

## Joint Task Force and the Fight against Terrorism in the Northeast Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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### Abstract

Terrorism is one of the major security threats bedeviling Nigeria most especially the northeastern part with Borno, Yobe and Adamawa being the most affected states. Terrorist activities unleashed by *Jama'atu Ahlissunah Lidda'awatiwal Jihad* popularly known as *Boko Haram* has resulted in the death of thousands of civilian, several security personnel and displacement of significant population. In 2011, Government created a Joint Task Force (JTF) as a special military task force, involving the main components of the state's armed forces and other paramilitary agencies to counter the increasingly sophisticated terror attacks by *Boko Haram* terrorists' group. The JTF were deployed to the affected states such as Borno, Yobe and Adamawa where they employed different strategies to counter the terrorists' activities with a view to restoring peace and harmony in the states. The objective of the paper is to examine the JTF's fight against terrorism with particular interest in their challenges and prospects. Accordingly, the paper revealed that the JTF succeeded in arresting and killing of some suspected terrorists, repelling some attacks and weakening the strength of the terrorists by reducing the frequency of their deadly attacks. Despite the achievements recorded by the JTF in their fight against terrorism, they were confronted with numerous challenges that affect their performance some of which include inadequate manpower which is key in combating terrorism and other violent crime considering the nature of terrorist and their activities which require adequate response that can only be achieved with adequate security personnel that can confront the terrorists. Others include poor working gadgets and lack of adequate training which result in the low the morale of the security personnel to confront the sophisticated terrorists etc. The paper recommends the recruitment of adequate and capable security personnel that can effectively combat terrorism in the country; provision of adequate sophisticated security equipment such as arms, vehicles, communication gadgets and modern crime detection gadgets necessary for effective counter terrorists operations.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Fight, Joint Task Force, Prospects, Terrorism

## **Introduction**

Terrorism is a global phenomenon and a major contemporary security challenge that is undermining the security and welfare of many states across the world. It is viewed globally as one of the gravest threats to the peace and security at both local and international levels. Various incidences of terrorism occurred in many parts of the world from the 1990s to the turn of the new millennium; including the Sept. 11 2001 attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, which were perceived to be the devastating attacks in the country. The globalization of terrorism has exposed Nigeria to series of terrorist activities unleashed by different terrorist groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND), Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the notorious one being *Jama'atu AhlissunahLidda'awatiwal Jihad* popularly known as *Boko Haram* of the Northeastern Nigeria. Terrorist activities by *Boko Haram* resulted in several violent attacks that occurred on high-profile government establishments, markets, banks, police stations, mosques, churches and other public places, such as schools and motor parks. The rise in insecurity posed by the *Boko Haram* terrorist group in the Borno State and other affected states has resulted in the death of thousands of civilian, hundreds of the police officers and significant population displacements, as well as dangerously exacerbating economic, political and religious divisions in the country (Onyebuchi and Chigozie, 2013). This has induced a lot of fear in the minds of every Nigerian.

Nigerian government in June 2011 created the Joint Task Force (JTF) as a special military task force, involving the main components of the state's armed forces, to counter the increasingly sophisticated terror attacks by the insurgent group. Other law enforcement agencies such as the police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence (NSCDC), Nigeria Custom Service and Nigeria Immigration Service were incorporated to work as Joint Task Force and were given the power of maintaining law and order in the country towards achieving effective internal security (Global security.org, 2016). However, the Joint Task Force (JTF) employed different strategies to counter the terrorist activities that pose serious threats to the peaceful coexistence in the country. Blanchard (2016) argues that the JTF has played some roles in countering terrorism by taking some proactive approach to deal with the problem of *Boko Haram* terrorism that is prevalent in north-eastern Nigeria particularly Borno State. By implication the JTF was designed to perform the roles of internal security operations and their performance in doing so is the core concern of this study. This is seen in the extension of the army's operational headquarters to Maiduguri in addition to the one in Abuja to enhance counter terrorist operations. The army together with other members of the JTF (the police and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence) has also been more strategic in their operations and there has been an appreciable rise in morale among officers due to the collaboration for a joint operation.

This effort made by the JTF have significantly helped in countering insurgent's attacks and taking over the Sambisa Forest (a *Boko Haram* stronghold), and territory lost to the group has been regained. The deployment of more security personnel (JTF) is also instrumental in the apprehension of suspected terrorists, the disruption of logistic routes for the supply of arms and food from other countries (International Crisis Group, 2016). In line with the foregoing, this paper examines the prospect and challenges of Joint Task Force in the fight against terrorism in the Northeast, Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism**

The concept of terrorism overlaps with insurgency as they share some common characteristic but they differ in some respect. However, the concept has no universally accepted definition even among experts in the area of terrorism. From the etymological concept, the word terrorism comes from a Latin and French words: *terrere*, and *terrorisme*, meaning “to frighten,” and “state rule by terror” respectively. Thus, the concept of terrorism has been variously defined by different scholars and experts. White (2002) argued that nobody has been able to produce an exact definition of terrorism, this is because of what he called “mutation forms” over the course of history. Gibbs (2012) also argues that definitions of terrorism are controversial for reasons other than conceptual problems because acts of terrorism promote condemnation of its actors. In view of this, Gibbs contends that, a definition may reflect ideological or even political bias. Chijioke (2013) described terrorism as a psychological warfare propelled by the use of fear or panic, intimidation, force or threats of violence on individuals with the intention of forcing the state, its institutions or organisations or individuals to act against to their wishes. Enders & Sandler (2012), define terrorism as the premeditated use of threat or violence by individuals or sub-national groups to achieve a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims. This implies that terrorists usually adopt the use threat or violence to induce fear in individuals so as to make them incapable of retaliating.

In line with above definitions provided by various scholars, this paper defines terrorism as the use of violent acts/ threats by an organized armed group against members of the society, the state or both for the realization of their objectives. This may involve fear inducement, destruction of properties, inflicting injuries and even killing of innocent lives.

Counter-terrorism has been defined and interpreted in different ways by various scholars. In this context, counter-terrorism connotes measures or tactics initiated and employed by relevant authorities in mitigating the activities of terrorist to ensure the restoration of peace and security in the affected area(s). It can also be define as the techniques, tactics and strategies employed by government, military institution, law enforcement and intelligence agencies or the citizens in order to combat the activities of terrorists (Udoh, 2016). This may include both the diplomatic and confrontational techniques that are capable of countering the

activities of terrors in the society. According to Yoroms (2013:437), counter-terrorism refers to efforts made by the state and international community in an attempt to tackle, prevent, preempt and deter terrorist from achieving their premeditated violent attack against unarmed civilians through any means available; including the use of force.

A research conducted by Olu-Adeyemi and Shaibu (2020), revealed that the JTF employed different counter terrorist operations in combating terrorist activities in the northeastern Nigeria. This includes ‘operation *lafiya dole*’(peace by force), carried out to supports the to maintain pressure on *Boko Haram* in the Lake Chad region, particularly in the Sambisa Forest through airstrikes and ground operations in order to degrade the capability of the *Boko Haram* terrorists. Another operation was launched by the JTF to stabilize the situation along the borders through continuous deployment of security personnel has strongly dislocated the terrorists as the general situation along the borders was characterized by incessant *Boko Haram* terrorists’ attacks that resulted in the loss of lives and property as well as displacing a significant part of the population in the affected area. Operation rescue of civilian captives have also led to the successful rescue of some civilians captured by *Boko Haram* terrorists moving large number of civilians rescued to IDP Camp in Monguno under the care of the Nigeria security forces (JTF).

### **Emergence and Development of Joint Task Force (JTF) in the World**

The Joint Task Force is a formal security structure organized both at global and national levels to achieve some set objectives through some operational tactics. Globally, Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is the main joint task force organized with a well-defined structure for effective security operations. The Joint Task Force is a conglomeration of security personnel from different countries whose primary assignment is to maintain peace and order, especially in areas affected by conflict or terrorist activities. The first one is the *Combatant Command* (COCOM), which performs the functions of command over assigned forces that involve organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designing objectives and giving authoritative direction over all the aspects of military training and the logistics necessary to accomplish the mission assigned to the command. The second structure is *Operational Control* (OPCON), which is a transferable command exercised at any echelon at or below the level of combatant command. It includes the same authority as COCOM to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designing objectives and giving the authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. OPCON omits the authority to direct logistical support. The third structure is *Tactical Control* (TACON), which is the command authority over assigned or attached force that is limited to the detailed and usually local direction and the control of movement or the maneuvers necessary to accomplish assigned mission or tasks. TACON excludes the ability to

organize or direct administrative and logistic support (Galeazzi et al., 2017; Mahmood & Ani, 2018).

### **The Origin and Composition of Joint Task Force (JTF) in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the Joint Task Force (JTF) was first established in 1994 by the then Head of State General Sani Abacha in an effort to curtail violent activities in some parts of the country, particularly along Nigerian borders. However, in 1998 it was expanded to include units from neighboring Chad and Niger with the purpose of dealing with common cross-border security issues in the Lake Chad region and its headquarters was in the town of Baga, Borno State (Musa 2013; Multinational Joint Task Force, 2020). In recent times, *Boko Haram* has been a serious threat to the security of the nation which distorts the social, economic and political stability of Nigeria. This compelled the government to come up with programmes and strategies to neutralize and checkmate the activities of *Boko Haram* through the establishment of the Joint Military Task Force (Donohue, 2001). In addition, Dze-Ngwa (2018) attest that the rise and proliferation of terrorism and other violent crimes characterized by religious fundamentalism, brutal assassinations, kidnappings, hostage-takings, suicide bombings, detonations and wanton destruction of properties that led to the extension of the JTF to all areas affected by terrorism or other violent crimes. This was done to complement the effort of the Nigerian Police to checkmate the excesses of terrorist groups in the sub-region. The role of the JTF is to create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected with insurgency, full restoration of state authority, and the return of internally displaced people and refugees (African Union, 2015).

The composition of the Joint Task Force in Nigeria includes the Nigerian Army (NA), Nigerian Air Force (NAF), Nigerian Navy (NN), Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC). The mandate of the JTF was to conduct military actions to prevent the spread of terrorism, particularly *Boko Haram* activities, conduct patrols, prevent the transfer of weapons and logistics, free all those who had been abducted, encourage *Boko Haram* militants to defect and share intelligence and respect human rights, among other things. Accordingly, Musa (2017) observed that the JTF operational mandate is aimed at stabilizing the situation in the northeastern region through continuous deployment to robustly dislocate the terrorists, rescue captured civilians and counter the ideology of violence through the De-radicalization, Rehabilitation and Re-integration (DRR) of repentant insurgents moving Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to camp for care.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

The paper adopts Routine Activity Theory (RAT) developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979) as its theoretical guide. According to the theory, criminal activity can only be committed by anyone that has the opportunity, in other words, it focuses on situations of crime. The theory postulates that structural changes in routine activity patterns influence crime

rates by affecting the convergence (in time and space) of three elements of direct contact predatory crimes, namely: the motivated offender (potential offender), a suitable target (person or property) and the absence of capable guardianship (any person(s) or measure(s) that can deter the offender from committing the offence). Thus, the convergence of these three basic elements provides an opportunity for a crime to occur without any hindrance.

To reduce the proliferation of crime or prevent its occurrence in the society, capable guardianship must be provided to discourage and deny motivated offenders the opportunity to perpetrate their atrocities against the suitable targets. For instance, terrorists always target and attack a public gathering with minimal or no guardianship, so in order to address this problem, a strong capable guardianship (like JTF) should be put in place to checkmate all attempts by the criminals (such as terrorists) to commit their criminality. Felson (1995) developed the notion of guardians that can discourage a crime from occurring. He identified three types of guardians: the guardians (those who keep watch over potential crime targets), the handlers (those who supervise potential offenders) and the managers (those who monitor places).

In this regard, terrorists are the motivated offenders capable of destabilizing the security of lives and properties (suitable targets). On the other hand, the JTF are the capable guardians, who can deter terrorists from perpetrating their atrocities through their operations. This implies that terrorists only embark on their activities when they have the belief that there is no enough capable guardians (deterrent measures) to counter them. Thus, the ability of the formal security agencies (Joint Task Force) to employ proactive and reactive measures against the terrorists can serve as an effective way of countering terrorism.

Although the theory explain the issue in question, however, it suffered from some criticisms particularly its emphasis on potential targets and a capable guardian as the condition favorable for crime to occur and ignored the fact that capable guardian (such as JTF) may not necessarily stop the commission of a crime. This is because in spite of the fact that agencies like the police and other security agencies are fighting against terrorism, that may not be adequate enough to effectively counter terrorism, as individuals involved have different reasons that contribute to their involvements in such activities, which may not be resolved through the use of force. For instance, people who engage in terrorism as a result of unemployment may be adequately deterred through the provision of jobs.

### **Challenges of the Joint Task Force in Counter-Terrorism**

In spite of the successes recorded by the JTF in counter-terrorism, they were confronted with numerous challenges in the process of discharging their duties. On major setback of the JTF is inadequate manpower which is the major tool of combating terrorism as the nature of terrorist and their activities require adequate response that can only be achieved when there are enough personnel to

confront the terrorist. Thus, even with the formation of Joint Task Force (JTF), the personnel are not adequate to handle the problem of terrorism (Otu and Aro, 2013). This attest to the fact that adequate and well trained security personnel specifically the line staff (operatives) are the greatest assets of executing holistic and effective operations that will undermine the audacity of terrorist to carry out their deadly attacks any time they wish. A security organization may have all its requirements and needs at its disposal to organize and execute counter-terrorist operation but adequate and well trained personnel are inevitable in executing a successful counter-terrorist operation. Therefore, the provision of well-trained manpower should be given high priority in any counter-terrorist operation. Siro and Sundramoorthy (2017), also observed that security agencies generally suffer from personnel inadequacy which serve as an impediment to the success of their operations in curbing the menace of criminality in the society.

According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2003) and Okunola and Ojo, (2012) several problems affect the performance of security personnel in combating crime in the country some of which may include poor working gadgets that are instrumental to low the morale of the security personnel to confront sophisticated terrorists. In this modern world of advancement in technology, the use of high sense technology equipment in security is inevitable in order to effectively combat terrorism and other security related challenges. In absence of technology based crime detection instruments, the police find it extremely difficult or impossible to successfully conduct effective counter-terrorism operations. Ude (2013) also attest to the fact that security operatives (JTF) suffers from inadequate technology infrastructure which undermines their efforts in countering terrorism in Nigeria. Thus, this is a challenge that must be adequately addressed to succeed in counter-terrorism war.

Another challenge militating against the work of JTF in countering terrorism is poor information sharing between the public and security personnel. Mbachu (2013) observed that the security forces in Nigeria lack adequate information sharing which undermine strong intelligence and the ability of the security to take proactive measures against terrorism. The mutual suspicion and mistrust that exist between the security forces and members of the general public has become a serious impediment in obtaining information that can be used to neutralize terrorists' operations within the society. Thus, weak intelligence gathering is a source of worry and powerful force that undermines the capability of the JTF to neutralize potential terrorists' threats in areas affected by terrorism.

### **Prospects of Joint Task Force in Counter-Terrorism**

The Joint Task Force is formed as a response to the rising wave of terrorism in an attempt to address the problem and enhance the safety of citizens and their properties. One of the roles expected of the Joint Task Force is to detect and prevent the occurrences of crime in the society through the application of various proactive measures such as patrolling, surveillance, stop and search etc.

Alabi (2017), also argued that when crime of any sort occurred, security personnel are constitutionally charged with the responsibility of detecting such crime with a view to take appropriate measures aimed at addressing it. On this note, section 53 of the Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) provides that police and other law enforcement personnel may interpose for the purpose of preventing and shall to the best of their ability prevent and detect the commission of any offence. In view of this, security operatives made some efforts in repelling some of the terrorist attacks, for instance, the JTF detonated different set of bombs planted by *Boko Haram* terrorists, prevented and apprehended various suicide bombers from executing their deadly attacks on the public (Chiawo, 2011). In line with this, military patrol was conducted on roads and other suspected hideouts of insurgents in cities to detect terrorists and their evil plans in order to arrest the terrorists.

Umar (2013) argues that the JTF embark on raids operations based on intelligence in order to curb the menace of *Boko Haram*. Proper conduct of this operation will help in weakening the strength of terrorist and their deadly attacks on security forces and the general populace. Mantzikos, (2013) posit that as part of its effort in countering terrorism, the JTF launched a massive crackdown on the terrorists and successfully arrested and killed some members of the group including its key leaders. For example, it was reported on 24 September 2012 that 156 members of the group were arrested and 35 of them killed, including one of their key leaders in a major military raid on the group's enclave in Yobe and Adamawa States. In October 2012, other 30 members of *Boko Haram* terrorists group were killed in a battle with the military. This kind of operations is seen as indications of the JTF's ability in dealing with terrorism in the area.

The JTF investigates local terrorist threats, neutralize and protect vulnerable targets within their area of jurisdiction. This role played by the joint task force requires serious expertise in technology and field operations so as ensure effective counter terrorism. In a concerted crackdown on *Boko Haram* in 2015, the Multinational Taskforce MNJTF that comprised of mainly military units from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger succeeded in reclaiming most of the territories previously captured and controlled by *Boko Haram*. This makes the *Boko Haram* terrorists to lose 80% of their territories and they were forced to retreat (Ajah, 2018). Also, the Joint Task Force is given the role of enforcing and maintaining these laws and regulations to ensure peaceful coexistence. By ensuring strict obedience to law and order, the joint task force presumably fights terrorism because people are aware that such violent acts like terrorism are serious offences against the state. This inhibits the courage of some potential terrorists to perpetrate the act of terrorism because the police are there to enforce the laws of the state. Osuji (2013) argue that the presence of JTF helped the civil authority in maintaining law and order and in containing violence caused by terrorists and other criminal gangs.

Moreover, the JTF embarks on intelligence operations through the NIA in partnership with the security agencies of neighboring countries and the DSS that spearheads intelligence gathering within Nigeria in order to decimate the terrorists' group and eliminate its core leadership elements (Umar, 2013). Thus, improved intelligence gathering through effective information sharing between the JTF and members of the public will enhance proactive measures of countering terrorism and other violent crimes in the affected areas. Onuaha (2013) revealed that the capacity of the military and other security forces was improved through the provision of equipment required for monitoring and tracking of suspected terrorists with a view to detect them, their hidden explosives and other weapons which helped greatly in aborting their attacks. Therefore, improving the capacity of the security is key in ensuring effective fight against terrorism and any other form of crime bedeviling the nation.

### **Conclusion**

Looking at the roles of JTF in counter terrorism, the paper concludes that the JTF also encounter series of challenges in the fight against terrorism which includes inadequate manpower and security equipment, lack of effective information sharing between the security forces and members of the public which that undermine effective performance of the JTF in counter terrorism. However, the JTF has prospects in repelling terrorist attacks, arresting suspected terrorists, recapturing some areas captured by the terrorist, regaining the freedom of some of the kidnapped citizen among other efforts aimed at cracking down the terrorists' plans and activities.

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