

Regional efforts to fight Boko Haram

The cross-border dimension of the Boko Haram insurgency – one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups – has compelled the countries in the Lake Chad basin to coordinate their fight against it. Launched in 2014, the Multinational Joint Task Force has weakened the group, without fully defeating it. The acute humanitarian situation calls for an approach that goes beyond military intervention.

The cross-border dimension of the Boko Haram terrorist threat

[Boko Haram](#), or Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), is an Islamist terrorist organisation based in north-eastern Nigeria. It is driven by an ideology of violent rejection of Western values, as suggested by the [name](#) 'Boko Haram', usually interpreted to mean 'Western education is forbidden', in the local Hausa language. The organisation has become known for its horrendous killings of civilians, and mass abductions, many involving [women](#) and children. Since 2011, Boko Haram is estimated to have murdered around [16 000](#) people. It was [ranked](#) the deadliest terrorist group in the world in 2014. In 2015, with 5 478 deaths (18 % less than the previous year), it came second in the number of killings after ISIL/Da'esh, to which it pledged allegiance in March 2015.

Starting in mid-2014, Boko Haram gradually gained control over a significant amount of [territory](#) in northern Nigeria, from where its future caliphate would grow. It also started making incursions into neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Although Nigeria had traditionally been a regional military power, known for its role in securing peace and stability in West Africa, its army was having obvious difficulties in coping efficiently with the jihadist group. [Shortage](#) of military equipment, caused in part by corruption of officers in command, alongside factors such as inadequate capacity, [inability](#) to battle an asymmetric insurgency and to fight in the climate conditions of northern Nigeria, as well as a weak political [response](#) under former President Goodluck Jonathan, have been cited as reasons for these difficulties. The affected countries were compelled to step up their military cooperation to respond to the insurgents' ability to conduct quick and mobile cross-border incursions. Chad's cross-border interventions began to push back the group in early 2015, and Niger's and Cameroon's armies' [readiness to cooperate](#) in the fight boosted efforts to create a formal framework. The election of President Buhari in Nigeria in April 2015 also gave fresh [impetus](#) to increased military cooperation.

The humanitarian crisis provoked by Boko Haram

The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis caused by Boko Haram is staggering. According to the [International Organization for Migration](#), a total of 2.6 million people have been displaced in the Lake Chad basin. Another 1 million people have returned home after being displaced. [Nigeria](#), which hosts 82 % of the displaced population, is the worst affected, followed by Cameroon (9 %), Niger (6 %), and Chad (3 %). Most of the displaced have stayed in their own country; only 191 000 (7 %) have sought refuge in another country. Many have fled to the cities, putting enormous [pressure](#) on already precarious urban settings, while others have ended up in overcrowded camps. The crisis has prevented many farmers from working their land, especially in Nigeria's Borno State, compounding food shortages in an already very poor region. Many of those who have returned to their liberated villages continue to face significant [security risks](#); and starvation poses a grave [threat](#) to those living in Nigeria's most affected areas. Given that some [10.7 million](#) people in the countries bordering Lake Chad are currently in need of humanitarian aid, the EU has stepped up its [assistance](#) in the region.

The concept of a multinational joint task force

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 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 October 2014, the [Lake Chad Basin Commission](#) (LCBC) member states



(Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) and Benin decided to improve their cooperation in combatting Boko Haram, by pledging troops to the MNJTF. In the field, the MNJTF faced major pressure, when in early January 2015 Boko Haram militants sacked its headquarters in the north-eastern Nigerian town of [Baga](#). On 29 January 2015, the African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) [authorised](#) the deployment of up to 7 500 military and non-military MNJTF staff, mandating the task force, among other things, to conduct military operations, facilitate coordination at inter-state level and assist in the conduct of border patrols. The MNJTF received the [backing](#) of the UN Security Council on 28 July 2015. The participating countries have benefitted from assistance in the form of military training, advice, logistics, equipment and reconnaissance missions from Western powers, namely the [USA](#), the [UK](#) and [France](#).

State of play

The MNJTF should be seen primarily as a [framework](#) for coordinating actions rather than a merged military force. Each country's troops are deployed and operate mainly in their own territory. The force operates under the direct political command of the LCBC and heads of states and government. The African Union has been managing the administrative aspects, especially donor assistance, while the UN also provides some administrative support. The military command is currently based in Chad's capital, N'Djamena. Nigeria has been given command of the force, being the country most affected. The financial needs of the MNJTF were initially estimated at €655 million, to cover costs related to logistics, human resources and equipment, excluding weapons. However, the [money](#) pledged subsequently falls significantly short of this sum.

The EU has pledged [€50 million](#) for financing the construction and maintenance of the general and sector headquarters, and for transport and communication assets.

With an estimated 10 000 staff, the military component of the MNJTF is fully operational, according to official sources, although the [situation](#) in the field has sometimes [pointed to the contrary](#). The establishment of the planned police and civilian components has not started. Overall, the MNJTF has dealt decisive blows to Boko Haram, arresting and neutralising hundreds of militants and freeing thousands of their prisoners. Yet, although Buhari has already announced that the group is militarily defeated, Boko Haram is proving resilient and capable of striking back. Thus, although Boko Haram casualty [figures](#) in Nigeria have dropped considerably in the second half of 2015 and in 2016, in neighbouring countries they saw a [157 %](#) increase in 2015. Boko Haram continues its asymmetric war, regularly perpetrating suicide bombings, attacks on villages and occasionally on cities, refugee camps and even [army bases](#). It is also constantly updating its horrendous arsenal of terror, most recently by using women with [babies](#) to commit suicide attacks.

Challenges for the Multinational Joint Task Force

The shortcomings faced by the MNJTF include the [lack](#) of clear oversight mechanisms; insufficient coordination and uneven responses; preference for national actions by some countries in the coalition; the risk of interference in the command structure; and severe underfunding. Military [action alone](#) will not be sufficient to defeat Boko Haram. The socioeconomic conditions that led to its rise have to be addressed, including by fighting corruption, improving public service delivery and promoting development.

In an April 2015 [resolution](#), the European Parliament welcomed the military response spearheaded by Chad and the decision of the African Union's Peace and Security Council to authorise the MNJTF. It stated that a stronger regional response is necessary, and asked the EU and its Member States to honour their commitments to provide Nigeria with political, development and humanitarian aid. The importance of regional cooperation was reaffirmed in a 2016 [resolution](#).

This 'at a glance' note updates a previous [edition](#) from March 2015.

Countries participating in the MNJTF (areas most affected by the insurgency are highlighted in red)

