



An African student fires an M240 machine gun from a Special Operations Craft–Riverine boat as part of the Lake Chad Basin Initiative, November 15, 2017, at the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School at Stennis Space Center, MI. The objective of the iteration is to increase partner nations’ abilities to project force against violent extremist organization safe havens within the Lake Chad region. (Photo courtesy of Department of Defense Michael Bottoms; Graphic by Jonathan S. Dingler, MIPB)

Throughout history, we see nations with allies thrive, and nations without allies wither.

—Gen. James Mattis (Retired) Former U.S. Secretary of Defense

Introduction

Prosperous nations do not operate in a vacuum, and they cannot operate effectively in an environment foreign to them without the cooperation of allies. In a 2019 interview, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis emphatically highlighted the importance of maintaining alliances with other nations. He emphasized our allied partners’ contributions and support not only in military operations but also in the pursuit of national security goals worldwide.¹ An example of this is in Africa, where several nations, including those in the Lake Chad Basin region, have formed alliances to combat the violent activities of Boko Haram militants. To be effective, these alliances must include intelligence sharing among the partner nations; however, in some cases, the sharing has proved to be more difficult than expected, contributing to a lack of coordination when conducting offensive operations.

Who Are Boko Haram?

Boko Haram is a terrorist group operating primarily in the Muslim majority of northern Nigeria, but in 2014, Boko Haram’s reign of terror spread throughout the countries surrounding the Lake Chad Basin—Chad, Cameroon, and

Niger. Boko Haram, which roughly translates to *Western education is forbidden*, has been conducting a de facto war with the government of Nigeria since 2009.² In the spring of 2014, Boko Haram militants kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls in northeastern Nigeria. The kidnapping of the girls in a secondary school was not only symbolic in nature but also demonstrated the great lengths Boko Haram would pursue to prove a point. The Nigerian Army claimed an aggressive approach to search the Sambisa Forest in northeast Nigeria where the kidnapped girls were taken.³ A video circulated immediately after the kidnappings, indicating the group’s opposition to Western education and, specifically, its opposition to girls receiving an education. Boko Haram advocated the strictest interpretation of their version of Sharia law but also called for the return of the Sokoto Caliphate.

From 1804 to 1830, tribal dynasties fought among themselves to form the Sokoto Caliphate.⁴ The caliphate encompassed most of current day northeast Nigeria and Lake Chad and lasted until colonial forces conquered the area in 1903, dividing it among the British, French, and German powers. Individual jihadist movements in the region were not synchronized but overwhelmed most of the area in an effort to Islamize the population.⁵ In a similar fashion, random acts of violence in the Lake Chad Basin increased exponentially in 2015, and other countries started to experience Boko Haram firsthand with greater

frequency. Although the majority of the violence centered on northeast Nigeria, most of the skirmishes and battles spilled into the border towns of Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. Daily armed conflicts in all the border areas resulted in more than 30,000 deaths and 10 times that number in displaced persons. Boko Haram was not even a blip on the U.S. Government's radar at the time.

Multinational Cooperation

In 2014 and 2015, the Integrated Country Strategy, formulated by the U.S. Embassy in N'Djamena, Chad, did not mention Boko Haram specifically. The Integrated Country Strategy is the foreign policy framework led by a U.S. ambassador but developed in a collaborative effort through the in-country interagency process.⁶ The Department of Defense's representative in this interagency process is the defense attaché office at the U.S. Embassy, led by the senior defense official, typically the defense attaché. The senior staff at the U.S. Embassy in Chad were well aware of the incipient threat from Boko Haram, but the staff's focus was on building partner capacity in military capabilities, humanitarian assistance, and development projects. The embassy's efforts were on supporting the Chadian contribution to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the mass refugee exodus from the Central African Republic into Chadian territory at the height of the Central African Republic Civil War.

The kidnapping of the schoolgirls gained worldwide publicity, and collaboration efforts led to France, the United Kingdom, and the United States establishing an ad hoc coalition, known as the P3. Additionally, the French had started Operation Barkhane in 2014, an expeditionary operation aimed at conducting counterterrorism missions in the Sahel region. It was not a new operation; Barkhane was a reorganization of Operation Serval, which the French had formed at the request of the Mali government in 2013 to oust Islamic militants from the north of Mali. Under the command structure of Operation Barkhane, the French military's premier planning organization, known as the CPCO,

created a coordination and liaison cell, the CCL.⁷ With 3,000 French military forces and associated weapons systems, the French were adequately postured to support any counter-Boko Haram efforts. The CPCO invited the P3 partners to provide advisors. Subsequently, the CPCO asked the military

leaders from Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria to contribute to the CCL. The CCL's charter was to share intelligence related to Boko Haram among the partner nations. The P3 partners would facilitate the use of organic intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) elements to share among the CCL partners.

In May 2014, former President Barack Obama notified the United States Congress of the deployment of United States ISR assets to

Chad to support missions over Northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin.⁸ Before U.S. intelligence can be shared with partner nations, a system needs to be in place to facilitate access as outlined by Department of Defense Instruction 5530.03, *International Agreements*. The process begins with the establishment of an international agreement and/or a memorandum of agreement or understanding. In this case, an international agreement must outline the conditions for sharing with foreign partner nations and the U.S. Government.⁹ First, initial negotiations must determine whether an agreement to share intelligence is in the best interest of the U.S. Government. Then, once the need is clearly articulated, the groundwork starts at the U.S. Embassy to discuss the international agreement with the host country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

France had been providing logistics and intelligence directly to Niger and Chad before CCL's formation.¹⁰ Intergovernmental discussions with the P3 slowly transformed into a more tangible contribution. The French divested control of the CCL, and it is now a rotational command among the P3 partners.¹¹ The French focus remains on battling Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) instead of Boko Haram. AQIM, with its support structure of arms traffickers and the coopting of local tribes, disrupts governance among the G5 Sahel partners (Mauritania,



A California National Guard Special Forces Soldier from Los Alamitos-based Special Operations Detachment-U.S. Northern Command and Company A, 5th Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne), reviews a sand table map with a Nigerian soldier in Nigeria, June 2014. The training is to help the Nigerian Army counter Boko Haram. (U.S. Army photo by CPL Danielle Rodrigues)

Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad), an intergovernmental cooperation framework that seeks to fight insecurity and support development with a view to opening up the region. Although France has invested heavily in the G5 Sahel, it considers Boko Haram a localized threat, and the implied task of sharing intelligence has proved to be more difficult than expected.

Currently, Chad and Niger have organic ISR assets to support their counter-Boko Haram efforts; however, establishing a reliable network of sources in the Lake Chad Basin is problematic. Oftentimes, people living along the lake are fearful of reporting Boko Haram activity because they might endanger family members or close friends who may have joined the cause for economic reasons. In Cameroon, some people believe that high-level political leaders have supported Boko Haram. Cameroon security forces arrested a former member of parliament in December 2020 for supplying goods and cattle to known Boko Haram operatives.¹² While this scenario highlighted a success in obtaining actionable intelligence, sharing with partner nations is not second nature. Each country operates well independently, but sharing intelligence is not a priority at this time. The lack of intelligence sharing may be attributed to each country in the Lake Chad Basin focusing on its own national interests and internal conflicts. Additionally, during the CCL's early stages, it was a daily struggle to get the partners to share because each partner nation had a different procedure for the disclosure of intelligence.

One of the most gratifying features of recent work in intelligence, and one that is quite unique in its long history, has been the growing cooperation established between the American intelligence services and their counterparts throughout the Free World which make common cause with us as we face the common peril.¹³

—Allen Dulles, former Director
of the Central Intelligence Agency

The Multinational Joint Task Force

The Nigerian government, which has been dealing with Boko Haram since the early 2000s, decided to form the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in Baga, Nigeria.¹⁴ In its infancy, the force consisted mostly of Nigerians with perfunctory contributions from Chad and Niger. The Boko Haram attacks increased in frequency and intensity, and the

MNJTF had to relocate in 2015 when the Baga headquarters was destroyed.¹⁵ It relocated to N'Djamena, Chad, after a series of meetings with Africa Union representatives and contributing forces from Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon. Benin also contributed forces but not in a combat capacity.¹⁶ The political and military frameworks formed after contentious discussions but still lacked a more comprehensive intelligence cell. As with normal multinational operations, the MNJTF needed each partner nation to share intelligence with others and to coordinate receiving intelligence from their respective forces.¹⁷

At the beginning, the relocation and reorganization of the MNJTF from Nigeria to Chad was problematic. Although these countries are neighbors, they inherently distrust each other; however, after an intervention by the Africa Union and the P3, partnerships soon developed and refocused their threat perspectives toward a common enemy.¹⁸ With the political framework solidified, the military reallocation needed to take effect. The MNJTF reorganized into four sectors, keeping national borders intact.¹⁹ Each country took command of its sector, not only with parochial interests at heart but with those of the MNJTF as well. Since the situation affected the Nigerian population the most, and the Nigerian Army had the most resources, it was decided unanimously that the Nigerians should take command of the MNJTF.

The MNJTF enhanced intelligence sharing by offering the partners a forum to generate greater dialogue, resulting in a more collaborative effort on the ground.²⁰ P3 advisors were dispatched and embedded themselves with the MNJTF. The contributions of France and the United Kingdom were substantial. France facilitated logistics nodes for the MNJTF, and the United Kingdom helped with episodic ISR contribution. The United States focused its contribution on countering violent extremism by increasing military-to-military engagements and training exercises through funding channels within the Department of Defense and the Department of State.²¹ With the involvement of U.S. Africa Command's Office of Security Cooperation, military engagements doubled in size from 2013 to 2017. Various forms of security force assistance programs were introduced, assuring expanding partner capacity. Although it is a multinational effort, Chadian military forces and their special operations forces (the Special Antiterrorism Group) have conducted most of the military campaigns since 2015.

The Special Antiterrorism Group's commanding general, Brigadier General Abdelrahman Youssouf Mery, expressed his view on the Nigerian contribution and resolve by saying, "Nigeria needs to commit and be ready to engage."²² A

long-held view is that Nigerian forces lacked the ferocity and violence of action required to take key terrain. More often than not, Nigerian forces would overwhelmingly take a town from Boko Haram but would rarely place stay-behind forces to repel counterattacks. Consequently, Boko Haram insurgents would return to the town after Nigerian forces had left. Although a smaller force compared to the Nigerian force, Chad's armed forces were more deliberate with their military campaigns, and their resolve influenced Niger, which dispatched 2,000 troops to fight along the Nigerian border.²³

The lack of intelligence sharing among the partner nations still contributes to the lack of coordination when conducting offensive operations, as battle tracking and taskings lie solely with each nation's organic command and control entities. The francophone countries readily contribute, but at times, they neglect to share with the Nigerian military.

Conclusion

In this current geopolitical landscape, intelligence continues to be the driving force in enabling military operations. Challenges in the operational environment will remain constant, increasing in intensity as power vacuums expand or develop. Alliances and partner nations are needed to obtain a situational understanding of any conflict. Joint, allied, and combined operations present challenges as each nation looks after its own interests as part of the overall mission set. Therefore, the formation of multinational partnerships that include cooperative intelligence sharing cells is one of the first steps in obtaining a clearer picture. The mere presence and establishment of these cells show the world a coordinated effort to quell conflicts. The formation of multinational intelligence cells are necessary to obtain actionable intelligence in support of coalition operations. ✨

Intelligence deals with all the things which should be known in advance of initiating a course of action.²⁴
—Second Hoover Commission Report on Intelligence Activities, 1955

The Death of Idriss Déby Itno, President of Chad
20 April 2021

Single-handedly, no country can overcome this threat [Boko Haram] and therefore pooling our resources together...we are going to overcome this challenge.²⁸

—Idriss Déby Itno

Long-time Chadian President Idriss Déby Itno died when visiting Chadian troops fighting in the frontlines on 20 April 2021. Chadian forces were repelling an attack from a rebel group called Front for Change and Concord in Chad. Déby had just received 79 percent of the votes in his unprecedented and controversial sixth term in office a couple of days before his death. A transitional military council led by Déby's son, Lieutenant General Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, will govern the country for 18 months, with the promise of holding "free and democratic" elections once the transition period is over. The former Chadian president ruled for 30 years and was a long-time ally of France and other Western nations in the fight against jihadist groups in the Sahel region of Africa. The future security of the Sahel is now more precarious during this transition.²⁹

Epigraph

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Endnotes

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Military Intelligence Soldier Heritage Learning Center

The Army Intelligence Museum acts as custodian and repository for artifacts significant to the history of intelligence organizations, operations, and individuals and provides military history education. The museum highlights the role of Military Intelligence within the U.S. Army from 1775 to the present day and honors the achievements of Soldiers acting in intelligence roles. Museum exhibits include a World War II German Enigma cipher machine, a large fragment of the Berlin Wall, a vehicle operated by the U.S. Army Military Liaison Mission during the Cold War, and signals intelligence gear used by the Army Security Agency. The museum also displays manned and unmanned intelligence aircraft at the outdoor Air Park on Hatfield Street.

Check out the MI Soldier Heritage Learning Center website at:
https://history.army.mil/museums/TRADOC/fortHuachuca_MI