Military Alliance and Counter-Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Multi-National Joint Task Force in Perspective

1Usman A. Tar (PhD) & 2Adejoh Sunday

1Department of Political Science and Defence Studies
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna
2Department of Political Science and Diplomacy
Veritas University, Abuja
usmanatar@gmail.com
adejohsunday61@gmail.com

Abstract: Understanding the formation and consequences of formal military alliances is a research area that is central to the study of international relations. Military alliances help define and shape the nature of interactions between countries, and by structuring international obligations; they help construct the nature of the international system. Over time, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have been faced with myriads of security challenges, ranging from militancy, ethno-religious crisis, political conflict, human and drug trafficking, to trans-border crimes. In recent times however, terrorism and insurgency have become a major security threat to the sovereignty of these countries, particularly the threat of Boko Haram in the Northeast of Nigeria and countries of the Lake Chad region; hence the formation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force as a military alliance to combat terrorism. The paper is thus, an attempt to investigate the role of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in countering Boko Haram terrorism within Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In interrogating the above problem, this paper scooped from secondary data and employed the Simon Walt’s theory of alliance as analytical framework. It is the position of the paper that the MNJTF has made remarkable achievement in the fight against Boko Haram. In the final analysis, the paper recommends, among other things, the need for participating states in the MNJTF to be much more committed in terms of funding and purchase of military equipment to further enhance military preparedness and capabilities.
Introduction

Alliances play a central role in international relations because they are seen to be an integral part of statecraft. Alliances are formed between two or more countries to counter a common adversary. They have been an important research focus in the theory of international relations. This is understandable because one of the central foreign policy debates in every country centres on the issue of ‘which nation to ally with and for how long’. Strong and weak nations alike feel the need to form alliances. Weak states enter into alliance when they need protection against strong states, that is, they enter into alliances to protect or defend themselves. Strong states enter into alliances to counter other strong states- they enter into alliances to maintain balance of power. States expect their allies to help militarily and diplomatically during the time of conflict (Sangit, 2012).

Much of the realist-neoliberal debates can be interpreted as an argument over whether a balance of power or collective security equilibrium is more stable or is a more appropriate characterization of contemporary affairs (Niou and Ordeshook 1991). Benson and Clinton (2014), identification of the range of alliances that exist and probing the conditions under which various types of alliances are likely to be formed along the dimensions of scope, depth, and potential military capacity of formal military alliances, are key to understanding the role of military alliances in structuring the international system.

Scholars generally agree that alliance agreements typically specify the primary obligations of alliance members, some of which require members to become involved militarily in a broad set of circumstances, while others are more limited in scope. For example, Snyder (1997) explains that offensive alliance agreements oblige alliance members in a wide range of circumstances compared to those written to secure a third party’s neutrality in the case of a military conflict. This is the standard view of alliances—agreements with offensive and defensive provisions oblige members to commit military action to a broader range of circumstances than defensive agreements alone, and defensive agreements are broader in military scope than, say, consultation pacts or neutrality agreements, which do not bind signatories to commit militarily to any conflict and may even require states not to become involved militarily (Benson and Clinton, 2014). Scholars have emphasized the importance of these concepts for characterizing and understanding the formation and consequences of military alliances (Snyder 1997; Leeds et al, 2002; Schelling, 1966; Benson, 2011, 2012; `and Leeds and Anac, 2005).

The emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group in 2009 and its activities have posed a lot of security threats to Nigeria. However, the trans-national nature of this terrorist group, as it operates beyond the shores of Nigeria, reaching into other neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger has qualified it to be an international terrorist organization. Since 2013, the Boko Haram terrorist group has frequently attacked towns and villages, security outposts and

Keywords: Strategic Alliance, Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, MNJTF, National Security
schools, and has also kidnapped civilians, foreign tourists and missionaries in the border regions of Cameroon. Recently, there have been an increasing number of attacks in the Lake Chad Basin region along Nigeria’s borders with Chad and Cameroon and in the northern provinces of Cameroon (AU, 2015). The international dimension of Boko Haram and its implications for sub-regional security necessitated the formation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force by Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger (which were complemented by Benin, Nigeria’s immediate neighbor to the west) as a strategic military alliance to address and combat Boko Haram terrorism within the sub-region.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues
The dynamic nature of international relations and the need for states to pursue and promote their national interest have made alliance an important component of global politics. Alliance can manifest in different forms: it could be security alliance or defence alliance, as the case may be. What is however more important is the fact that states do form alliances either to contain perceived threats or to balance power against a stronger enemy.

The concept of alliance in the literature of international relations is ambiguous and amorphous (Edwin, 1968). Reflecting on this important role of alliances in world politics, the literature in international relations has produced quite an impressive list of interesting studies, articles and analyses in this area of research. However, it seems striking that despite these scholarly attempts, not much thought has been given to the question, "what is a military alliance?" (Edwin, 1968). An ordinary meaning of the term “alliance” can be found in Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary, which defines it as:

a) the state of being allied;
b) a bond or connection between families, parties, or individuals;
c) an association (as by treaty) of two or more nations to further their common interests;
d) a treaty of alliance.

This meaning also corresponds to the historical development of the term "alliance". The corresponding German term, "Allianz" developed in the 17th century out of the French word "alliance", which meant "connection", "pact" or "association between states". This French term, in turn, goes back to the old French verb aleier (= to connect, to combine, to join), which is itself rooted in the Latin verb alligare. Alligare, finally, is a compositum of Latin "ligare" (= to bind) and could be translated as "to bind" and "to combine" (Duden, 1963).

In the realist view, "the historically most important manifestation of the balance of power ... is to be found ... in the relations between one nation or alliance and another alliance" (Morgenthau 1959:169) because "alliances and regional coalitions among the weak to defend themselves from the strong have been the typical method for preserving ... balance" (Wright 1965:773). An alliance is a collective security arrangements among states in which all members of the alliance agree to not threaten each other, to punish defectors from this agreement whenever possible, and to threaten countries outside of the alliance whenever it is in their individual interest to do so.

Insofar as our understanding of alliances is concerned, we are aided by
the fact that definitions come within striking distance of acceptability by even rigorous theoretical standards. In the view of Walt's (1987:12) : "an alliance is a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states;" to Snyder's (1990:104): "alliances ... are formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states..."his view tallies with that of Liska (1968) whose sees alliance basically as a formal association between two or more states against the threat of a third, more powerful state. The association itself is what Liska calls an "alignment" and corresponds to the predictions of the balance of power theory. Alliances for him – although he uses the terms almost interchangeably – merely formalize these alignments. Conflicts are thus for him the primary determinant of alignments and alliances, with threat and power potential used as synonyms as usual in the balance of power literature: "Alliances are against, and only derivatively for, someone or something" (Liska (1968).

Alliance is described as a process or a technique of statecraft or a type of international organization (Fedder 1968: 68). Arnold Wolfer (1968: 268) sees an alliance as „a promise of mutual military assistance between two or more sovereign states“. Alliances are only the formal subset of a broader and more basic phenomenon, than that of „alignment“ (Snyder 1990: 105). The primary purpose of most alliances is to combine the member’s capabilities in a way that furthers their respective interests.

Holsti, Hopmann and Sullivan developed another very germane perspective on alliance. They were of the opinion that for an association to qualify as an alliance it must poses the following elements:

i. A formal treaty – open or secret

ii. It must be directly concerned with national security issues

iii. The partners must be nation-states

On the basis of these three elements the authors define the concept as follows: "an alliance is a formal agreement between two or more nations to collaborate on national security issues"(Holsti, et al, 1973).

Theoretical Framework

Theories are important instrument in every scientific investigation, as they serve as lenses which give insight and clarity to the researcher. For the purpose of this study, Stephen M. Walt’s theory of alliance will be employed. This is not to say that there are no other theories that can be used to examine the issues under investigation. Walt’s “balance-of-threat” theory of alliance formation (1988) is examined as a focus theory. An attempt to examine alliances and the factors precipitating can be better fashioned within the context of certain fundamental questions. No wonder Walt (1988) began his analysis of alliance by putting forward some germane questions such as “When will states form alliances, and what determines their choice of allies?” More specifically, do states tend to balance against strong or threatening powers by allying against them; are they more likely to “bandwagon” by allying with the most powerful or threatening states? If states tend to balance, "aggressors will face numerous opponents and sustained efforts to
expand are likely to fail.” However, if ‘bandwagoning’ is the dominant tendency, “threats and intimidation are more likely to work, and empires will both be easier to amass and more likely to fall apart. In his analysis of the factor that necessitates alliance, he critiques the balance of power theory and emphasized the role of threat in alliance formation. Walt further argued that balance-of-power theory focused on capabilities and ignores other factors that statesmen consider when making alliance choices. Threat, not power, is at the heart of security concerns. According to Walt, balance-of-power theory does not well describe the observed behavior of alliance formation in the historical record. It cannot explain why balances often fail to form. His balance-of-threat theory gives a better description. In Walt’s view, threat level is characterized by:

i. Overall capabilities
ii. Proximity
iii. Offensive capability (vs. defensive)
iv. Perceived intentions

Other things being equal, states that are nearby are more dangerous than those that are far away. States with large offensive capabilities defined as the capacity to threaten the sovereignty of other states pose a greater threat than states whose capabilities are more suitable for defense. Lastly, states with aggressive intentions are more threatening than those who seek only to preserve the status quo. If balancing behaviour is the norm, therefore, an increase in any of these Factors power, proximity, offensive capabilities, or aggressive intentions should encourage other states to ally against the most threatening power (Walt, 1988, 281).

Walt characterizes the concepts of balancing and bandwagoning as ideal types, and that “actual state behavior will only approximate either model.” (Walt, 1988: 282) Another problem of interpreting the historical record is distinguishing between bandwagoning and détente. In Walt’s view: Bandwagoning involves unequal exchange; the vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power and accepts a subordinate role. Détente, by contrast, involves roughly equal concessions in which both sides benefit (Walt 1988, 282).

Thus Walt (1988) puts forward three types of state behavior within the context of alliance and they are:

i. Balancing is alignment against the threatening power (rather than the most powerful one) to deter it.
ii. Bandwagoning is alignment with a dominant power, either to appease it or in the hope of profiting from its victory. (Unequal exchange, often coerced. Dominant power may extract significant, asymmetrical concessions, High risk. Requires trust that the dominant power will be benevolent).
iii. Détente is the voluntary development of peaceful relations to reduce tensions. (Equal exchange. Symmetrical concessions. Low risk. The dominant power’s attempt to exploit the relationship will collapse the détente. The state remains aligned with the balancing power against the threatening power)

From the foregoing, it is obvious that this theory is very germane to the topic under investigation. One basic argument of this theory is the fact that states form alliance not to balance power but to curtail and contain threats.
This is also clearly manifested in the Multi-National Joint Task Force which as establish not for the sake of balance power against a stronger state but for the purpose of containing Boko Haram terrorist group which constitute a major threat to all member states of the MNJTF. Deterrence is also an important aspect of the theory. The MNJTF also serves as deterrence to Boko Haram. Aside the utilization of coercion the states also employ diplomatic means which should eventually lead to détente. It is also important to note that Bandwagoning does not really apply to the MNJTF as an alliance because the relationship that exist between the LCBC and Benin is not one of unequal exchange neither is any member of the alliance coerced into the alliance. The MNJTF as an alliance is a product of collective interest for collective security and as such every ally hitherto forming the alliance knew how important this alliance will be as far as their national security and the security of the sub-region is concerned.

Multinational Joint Task Force and Counter-Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa

States within the international system are beginning to realize the importance of alliances and also recognizing that alliances are not necessarily for balance of power but more importantly that alliances are strategies for addressing perceived, existing and potential threats to their security especially in contemporary times where there are galaxies of threats manifested in forms of insurgency, terrorism, ethnic militias, piracy, trans-border crimes etc. sub-Saharan Africa is faced with a lot of security challenges among which is terrorism. Terrorism within West Africa has attracted international attention because of its catastrophic impact.

The impact and implications of Boko Haram on sub-regional security instigated the affected states to form a military alliance against terrorism. This move/step was also supported by the African Union when it specifically urged the countries of the region to take the necessary steps towards operationalizing the mechanisms agreed upon to address more effectively the threat posed by Boko Haram. Subsequently, a number of initiatives were taken by the countries of the region pursuant to the conclusions of the Paris Summit of 17 May 2014, which brought together the Heads of State of Benin, Chad, Cameroon, France, Niger, Nigeria and other stakeholders, as well as the ministerial-level meetings that took place in London and Washington on 12 June and 5 August 2014, respectively (AU, 2015).

Transnational efforts to combat crime in the region predate the emergence of the terrorist movement. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) between Nigeria, Chad and Niger was set up in 1998 in order to combat transnational crime in the Lake Chad region, but was mostly dormant until 2012, when it was reactivated in order to deal with Boko Haram. In order to cope with the spread of terrorism in the region, the Paris Summit of May 2014, which brought together the heads of state of Benin, Chad, Cameroon, France, Niger and Nigeria, and representatives of the US, UK and EU, decided to enhance regional cooperation in the fight against Boko Haram, by means of coordinated patrols and border surveillance, pooling intelligence and exchanging relevant information (Zamfir, 2015).
In October 2014, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) member-states (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) and Benin decided to improve their cooperation to combat Boko Haram, by pledging troops to the MNJFT, which should have become operational inside national borders by November 2014 (Zamfir, 2015).

It is important to note that the Paris Summit agreed on a number of steps aimed at enhancing regional cooperation and international action against the Boko Haram terrorist group, notably through coordinated border patrols; the establishment of an intelligence and fusion unit; the adoption of sanctions against Boko Haram, Ansaru, and their main leaders; as well as through support for marginalized areas and for their vulnerable populations. The London meeting reaffirmed the commitments made at the Paris Summit and welcomed the progress accomplished since then, particularly the signing in Yaoundé, on 9 June 2014, of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU) (AU, 2015).

**Mandate and Objectives of the Multi-National Joint Task Force**

The AU gave the green light to the MNJTF through a decision of 29 January 2015 by the African Peace and Security Council (PSC), meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government. The PSC is a standing decision-making body of the AU, competent for peace and security issues (Zamfir, 2015). While this process is underway, it is recommended that, in support of the efforts led by the LCBC Member States and Benin, Council authorize the deployment of the MNJTF comprising up to 7500 military and non-military staff, for an initial period of twelve months renewable at the request of the LCBC Member States and Benin (AU, 2015).

In line with the overall objective set by the countries of the region during their various meetings, it is proposed that the MNJTF be mandated, within its Area of Operation (AoR) as will be determined in the concept of operation, to:

i. create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by the activities of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, in order to significantly reduce violence against civilians and other abuses, including sexual- and gender-based violence, in full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP);

ii. facilitate the implementation of overall stabilization programmes by the LCBC Member States and Benin in the affected areas, including the full restoration of state authority and the return of IDPs and refugees; and

iii. facilitate, within the limit of its capabilities, humanitarian operations and the delivery of assistance to the affected populations.

Within the framework of the mandate outlined above and in its AoR, the MNJTF contingents deployed within their national territories may carry out a number of tasks. These will include the following:

i. conducting military operations to prevent the expansion of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups activities and eliminate their presence;

ii. facilitating operational coordination amongst the affected countries in the fight against Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, including on
the basis of the intelligence collected by the LCBC Member States and Benin and/or availed by external partners;

iii. encouraging and facilitate the conduct of joint/simultaneous/coordinated patrols and other types of operations at the borders of the affected countries;

iv. preventing all forms of transfer of arms and ammunition and other type of support to Boko Haram and other terrorist groups;

v. ensuring, within its capabilities, the protection of civilians under immediate threat, IDP and refugee camps, humanitarian workers and other civilian personnel;

vi. actively searching for, and freeing all abductees, including the young girls abducted in Chibok in April 2014;

vii. undertaking effective psychological operations to encourage defections from Boko Haram and other terrorist groups;

viii. supporting, as maybe appropriate, the initial implementation phase of strategies for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of disengaged fighters into their communities;

ix. contributing to the improvement and institutionalization of civil-military coordination, including the provision, upon request, of escorts to humanitarian convoys; (AU, 2015: 6-7)

Achievements, Challenges and Prospects of the Multi-National Joint Task Force

There is no doubt that since the establishment of the MNJTF, it has recorded some degree of success in the fight against terrorism within the sub-region. However, most works on the achievements of MNJTF are not thematically stated particularly as it relates to clear data and figures, geopolitical areas where such achievements are recorded. According to Oluwadare (2016) the MNJTF, with its headquarters in Ndjameña, has been able to canalize the insurgents and restrict them within the Sambisa forest as the push against them was on all fronts. The present situation sees the fighting deescalating given the successes that the MNJTF has achieved. For instance, the cases of bombing have drastically reduced since the line of supply of the insurgents had been cut. They now lack food and ammunition, and even communication to the outside world seems to have been reduced. Other achievements of the MNJTF include an improvement of the security situation as many of the territories hitherto controlled by the insurgents have been taken back and people are returning home.

It was based on the foregoing that Feltman, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, posit that:

We commend the Lake Chad Basin countries’ efforts to combat Boko Haram. The regional offensive involving Chadian, Cameroonian, Nigerien and Nigerian troops operating under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has recaptured 80 per cent of the areas once under Boko Haram control, freed thousands of captives and prevented terrorist attacks (Feltman, 2016:2). In the view of Zamfir (2015), the approach adopted by the AU has raised some doubts among commentators. As far as the timeframe is concerned, logistical difficulties, together with the
attitudes of the countries involved – which have always tended to focus more on their own interests than on a regional approach – could delay the operationalization of this force. However, recent efforts suggest that the force could take shape soon. The number of troops is seen as insufficient to combat Boko Haram effectively, given its military capacity. The problem of funding has not yet been solved, and it will require the UN to set up a fund for the operations.

In relations to poor funding Feltman (2016:2) maintains that:

MNJTF’s main challenge remains a severe lack of funding. The 1 February African Union donor conference aimed to mobilize $750 million, of which only $250 million was pledged; even less was disbursed. The success of MNJTF operations also depends on timely and actionable intelligence as well as specialized counter-terrorism skills and equipment, given the evolving tactics of Boko Haram.

Feltman further posits thus:

So far, the Lake Chad Basin countries have borne the financial responsibility of combating Boko Haram despite their own economic crises. As President Deby Itno explained to me with frustration, they have been forced to divert national spending away from basic services to security. Lake Chad Basin leaders have expressed their growing impatience over delays by international partners to support the MNJTF financially (Feltman, 2016:2).

During the period under consideration, the Boko Haram terrorist group has continued to carry out numerous attacks, targeting civilians, police, churches, mosques, and public facilities, including schools. In early January 2015, Boko Haram overran a military base in northeastern Nigeria that was the headquarters of the MNJTF located in Baga, Borno State. The group then forced thousands of people from the region, burnt and destroyed homes and businesses, and committed mass killings. Mention should also be made of the 10 and 11 January 2015 suicide bombings in Maiduguri, Borno State, and Potiskum, Yobe State, reportedly involving children coerced by Boko Haram to act as suicide bombers (AU, 2015).

Attacks by Boko Haram continue, mainly in north-eastern Nigeria and southern Niger, and to a lesser extent in northern Cameroon and the Lac region of Chad. Terrorists persist in targeting innocent civilians, often using young children. Despite commendable regional efforts, the group continues to threaten regional stability, as illustrated by the 3 June attack on a military base in Bosso town, south-eastern Niger (Feltman, 2016).

The most recent is the abducted four persons contracted by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) for oil exploration in the Lack Chad Basin among whom were lecturers of the University of Maiduguri on the 28th of July, 2017. This view was captured by Sahara Reporters (2017) when they claimed that:

The so-called Islamic State faction of the sectarian terrorist group, Boko Haram, has claimed responsibility for the attack on a military-escorted convoy of oil exploration workers in the Chad Basin. Scores of soldiers and civilians died in the ambush. According to sources within the leadership of the insurgent group, the Islamist terrorists did not immediately realize the composition of the convoy when they launched their attack. Such
attacks on convoy are a common occurrence in Nigeria's beleaguered northeast zone where Boko Haram militants have been most active. This view was further confirmed by Zamfir, (2015: 6), when he claimed that:

At the beginning of 2015, the MNJTF headquarters fell into the hands of Boko Haram militants, together with the town of Baga in north-eastern Nigeria where it was sited. It appears that, by that time, only troops from Nigeria were stationed there, as Niger and Chad had withdrawn their own troops because of security risks.

It is important to note that defence is an expensive venture and defence alliances are even more expensive. Hence the inability of the UN Secretary-General to establish the Trust Fund for the sustenance of the MNJTF operations as proposed and the mobilization of the necessary international financial and logistical support constitute a major challenge to the MNJTF.

All these challenges notwithstanding, the MNJTF has a lot of prospects. For the fact that ECOWAS, African Union and the United Nations see the MNJTF as a laudable mechanism means they seriously believe that the MNJTF if well managed and operationalized has what it takes to counter Boko Haram within the Sub-region. The establishment of the UN Trust Fund for the sustenance of the MNJTF will go a long way to address the challenge of funding. For the fact that the LCBC members are presently victims of Boko Haram and Benin a potential victim will motivate them to be more committed since their collective interest is at stake.

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

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

Military alliances are an important strategy for curbing threats and the MNJTF as a military alliance has contributed in no small way in combating Boko Haram terrorism within the Lake Chad sub-region. However, the LCBC must realize that military approach is not the only panacea to combating terrorism. Hence, there is the need to address the socio-economic and political situations that led to the emergence of terrorism in the region.

Specifically, the following are critical to containing the spread or popularity of the philosophy of violence advanced by the terrorist group:

i. There is need to convey of a donors’ conference to mobilize resources for the MNJTF and appeal to the international partners to support the implementation of the LCBC strategy against Boko Haram;

ii. There is the need for the United Nations to urgently establish the Trust Fund for the sustenance of the MNJTF so as to address the challenge of funding;

iii. The African Union also needs to go beyond condemning the activities of Boko Haram in principle, but giving practical military and financial support to the MNJTF. The AU needs to take pro-active steps to address the challenge of terrorism before it spreads to other parts of the continent;
iv. The MNJTF’s partners should give concrete effect to their pledges of material, financial and technical assistance in order to strengthen operational capacities (mobility, communications, intelligence) that would enable it to operate effectively.

References


from