, in a deepening conservative Salafist streak in northern Nigeria. The violent manifestation of this movement spread to other parts of the Lake Chad region given the cross-border linkages and influence while demonstrating the deep history and association with conservative religious movements. In fact religious extremism cannot be waved away when assessing the root causes of Boko – Haram terrorism. For example, according to The Guardian News (2014), religious extremism was the main driver of terrorism.

The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The increase in the number of arms production and circulation in the region was one of the causes of Boko – Haram terrorism as no terrorist act could be easily championed without the availability and the use of arms such as A.K.47 riffles, bombs, knife and cutlasses, Rocket – Propelled Grenade (RPG), Sub-Machine Guns (SMG), General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG), and armored tanks were proliferated around the region and easily accessed by Boko – Haram. These weapons were acquired by illegal means along the already porous borders and illegal routes within the region.

Foreign influence (Islamic Mission)

As earlier stated, the movement started as an Islamic group that operated in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria with the aim of establishing a Sharia state in Nigeria, destabilize

the government and remove western influence from Nigeria. Boko-Haram has allies in other countries in which they are loyal to and does not operate at its own discretion; they have a similar vision to be accomplished with their allies in another country. The mission of Islamization is to be accomplished in most of the countries, especially in Asia and Africa. This is why assistance in the form of materials, money, and weaponry is often given to Boko – Haram illegally through the unmanned illegal routes found in the bushes.

Political Greed

According to Oladimeji (2016), some politicians sponsored Boko – Haram. He reveals that politicians would hide under religion, submit themselves to the terrorist group as Islamist, and claim to fight same course with that of the terrorist group. He further reveals that politicians sponsor activities of terrorism in Nigeria to destabilize government of the day. In response to the crisis brought about by Boko – Haram, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was formed, and in 2015 it was reconfigured into a more elaborate and robust regional force to fight the expansion of Boko – Haram and was structured into four sector headquarters; that is, Mora in Cameroon—Sector 1, Baga-Sola in Chad—Sector 2, Mongonu in Nigeria—Sector 3, Diffa in Niger—Sector 4 and the Benin contingent. There was also the MNJTF headquarters in N'djamena, Chad under the commandership of Nigeria and political leadership of the LCBC. The mandate of setting up of the MNJTF was to:

I. To create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by terrorist activities and reduce violence against civilians and other abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence.
II. To facilitate the stabilization programs of LCBC in affected areas which included full restoration of state authority and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees?
III. To facilitate humanitarian operations and the delivery of assistance to the affected populations.

To achieve the above, the MNJTF under the political leadership of LCBC conducted military and non – military operations (Cameron, 2005).

In 2015, the Peace and Security Council of the AU (AUPSC) met to discuss the expansion of the MNJTF following the attack and killing of several soldiers and civilians by Boko – Haram at the force's headquarters in Baga, Nigeria. The AUPSC decided to support the efforts of the LCBC member states and the Republic of Benin by endorsing the Concept of Operations of the Force on 3 March 2015. On 28 July 2015, the United Nations Security Council issued a Presidential Statement that called upon the International Community and Donors to support the MNJTF operations in the fight against Boko – Haram.

Thus, the force's mandate was expanded to focus on preventing Boko –Haram's free access in the region, and by way of fortifying and energizing it, the number of troops was increased and its leadership transferred to the LCBC. Its headquarters was moved from Baga, Nigeria, to N'Djamena in Chad, and the force's commandership was handed to Nigeria, under the political leadership of the LCBC. In the second phase of its operations, the LCBC implemented the Regional Stabilization Strategy (RSS) to address the root causes of the Boko – Haram insurgency and to put an end to the conflict. In a bid to ensure stabilization of the region, the Council of Ministers of LCBC, endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AUPSC), on 30 August 2018, adopted the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RSS) of the Boko – Haram affected areas of the Lake. The strategy was implemented in eight targeted territories of the four member states and structured around nine inter-related strategic pillars of intervention that defined the broad scope of work to achieve its objectives. These were:

Pillar 1 Political cooperation
Pillar 2 Security and Human rights
Pillar 3 Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, Reinsertion and Reintegration of Persons associated with Boko – Haram
Pillar 4 Humanitarian Assistance
Pillar 5 Governance and Social Contract
Pillar 6 Socio-economic Recovery and Environmental Sustainability
Pillar 7 Education, Learning and Skills
Pillar 8 Prevention of Violent extremism and Building Peace
Pillar 9 Empowerment and Inclusion of Women and Youth

The strategy was strengthened by nine guiding principles which were to guide its implementation:

i. National and Regional ownership
ii. Leadership: National, Regional and Continental
iii. Mutual Accountability
iv. Co-operation and Complementarity
v. Mutually Reinforcing Partnerships
vi. Transformative Approaches to Stabilization/Development
vii. Respect for Regional, Continental & International Human Rights Instruments
viii. Capacity Building for Effective Service Delivery
ix. Gender Mainstreaming

It is pertinent to note that the RSS was a product of consultations from LCBC and various stakeholders and its implementation was led by the commission which mandate among others, included to promote regional integration, peace and security of the basin.

In 18 July 2019, the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) was launched to mobilize an estimated budget of USD100m to carry out stabilization interventions in the affected territories by the UNDP, with support from Germany, Sweden, UK, Netherlands, the European Union (EU), and the African Development Bank (AFDB). According to Ambassador Mamman Nuhu, USD60m was raised in 2019 and was used to address some humanitarian challenges. This was a rapid-

Intervention mechanism that relevant authorities adopted to ensure immediate follow-up in specific locations, with the goal to curtail the ability of Boko – Haram to re-infiltrate and exploit security gap and perceptions of government negligence by the community. The facility was engaged in two types of support to consolidate MNJTF military progress; i) The Joint Action Plan (JAP) which_was concerned with the immediate stabilization of insecure areas in collaboration with governors and relevant ministries at the national level. ii) The second was aimed at long-term stabilization at the regional level by strengthening the commission's capacities to implement the strategy and multi-partner cooperation mechanisms under the Territorial Action Plan (TAP). The interventions focused on four of the nine pillars, that is, Pillars 5, 6, 8, and 9 – Governance and Social Contract, Socio-economic Recovery and Environmental Sustainability, Prevention of Violent extremism and Building Peace, and Empowerment and Inclusion of Women and Youth respectively (Buzan, 2003).

The RSF had two types of windows; 1) four national windows that provided immediate stabilization (for 18 months) in the specific target areas of the four affected countries. The activities under this windows sought to provide community safety and security, essential infrastructure and basic services and livelihood opportunities, while 2) the regional window provided support for the implementation of the strategy and aimed at facilitating LCBC transition from humanitarian assistance to longer-term development and resilience

by supporting the commission, strengthen its capacity for the implementation of the RSS, cross-border cooperation and coordination, development of Territorial Action Plans (TAPs) and coordination mechanisms. For example, in 2021, UNDP Nigeria through the RSF implemented capacity building, construction and livelihood activities in targeted communities of northeastern Nigeria.

The Role of State Cooperation in the Fight against Boko – Haram Terrorism at the Lake Chad Basin Area.

State cooperation refers to the political and institutional mechanisms that countries devise to strengthen common interests as well as promoting their national interests, through mutual cooperation and dialogue. This is formed as governments of different nations agree to work together towards a common goal, politically, militarily, and economically. What this means in simple terms is that if one country faces a significant security threat, there is the likelihood that nearby states will become insecure too, hence the need for effective collaboration or cooperation among the countries to tackle the risks of insecurity. For instance, Boko – Haram originated in Nigeria and was initially considered a Nigerian internal security problem, but quickly escalated into a regional problem spreading its terrorist activities into neighboring countries of Cameroon, Niger and Chad. In other word, if crisis in one country affects the other, there is a likelihood of a unanimous agreement upon the actions to employ and that alliance between and among states is crucial in international relations as they form the basis for combating a common enemy.

However, this research having assessed the evolution of Boko – Haram terrorism and its consequences at the LCB region, it is pertinent to assess the role of state cooperation in the fight against the group in the region. This idea prompted the states affected by terrorism in the LCB region to harness their collective efforts against terrorists under the platform of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). As such, the joint effort by Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad to combat terrorism is a notable example of state cooperation.

The role played by states cooperation in the fight against BH terrorism cannot be overemphasized, as it was offered as a cure for a number of ills and acknowledged as a critical component in the push to develop greater counter-terrorism (CT) capacity. In order to effectively counter terrorism, it is importance that states facilitate some multilateral understanding or agreement with locals of where terrorism is likely to emerge, not just where it is already.

It is pertinent to note that more militarily developed states have secured borders, and therefore continuously increase ability to monitor them. However, much of the contemporary terrorist violence is concentrated in regions and states which had struggled to police their borders, example is seen in the rise of trans-border terrorist activities in the LCB – a region with thousands of kilometers of largely uncontrolled and ungoverned spaces and porous borders. The European Union adopted this method and made some strides in June 2018, when the EU Council signed off on the Commission's proposal to deepen Counterterrorism collaboration and information exchange with eight countries including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. Likewise, in the LCB region, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was reinvigorated to deal decisively with Boko – Haram terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), with the support of African Union (AU) developed a Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko – Haram affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin to address the multidimensional security challenges in the area. This strategy was adopted in 2018 by the LCBC, endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the AU. The decision to develop a regional stabilization strategy was

born out of recognition that a multilateral response is required because neither causes nor effects of the crisis respect national borders. For this purpose, according to Wittin (2013), the mandate of the LCBC were expanded to include cooperation against trans-border terrorist activities within the borders of the LCB states through different ways including formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

Lake Chad Basin Commission and Military Strategy in the Fight against Boko –Haram

The MNJTF was LCBC instrument of war against terrorism at the LCB region. Since its inception in late 2014 and early 2015, the MNJTF conducted joint operations which involved mainly Chadian troops deployed into other countries which helped to stem Boko – Haram's spread in 2015/16 and pressurized the group, resulting in its split into faction – the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). In 2016, 2017 and 2018, the MNJTF launched short operations, which saw Chadian and, to a lesser extent, Cameroonian and Nigerien troops entered into Nigeria to help pushed back jihadists tagged operations, Gama Aiki (Finish the Job, in Hausa) in 2016 – this operation affected the flow of supplies to the terrorists; offensives were mounted along the bank of the river, which led to the release of some of their civilians captives. In 2017, Operation Rawan Kada (Crocodile Dance in Hausa) was launched – this resulted in the arrest of Boko – Haram members in the town of Liwa and helped to curbed arms smuggling in Daboua, Chad. There was Operation Gama Aiki II in 2017 and as a follow up, Operation Amni Fakat (Peace at All Costs) was launched in 2018 respectively which led to killing of terrorists, suicide bombers and destruction of gun trucks belonging to the groups in Gashigar, Arege and Metele communities. These three operations weakened Boko – Haram and reduced its ability to hold territories or attack towns and military installations. They were dislodged from their strongholds; their captives were freed and borders under their control were taken back.

In early 2019, the Lake Chad states deepened its cooperation as Chadian troops reinforced their positions on its side of the lake and troop numbering over 1,000 entered Nigeria in February, 2019 in what was called Operation Yancin Tafki (Lasting Freedom, in Hausa). The cooperating states extended the 2019 operation (Yancin Tafki) to the end of 2019 in an attempt to address the flaws of the previous on-again, off-again offensives which gave the terrorist group the space to regroup. It was also reported that Operation Yancin Tafki put ISWAP under considerable pressure, boosted Nigerian forces' morale and helped to secure Sector 3 of the MNJTF's operational area which covers part of Borno State, Nigeria.

The LCBC through the MNJTF allowed for greater tactical cooperation on the ground which at times also occurred outside MNJTF zones (but not beyond 20km) without the authority of force's headquarters because of the spirit of cooperation brought about by the regional force. In fact, according to a respondent, the force was seen as a symbol of regional cooperation and expressed pride at working with colleagues from other neighboring countries.

Lake Chad Basin Commission and Non – Military Strategy in the Fight against Boko -Haram

Since 2016, the four Boko – Haram affected countries have addressed insecurity through both military and non-military strategies. This was necessary since military operations alone proved to have been insufficient to defeat the sect and its factions. While this research recognizes the importance of military strategy, a successful fight against Boko – Haram required developmental solutions. For this purpose, the different national governments of the affected areas, at local or national levels adopted some non – military initiatives to fight against terrorism. For example, in Niger, a demobilization sites were

set up in 2016 and adopted a special and comprehensive security and stabilization framework called "Projet de Stratégie de Sortie de Crise de Terrorisme dans la Region de Diffa" to support Diffa Region. The initiative was a security and development strategy for the Sahel and provided a framework for how Diffa could begin to build on the successes registered by military response in order to consolidate stability and peace. Also in Nigeria, the government launched the Buhari Plan in 2016 by setting up a Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative (PCNI) to coordinate the establishment of Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) which provided rehabilitation and reintegration support to low-risk surrendered Boko – Haram fighters and also created the North-East Development Commission (NEDC) to tackle the root causes of terrorism.

This non – kinetic strategy became very effective, for example, after an intense military operation that led to the death of Abubakar Shakau in 2021, over 70,000 terrorists left the group. The OPSC was adopted as 'soft slap' to lure militants away from Boko – Haram. It was a multi-agency humanitarian arrangement spearheaded by Nigeria's Defence Headquarters (DHQ) to encourage terrorists to renounce their membership of Boko – Haram and surrender to the state. Similar initiatives were also adopted in Chad and Cameroon, with supports from the international community to raise the profile of the Lake Chad crisis and build momentum for holistic approaches to address the crisis. For instance, in March 2017, the United Nations Security Council visited the Lake Chad Region on a fact-finding mission which resulted in UN Security Council Resolution 2349 (2017) that condemned all terrorist attacks, violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses by Boko – Haram. However, these well intended initiatives were marred with institutional corruption that ravaged the countries' security forces and mismanagement of funds meant to fight terrorism as evident in the 2017 Transparency International (TI) report on Nigeria, that corrupt military officials looted terrorism funds and transferred proceeds abroad.

In July 2017, the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) undertook a field assessment mission to the Lake Chad Basin countries (LCB). Consequently, the AU PSC in its report reinforced its call for a comprehensive approach in the fight against Boko – Haram by taking a transformative approach to address the root causes of violent extremism, radicalization, poverty, illiteracy and massive youth unemployment.

In February 2018, heads of state from the region convened in Abuja at the International Conference on Lake Chad to explore regional solutions to address the diminishing water levels of Lake Chad which resulted in the endorsement of an inter-basin water transfer to recharge the lake waters, which would address one of the root causes of the crisis. Nevertheless, at the 489th meeting of AUPSC held on 3 March 2015, the Council authorized the deployment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the region for an initial period of twelve months as efforts by the Member States of the commission and Benin to create a safe and secure environment and contribute to stabilizing the situation in the Boko – Haram affected areas.

Consequently, military operations were carried out successfully and degraded the capacity of the group to wage large-scale operations and also dislodged it from strongholds. Despite this feat, the overall success was to be determined by the level of long-term consolidation of achievements following the first phase of MNJTF military operations. However, the transition from a military operations to a long-term stabilization was dependent on the second phase of the mandate as highlighted in the Strategic Concept of Operations of the Force, namely to facilitate the implementation of overall stabilization program by the commission member states and Benin, including full restoration of state authority and the return of IDPs and refugees.

In order to achieve a long term and lasting solution to the problem of terrorism at the LCB, scholars have continued to advocate the adoption of non – military strategy to compliment military strategy of the commission. One of such scholars is Omar, who stated that…

> *…states cannot kill their way to victory. Killing might work in the short run, but tends to create new anger and recruit more rebels in the long run. Terror or insurgent groups must be persuaded to stop fighting. Even if Boko – Haram were defeated, its members and extremist ideology almost certainly would live on, and other groups or remnants of Boko – Haram itself could pick up where it left off. Thus, persuasion must be part of any campaign to end its threat.*

In line with Omar's assertion, Mutah (2018) reiterates that failure to end the menace of terrorism, despite massive military deployments, both unilaterally and multilaterally, is indicative of the fact that no military force can eradicate today's violent extremism. The MNJTF, under the leadership of LCBC conducted both kinetic and non-kinetic operations in order to achieve its mandate. To achieve this, the commission was tasked to facilitate the mechanisms and processes to consolidate earlier gains of the MNJTF. In light of this, the research assesses the role of LCBC and its non – military strategy to tackle Boko – Haram at the region.

However, the Regional Stabilization Strategy was a non-military strategy established in 2018 to complement the efforts of MNJTF and member states in the stabilization of Boko – Haram affected areas. The initiative was a five-year strategy to establish an approach that addresses the structural challenges of vulnerability and insecurity for sustainable peace and development in the Lake Chad region. It was a product of consultations among experts of the LCBC, African Union Commission, and relevant agencies of the UN, civil society representatives and bilateral partners to address the key challenges at the region. The RSS was anchored on nine strategic pillars and objectives which provided a comprehensive, integrated and multi-level framework for overall stabilization to support MNJTF operations, humanitarian assistance responses, and key development initiatives to secure early recovery and longer-term resilience in the region as highlighted below:

Table 1: Showing Pillars of Intervention and Strategic Objectives

Order No.	Pillar	Strategic Objective	Description
1.	Political Cooperation	1.Enhancing Political Cooperation	To improve cooperation, coherence and complementarity among the LCB Member States
		2.Strengthening National Capacities	To support National Governments to develop harmonized national coordination mechanisms and systems, including the Governors' Forum and the regional Inter-Parliamentary Committee for an effective implementation of the strategy in the Lake Chad Region
		3.Role of Regional Economic Communities and Other Actors	To enhance and improve intra and inter regional cooperation between ECCAS, ECOWAS and CEMAC for Peace Security and Development in the LCB region
		4.Capacity of LCBC and AUC is Enhanced	To effectively enhance the capacities of the LCBC Secretariat and the AUC for the effective implementation of the strategy
2	Security and Human Rights	5. Enhancing Support to MNJTF Operations	To enhance support to the MNJTF to enable it to continue to fulfil its mandate
		6. Reinforcement of Community Security	To enhance capacities for safety and security at the community level through increased responsive law enforcement that extends and safeguards the rule of law to all

		and Restoration of Rule of Law	areas, as military forces clear the territory under Boko Haram control
		7. Management of Vigilantes	Disarmament and demobilization of vigilante groups is managed through appropriate national initiatives for their peaceful re-orientation and reintegration
		8. Promoting Human Rights	To ensure that security service providers operate at the highest levels of integrity and respect for human rights based on international and continental norms and standards, through effective internal and external oversight and accountability mechanisms, with appropriate remedial mechanisms to address alleged human rights abuses
3	DDRRR of Persons Associated with Boko Haram	9. Screening and Disarmament	To ensure that persons associated with Boko Haram are received, screened and disarmed according to a common regional approach in line with international and continental standards.
		10. Transitional Justice	To strengthen and harmonize National transitional and criminal justice systems to effectively undertake the investigation and prosecution of persons associated with Boko Haram and other forms of accountability.
		11.Rehabilitation and Reconciliation	To ensure that persons associated with Boko Haram and other violent extremist groups are rehabilitated according to a common regional approach linked to later reintegration activities and including psychosocial support, health, nutrition (in a first phase) and vocational training and income-generating activities (in a second phase)
		12.Reinsertion and Reintegration	To ensure that persons associated with Boko Haram, members of vigilante groups, returnees (including former prisoners), youth at risk and victims of Boko Haram receive community-based reintegration support, following a harmonized regional approach
4	Humanitarian Assistance	13. Humanitarian Lifesaving Response	To assist affected populations have access to basic lifesaving assistance, including food and nonfood items, clean water, health and sanitation support regardless of their respective areas of settlement.
		14. Voluntary, Safe and Dignified Return and Resettlement	To ensure that displaced persons are supported in returning to their communities of origin based on the principles of voluntary, safe and dignified return
		15. Protection	To ensure effective and full implementation of the Abuja Action Statement of 2016 on protection.
		16. Psychosocial Support and Social Cohesion	To provide affected populations access to quality psychosocial counseling services, and to actively participate in community cohesion and trust building interventions
5	Governance and the Social Contract	17. Shared Values on Good Governance	Governance norms, principles and best practices are adopted by LCBC member states
		18. Improving Service Delivery	To restore and strengthen state authority and institutional capacity to enhance the scope and improve the quality of social service delivery at the local level
		19. Enhancing Rule of Law and Accountability	To enhance the capacity of rule of Law providers to deliver effective services to citizens, civilian oversight and accountability
		20. Enhancing Public Participation and Civic Engagement	To strengthen civic engagement and participation in the implementation of the strategy
		21. Improving Cross-Border Cooperation	To strengthen cross-border and trans-boundary cooperation for mutually beneficial solutions and sub-regional integration
6	Socio-Economic	22. Supporting Sustainable Livelihoods	To support and promote livelihoods, particularly in the agricultural sector (farming, fishing and livestock) in a way

	Recovery and Environmental Sustainability		that takes account of climate change and environmental sustainability
		23. Improving Infrastructure for Regional Economic Integration	To mobilize investments to promote infrastructural development to increase economic, trade and cultural exchange
		24. Creating Conducive Business Environment	To ensure a conducive business environment is fostered through policy and legal frameworks that promote investments, trade and economic activity
		25.Ensuring Environmental Sustainability	To enhance the resilience of communities and systems around Lake Chad to adapt to environmental shocks for enhanced sustainability of interventions.
7	Education, Learning and Skills	26. Restoring Quality Safe and Inclusive Education	To ensure the restoration and access of equitable education for all women, boys and girls in a safe and secure environment under appropriate civilian authority.
		27. Promoting Professional, Vocational Training and Skills Acquisition	To promote professional technical and, vocational training skill acquisition programmes in line with job market demand.
		28. Reforming the Education Sector	To promote a reformed education system that is based on the local realities
		29. Promoting Cultural and Social Learning	To promote cultural and social learning for increased interfaith understanding, tolerance and social cohesion
		30.Developing Education Infrastructures	To develop and improve adequate education infrastructure and ensure safe and secure environment for peaceful education
		31.Promoting Advocacy and Experience Sharing	To promote advocacy and experience sharing on education between LCBC Member States.
8	Prevention of Violent Extremism and Building Peace	32.Supporting National Capacities for PVE	To support the development and implementation of national strategies and action plans for PVE in-line with international obligations and best practices
		33.PVE Education, Knowledge and Capacities	To build up indigenous capacity in order to increase knowledge about the phenomenon and the drivers of violent extremism.
		34.Mobilising Communities and Counter-Narratives	To empower local communities as actors to prevent, anticipate, and counter radical narratives
		35.Promoting Cross-Border Cooperation for P/CVE	To enhance and empower local, regional and international cooperation based on synergy, appropriation and coordination at all levels
		36.SupportingPeaceArchitecture	To build, review and strengthen local and national peace architecture, including early warning and early response mechanisms
9	Empowerment and Inclusion of Women and Youth	37. Protecting Women and Girls	To ensure effective protection measures that empower women and girls as beneficiaries and can effectively engage in the stabilization and Peace-building process as well as prevention and response to violence extremism. Protect women and girls from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse
		38.Promoting Women Participation, Empowerment and Socio-Economic Rights	UN, AUC and RECs frameworks for Women's Empowerment are domesticated and operationalized in national plans and Territorial Action Plans for the full and effective inclusion and participation of women and girls in the stabilization, recovery and resilience process, with provision for financial resources as well as coordination framework for the implementation of the National and Territorial Action Plan

		39.Youth Empowerment, Participation, and Protection	To ensure effective mechanisms are established to ensure that youth are protected, empowered and effectively engaged in structured dialogues, stabilization and peace-building process
		40.Monitoring and Accountability	To improve research, monitoring, reporting, analysis and advocacy ensures that a gender & youth-sensitive approaches are mainstreamed and that the stabilization process leverages effectively upon the capacities of girls and women.

Source: Regional strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko – Haram - affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region, August 2018.

The Regional Stabilization Strategy was part of efforts and non – military strategy by the Lake Chad Basin states under the LCBC – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria to tackle Boko – Haram terrorism which had threatened the region's peace and security. The strategy was quite detailed and covered the multidimensional challenges that faced the region, with nine pillars of intervention as well as the implementation mechanism. The joint force carried out periodic military operations that involved troops from one country that fought in the neighboring country and recorded major victories and successes. But the sect would easily regroup, multiplied and dealt the region with more attacks. By implication, the war against terrorism could not have recorded any sustainable solution without the combined efforts of kinetic and non – kinetic strategies. Efforts against the Boko – Haram depended mostly on policies of the states, of which a joint military operation was only one component, but still, the force's flaws limited its effectiveness. Nevertheless, the continued existence of Boko – Haram in the region justified the adoption of state cooperation through the instrumentality of the MNJTF as an offensive force charged with the mandate of liquidating terrorism in the region, followed by adoption of the RSS aimed at stabilizing, recovering and building resilience in the affected areas.

However, despite the many challenges and weaknesses of military approach, it is, nevertheless, key if complete and sustainable peace and security were to be achieved. It was established that despite the recorded successes and victories by regional cooperation against Boko – Haram, terrorist's attacks did not cease, they remained active and used various tactics to recruit and sustain its activities at the region. This was why, apart from the adoption of an effective military approach, there was also need to adopt the carrot and stick diplomatic or non – kinetic approach, if Boko – Haram was to be completely neutralized.

Both religious and community leaders must be engaged by the governments of LCBC members to discourage youths from joining the group. It was established that Boko – Haram sustained its activities by engaging in licit enterprise to fund its activities and by embarking on frequent recruitment of individuals to carry out attacks. This was achieved through various strategies and tactics as identified in chapter 3 of this study. The response by stakeholders to counter these strategies included various initiatives, policies, and legislations such as the National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism, the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery, and Resilience of affected areas which yielded minimal results. This was because stakeholders involved in combating the threat of Boko – Haram were confronted with numerous challenges including the inability to identify the best strategy or approach to fight terrorist expansion or recruitment in the region.

The cooperating countries needed to establish stronger border security units to collaborate in information sharing and intelligence gathering to control the movement of terrorists across international boundaries. Since the threat of terrorism in the region

became a regional security challenge, it required both military and diplomatic cooperation among the countries of the region.

Conclusion

The persistent threat of Boko Haram terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin between 2009 and 2023 represents one of the most significant security challenges confronting regional cooperation, political stability and socioeconomic development in Central and West Africa. This study examined the role of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in addressing this threat, with particular emphasis on interstate cooperation, the operational contributions of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and the implementation of military and non-military counterterrorism strategies. The study established that the transformation of Boko Haram from a predominantly Nigerian insurgent movement into a transnational terrorist organisation fundamentally altered the security dynamics of the Lake Chad Basin, necessitating collective responses from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that terrorism in the region cannot be adequately understood or addressed independently of the broader political, socioeconomic, environmental and institutional conditions that facilitate violent extremism.

The study revealed that the emergence and expansion of Boko Haram were influenced by interconnected factors, including poverty, youth unemployment, political marginalisation, weak governance, religious extremism, environmental degradation, porous international borders and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. These structural vulnerabilities created favourable conditions for terrorist recruitment, cross-border movements and the establishment of insurgent operational networks. Furthermore, the declining availability of natural resources and the disruption of traditional livelihood activities intensified socioeconomic insecurity and competition among communities. Consequently, the Boko Haram insurgency evolved beyond a conventional military threat into a multidimensional humanitarian and development crisis, characterised by population displacement, destruction of infrastructure, disruption of economic activities and the weakening of state authority.

A major finding of the study is that interstate cooperation under the institutional framework of the Lake Chad Basin Commission contributed significantly to strengthening regional responses to Boko Haram terrorism. The reorganisation of the Multinational Joint Task Force in 2015 marked an important milestone in the development of collective security arrangements among the affected countries. Through coordinated military operations, intelligence sharing and cross-border collaboration, the MNJTF recorded notable achievements in weakening insurgent capabilities, recovering territories previously controlled by terrorist groups, disrupting logistical networks and facilitating the liberation of abducted civilians. These achievements demonstrated the importance of regional solidarity and collective military action in confronting security threats that transcend national boundaries. Nevertheless, the continued activities of Boko Haram and its factions revealed that military successes, although necessary, were insufficient to guarantee sustainable peace and security.

The study further established that the effectiveness of regional counterterrorism efforts was constrained by institutional weaknesses, inadequate logistical and financial resources, differences in national security priorities, insufficient intelligence coordination and persistent governance challenges. The ability of insurgent groups to reorganise and exploit ungoverned spaces demonstrated the limitations of intermittent military operations and fragmented national security approaches. These challenges underscored the need for stronger political commitment, improved operational coordination and

sustained institutional support for regional security mechanisms. They equally highlighted the importance of strengthening the capacity of the LCBC to coordinate security initiatives, facilitate cooperation among member states and promote accountability in the implementation of regional counterterrorism policies.

Importantly, the study demonstrated that sustainable counterterrorism requires the integration of military interventions with comprehensive non-military strategies. The adoption of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of Boko Haram-affected areas in 2018 represented a significant advancement towards addressing the underlying causes and consequences of violent extremism. By incorporating humanitarian assistance, socioeconomic recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration, governance reforms, education, environmental sustainability, peacebuilding and the empowerment of women and young people, the strategy provided a broader framework for restoring stability and rebuilding conflict-affected communities. However, its effectiveness remained dependent on adequate financing, institutional coordination, community participation and the sustained commitment of national governments and international development partners.

The findings of this study have important implications for regional security governance and international cooperation in Africa. They demonstrate that collective security arrangements are indispensable in addressing transnational terrorism, particularly in regions characterised by interconnected economies, porous borders and shared socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The experience of the Lake Chad Basin further illustrates that the effectiveness of regional institutions should not be assessed exclusively through military victories or territorial recovery, but also through their capacity to restore legitimate state authority, protect civilian populations, strengthen community resilience and promote sustainable socioeconomic development. Accordingly, regional counterterrorism initiatives must adopt people-centred approaches that prioritise human security, institutional accountability, inclusive governance and the restoration of public confidence in state institutions.

In view of these findings, the study emphasises the need for the LCBC and its member states to consolidate existing security partnerships, strengthen intelligence-sharing mechanisms, improve border surveillance and ensure sustained logistical and financial support for the MNJTF. Equally important is the effective implementation of development-oriented interventions that address poverty, unemployment, environmental insecurity and political exclusion. Greater attention should be directed towards educational opportunities, youth empowerment, vocational training, livelihood restoration, community reconciliation and the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals formerly associated with violent extremist groups. Such interventions would contribute to reducing the socioeconomic vulnerabilities that facilitate terrorist recruitment while strengthening the foundations of sustainable peace.

Ultimately, this study concludes that the fight against Boko Haram terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin cannot be won through military force alone, nor can it be effectively sustained through isolated national interventions. Rather, lasting peace and security depend on a comprehensive, coordinated and multidimensional approach that combines regional military cooperation with political dialogue, institutional reforms, socioeconomic development and community-based peacebuilding initiatives. The Lake Chad Basin Commission therefore remains an important institutional mechanism for promoting collective security, regional stability and sustainable development. Its long-term effectiveness will depend on the willingness of member states to translate political commitments into coordinated actions, strengthen regional institutions and address the structural conditions that perpetuate insecurity. By consolidating the achievements

recorded between 2009 and 2023 and adopting more inclusive and sustainable approaches to counterterrorism, the Lake Chad Basin countries can establish stronger foundations for lasting peace, regional integration and socioeconomic transformation.

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