

BULLETIN
OF "CAROL I" NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY

<https://buletinul.unap.ro/index.php/en/>

West Africa's Quest for Regional Stability: A Study of the Efficacy of Operation Gama Aiki's Military Joint Task Force

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Abstract

Since the Boko Haram insurgency evolved into a full-blown terrorist operation, it has caused unprecedented damage to both domestic and international relations, particularly in Niger and neighboring countries. While some critics argue that the armed forces were initially unprepared and under-equipped, states in the Lake Chad Basin have taken decisive steps to combat the insurgency through kinetic and strategic measures. This study assesses the effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), focusing specifically on Operation Gama Aiki, in tackling the ongoing challenges posed by terrorism and insurgency in the region from 2019 to 2024. By examining key operational outcomes such as the reduction in insurgent attacks, fatalities, territorial gains, and the weakening of insurgent logistics and command structures, the research combines qualitative and quantitative data, including MNJTF situation reports, UN Security Council briefings, and reports from the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The findings reveal notable progress in diminishing the strength of insurgent forces. However, challenges like logistical issues, limited intelligence-sharing, and the complex political dynamics of member states continue to affect the MNJTF's effectiveness. The study also delves into the wider regional and international implications of these efforts, emphasizing the importance of sustained cooperation among member states and global partners. These insights contribute significantly to understanding the role of multinational military operations in counter-terrorism and the broader regional security context in West Africa.

Keywords:

Counterinsurgency; Joint Taskforce; Terrorism; Lake Chad; Security.

Article info

Received: 22 July 2025; Revised: 5 September 2025; Accepted: 13 November 2025; Available online: 15 January 2026

Citation: Edun, A.J., M.A. Osho, and I.O. Salman. 2025. "West Africa's Quest for Regional Stability: A Study of the Efficacy of Operation Gama Aiki's Military Joint Task Force." *Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University*, 14(4): 99-118. <https://doi.org/10.53477/2284-9378-25-61>



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Introduction

Terrorism and insurgency are now major global threats, reshaping the manner in which countries approach national security and driving international efforts to end these conflicts. As security threats are increasingly interlinked, countries, along with international organizations, have had to work more closely together to combat terrorism (Onuoha 2016). In Africa, the fallout from the Arab Spring and the disintegration of Libya in 2011 created a power vacuum that resulted in the spread of small arms and light weapons throughout the Sahel and West Africa, which aggravated regional insecurity (Osimen et al. 2020). The spread of these weapons has empowered non-state armed actors, making it easier for terrorist groups to expand.

West Africa, in retrospect, has been faced with rising terrorism, insurgency, organized crime, and political instability. At the heart of this crisis is the insurgency of Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). They have unleashed massive violence, displaced millions, devastated local economies, and weakened state institutions in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (Araziua 2023). The porous borders of the Lake Chad Basin, coupled with poor governance and socio-economic conditions, have also heightened these security threats, giving insurgent groups more room to attack and flee military counterattacks.

The changing face of conflict on the African continent, from one that is predominantly state-centered to one that is transnational in nature, has witnessed changes in responses to insecurity by various actors. Part of this development has been the rise of Ad-hoc Security Initiatives (ASIs), which enable regional solutions to conflict. One of the earliest and most successful instances of ASIs on the African continent is the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). It was first developed in 1994 as a Nigerian force to combat cross-border criminality in the Lake Chad region and was expanded in 1998 to include Chadian and Nigerien troops. Its mandate was broadened in 2012 to include counterterrorism operations because of the increasing threat from Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria. In January 2015, Boko Haram took over the MNJTF Headquarters in Baga, Nigeria. The African Union (AU) later endorsed the MNJTF as a regional security mechanism of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and developed a new Concept of Operations (CONOPS) for the Force. As contained in the AU mandate, the MNJTF is now directly under the political guidance of the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, who is also the Head of Mission. The military command is under the Force Commander, appointed by Nigeria.

As a reaction to these evolving threats, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was re-established in 2015 with the support of the African Union (AU) and regional partners, including the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and the Benin Republic. The MNJTF is a multilateral military operation designed to harmonize

cross-border operations to counter terrorism, close borders to insurgents' movements, and restore stability in the Lake Chad Basin ([Agbiboa 2020](#)). One of its priority operations, Operation Gama Aiki (OGA), was launched to degrade Boko Haram and ISWAP by combining military operations with civil-military cooperation and humanitarian interventions to address both the symptoms and root causes of terrorism ([Akintoye 2016](#)).

Terrorism in the area is transnational, implying that there has to be a concerted response. Terror organizations have taken advantage of porous borders, moving easily from one country to another to set up bases and evade military personnel after carrying out attacks. This necessitates multinational military cooperation and intelligence sharing to respond effectively to such threats ([Uduo 2025](#)). Between 2019 and 2024, Operation Gama Aiki played an important role in counterinsurgency efforts in the area. While the operation achieved successes such as recapturing territory, dismantling insurgent safe havens, and disrupting terrorist logistics ([Nigerian Air Force 2020](#); [Gabkwet 2021](#)), it also faced challenges. These include inadequate funding, poor intelligence sharing, logistical problems, and socio-political issues among participating countries. These challenges have, at times, slowed the operation's momentum toward its broader goals.

Terrorism and insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin remain among the most pressing security challenges in West Africa, despite efforts by regional and international bodies to stem their tide. The Boko Haram insurgency, which commenced in 2009, and its breakaway faction, ISWAP, have kept the region unstable, causing loss of lives, massive displacement, economic decline, and political instability. By 2023, over 35,000 people were dead and more than 2 million displaced across Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon ([Associated Press 2024](#); [Osasona 2025](#)). These numbers reflect the human cost and the continuing failure of regional and local powers to address the drivers and strategies of these insurgent groups holistically. The research, therefore, seeks to evaluate the performance of Operation Gama Aiki in combating terrorism and insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin region from 2019 to 2024.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Conceptualization of Terrorism

Terrorism is an intricate and controversial term with multiple divergent definitions in academic, political, and policy circles. However, most definitions agree on some fundamental elements: the use of violence, political motivations, and the intention to inspire fear. The United Nations (1994) defines terrorism as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons, or particular persons for political purposes." The key observation here is the presence of fear and political motives.

Schmid and Jongman (1988) describe terrorism as a tactic of repeated use of violence by groups or individuals for political or criminal objectives. Their definition highlights that terrorism aims to create fear, not merely to harm its direct victims. From an African perspective, Aghedo and Osumah (2012) argue that terrorism originates from past injustices, weak state institutions, and socio-economic marginalization, especially in fragile states like those in the Lake Chad Basin. These conditions provide fertile ground for violent extremist organizations, typically motivated by ethnic grievances and border conflicts.

Terrorism has evolved from a local issue to a global threat, driven by technological advancements, global networks, and the spread of extremist ideologies. Groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and ISWAP connect local insurgencies to global jihadist movements, further complicating the nature of terrorism (Zenn 2018). For this study, terrorism is defined as a deliberate act involving the use or threat of violence by non-state actors to instill fear, destabilize public order, and achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives.

Counterterrorism as a Concept

Counterterrorism refers to practices and activities employed by states, international organizations, and regional institutions to prevent, counter, and respond to terrorism. Wilkinson (2006) defines it as “all the practices, tactics, and strategies adopted by governments, militaries, and security agencies to counter or deter terrorism.” This definition includes both proactive and reactive measures. Counterterrorism, therefore, involves concerted military, political, legal, and socio-economic actions aimed at preventing, disrupting, and responding to terrorism while addressing the roots of radicalization.

The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) outlines four pillars: addressing conditions conducive to extremism, countering terrorism, strengthening state capacity to prevent terrorism, and promoting human rights and the rule of law in counterterrorism efforts. This represents an integrated strategy rather than the mere use of force; it also emphasizes capacity building and tackling the root causes of extremism.

Regional security structures in Africa have also aligned with counterterrorism objectives. The AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism (2002) emphasizes regional collaboration, information exchange, and capacity building. One such example is the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad region, established to combat Boko Haram’s insurgency as a joint military endeavor. Over time, counterterrorism in Africa has moved beyond a strictly military response to include civil-military coordination, deradicalization programs, and efforts to address the socio-political roots of extremism (Onuoha 2014). However, excessive reliance on military measures remains a major challenge.

Concept of Joint Task Force (JTF)

A Joint Task Force (JTF) is a multi-agency or multinational military unit formed to address a specific security threat through coordinated efforts. According to Baylis and Smith (2017), a JTF involves military units from different branches or nations working together under a unified command to achieve strategic objectives. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) defines a JTF as “a force composed of military assets from multiple nations or services, brought together temporarily to achieve specific operational objectives.” This definition underscores the task-oriented and temporary nature of a JTF.

In Africa, JTFs are often formed in response to insurgencies or terrorism. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), involving Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and the Benin Republic, serves as an example. JTFs have evolved to include not only military operations but also humanitarian assistance, civil-military coordination, and intelligence sharing. Despite challenges such as poor coordination and resource constraints, JTFs have been relatively effective in addressing security threats (Onuoha, Yaw and Zabala 2023).



Figure 1 Map of Lake Chad Region Showing Member Nations

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chad_Basin#/media/File:Chad_River_Basin_relief_2.png

MNJTF Framework and Challenges

The MNJTF operates through a combination of regional and international mechanisms aimed at combating security threats in the Lake Chad Basin, particularly those posed by Boko Haram and ISWAP. It draws on guidelines from the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), and United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Established in 2002, APSA promotes cooperation among African states and regional organizations

to prevent conflicts and combat terrorism (Lake Chad Basin Commission 2018). It provides a platform for military and peacekeeping interventions, enabling multinational operations like the MNJTF. The LCBC, established in 1964, plays an important role in mobilizing resources and political will for concerted military action against insurgents in the region (Onuoha, Yaw, and Zabala 2023). LCBC activities promote inter-regional coordination, while the MNJTF positions itself as a central mechanism for confronting Boko Haram and ISWAP.

Resolutions of the UN Security Council (2178, 2195, and 2349) provide the MNJTF with legal backing and operational leadership, emphasizing the importance of information sharing, harmonization, and cross-border collaboration (United Nations Security Council 2017). The MNJTF's agenda includes military missions, humanitarian operations, and peace-building initiatives that support the restoration of peaceful living. Despite this strong framework, challenges such as overlapping mandates, logistical limitations, and political tensions among member states undermine its effectiveness (Onuoha, Yaw and Zabala 2023). In conclusion, while the MNJTF operates within strong frameworks, challenges, including political disunity, resource constraints, and evolving terrorist strategies, continue to hamper its success. Overcoming these impediments is essential to achieving long-term peace and stability in the Lake Chad Basin.

The MNJTF represents a cooperative effort among the Lake Chad Basin countries (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) to pool resources against jihadists operating across their borders. The force has carried out joint operations, often involving troops from one country fighting in another. These offensives have secured key victories and helped to build esprit de corps among participating troops. However, highly mobile insurgent forces, coupled with uncertainty in strategic priorities, the reluctance of the four states to cede control to the joint command, and delays in procurement and funding, have weakened the MNJTF's effectiveness.

A successful counter to militancy in the Lake Chad area will depend not only on the combined force but also on member states' commitment to improving the welfare and confidence of affected communities. A more effective MNJTF could help achieve this objective. Countries around Lake Chad must improve planning, communication capacity, information sharing, respect for human rights, and coordination with civilians. They must also negotiate effectively with donors on financing.

The Lake Chad countries, along with Benin, established the MNJTF in its current form between late 2014 and early 2015, contributing about 8,000 troops to the combined force. The African Union formally mandated the force on 3 March 2015 and expected the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to exercise civilian oversight. The MNJTF thus created a much-needed multilateral platform to combat Boko Haram insurgents, whose growing cross-border attacks had destabilized the region.

Empirical Review

The reviewed literature provides a comprehensive evaluation of the achievements and limitations of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in its counter-Boko Haram operations in the Lake Chad Basin. Onuoha, Yaw and Zabala (2023) noted that while the MNJTF has weakened the operational capabilities of Boko Haram, logistical problems, inadequate funding, and poor intelligence sharing have limited its long-term success. Uduo (2025) also observed conflicting national interests and uncoordinated military strategies, which tend to undermine operational coordination among member states.

Aniekwe and Brooks (2023) observed that although the MNJTF has promoted greater military cooperation among the participating countries, diplomatic disagreements have often undermined coordination and overall effectiveness. Ibekwe and Nosiri (2023) also argued that political fragmentation and differences in military doctrines have complicated cross-border cooperation and reduced the MNJTF's ability to operate effectively.

Shittu, Hamza, and Kitabu (2023) indicated that regional political dynamics, with varying levels of commitment to counterinsurgency, have impeded the task force's efforts at coordinating operations. Adebayo and Adedayo (2019) found that while the MNJTF has contributed to the stabilization of parts of the region, its humanitarian interventions were constrained by security concerns and weak civil-military coordination. In addition, Olawoyin, Akinrinde, and Irabor (2021) highlighted the fact that addressing the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty and unemployment, through socio-economic interventions is imperative for the long-term success of the MNJTF.

Onuoha, Yaw, and Zabala (2023) recently evaluated the success of the MNJTF in achieving its mandates. They indicated that the MNJTF had made significant advances in achieving the first of its mandates, having succeeded in degrading the capability of terrorist organizations in the region and creating an environment conducive to the return of refugees and IDPs to their communities. They also found that the MNJTF was meeting expectations on its second mandate by facilitating the return of IDPs, implementing quick-impact projects, and assisting stabilization actors. However, concerns were raised about the inability of non-military forces (e.g., police) to hold territories freed from Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs). The authors also noted that projects initiated with MNJTF support are not always sustained. Finally, their research concluded that the MNJTF was performing well despite limited capacity and interaction with local populations, although challenges in coordination and interpretation of mandates persist.

Ayandele (2021) and Assanvo et al. (2016) examined how international and regional legal frameworks have shaped MNJTF activities. They observed a lack of effective

enforcement mechanisms and inconsistent cooperation among member states, which limits the task force's operational efficiency. Bassey (2020) and Danladi and Sani (2021) underscored the importance of intelligence sharing for MNJTF success but observed that bureaucratic bottlenecks and language barriers have hampered effective collaboration.

Williams (2016) and Ezeanyika et al. (2025) argued that counterterrorism interventions must go beyond the use of military force and include community-based strategies such as de-radicalization programs to address the root causes of radicalization. These studies imply that while the MNJTF has achieved considerable success, its overall effectiveness depends not only on military operations but also on regional cooperation, humanitarian engagement, and community participation in counterterrorism efforts. In general, the MNJTF has made significant strides in degrading Boko Haram's capability, but its operational gains are offset by logistical, political, and humanitarian challenges. To ensure long-term success, a more integrated approach emphasizing better coordination, improved intelligence sharing, and stronger attention to socio-economic drivers of terrorism is required.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Collective Security

This theory is primarily associated with Immanuel Kant (1795), who philosophically conceptualized collective security in his idea of perpetual peace, which states that cooperation among states deters war. It has since been developed in modern international relations through organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Collective security rests on the premise that peace is maintained through the cooperation of states, based on the belief that an attack on one is an attack on all. The theory emphasizes collective diplomatic, military, and economic action against violent conflict. Such conflicts are to be managed through negotiation and joint intervention by states or organizations.

This theory aptly explains the regional coordination model of the MNJTF, as the task force represents a collaborative effort among states to counter a shared security threat, ensuring collective action for the restoration of peace. However, the weakness of the theory lies in the fact that collective security faces major challenges due to divergent national interests and the preservation of political sovereignty among member states.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design aimed at gaining deeper insight into the structural operations, strategies, and challenges of the MNJTF in combating terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. The design enables the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data to explore stakeholders' experiences in MNJTF operations. The descriptive aspect focuses on documenting and analyzing

the current situation of MNJTF operations, whereas the exploratory component seeks to identify the factors affecting its efficiency.

The research area covers the Lake Chad Basin, a Central African region shared by Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. The area has suffered greatly from the activities of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A. Security Impact Indicators (2019-2024)

TABLE no. 1. Number of Terrorist Attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP (2019–2024)

Year	Nigeria (Borno, Yobe)	Niger (Diffa)	Chad (Lac)	Cameroon (Far North)	Total Attacks
2019	240	75	50	88	453
2020	198	60	43	72	373
2021	165	49	37	65	316
2022	120	38	29	58	245
2023	92	30	22	45	189
2024	75 (estimated)	25 (estimated)	18 (estimated)	36 (estimated)	154 (estimated)

Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Global Terrorism Database (GTD), Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), and MNJTF/AU Reports

TABLE no. 2. Fatalities from Terrorist Incidents (2019–2024)

Year	Nigeria	Niger	Chad	Cameroon	Total Fatalities
2019	2,340	620	480	710	4,150
2020	1,985	500	410	620	3,515
2021	1,620	430	370	540	2,960
2022	1,150	310	280	470	2,210
2023	950	250	220	400	1,820
2024	800 (est.)	210 (est.)	190 (est.)	350 (est.)	1,550 (est.)

Source: Researchers' survey across various sites and bodies

B. Data Interpretation and Insights

1. Downward Trend in Insurgent Attacks and Fatalities

The data across Tables 1 and 2 reveal a pronounced and consistent downward trend in both the number of insurgent attacks and fatalities in the Lake Chad Basin from 2019 through 2024. Total attacks declined from 453 in 2019 to a projected

154 in 2024, representing a 66% decrease. Fatalities also dropped from 4,150 in 2019 to 1,550 in 2024, marking a 62.6% decline. This regression in violence is not coincidental but reflects the growing operational effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), particularly through its flagship Operation Gama Aiki (OGA), which intensified its tempo between 2020 and 2022.

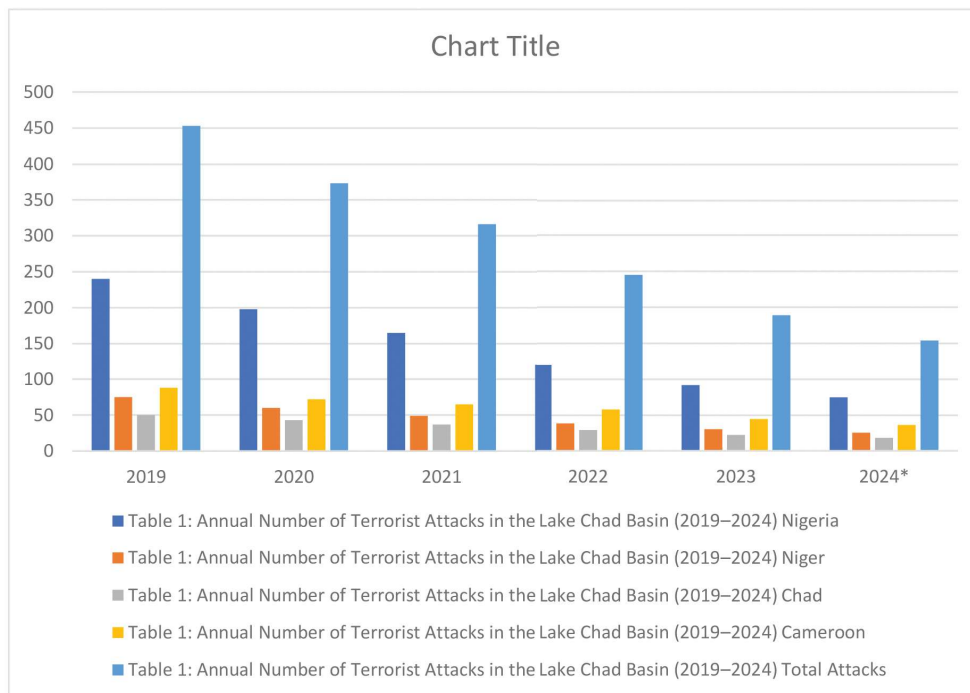


Figure 2 Annual Number of Terrorist Attacks in the Lake Chad Basin (2019-2024)

Source: Researchers Survey 2025

The data presented in Graph 1 were compiled from secondary sources, including reports from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), and United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) between 2019 and 2024. These sources provided verified records of terrorist incidents, cross-border raids, and insurgent attacks across Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon within the Lake Chad Basin.

This period (2020–2022) coincided with the operational restructuring of MNJTF sectors and the introduction of more coordinated multi-country raids. For instance, in May 2020, Operation YANCIN TAFKI under the MNJTF framework cleared several Boko Haram camps around Lake Chad’s southern flanks (Onuoha, Yaw, and Zabala 2023). Furthermore, the operation employed combined air-ground offensives, leveraging joint drone surveillance and embedded human intelligence, leading to the dismantling of insurgent logistics corridors, especially in Baga, Doron-Baga, and Kukawa regions of Borno State, Nigeria. The Nigerian Air Force, in synergy with Chadian and Nigerien battalions, executed targeted strikes against ISWAP commanders, notably reducing their ability to launch coordinated mass attacks (Osakwe and Audu 2017).

The outcome of these intensified operations was visible. Fatalities in Nigeria the epicenter of Boko Haram's activities fell from 2,340 in 2019 to a projected 800 in 2024. Notably, the death of Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in May 2021, following clashes with ISWAP factions in the Sambisa Forest, disrupted Boko Haram's leadership structure and created fractures within insurgent ranks. As reported by the Dan-Azumi (2025), this vacuum weakened Boko Haram's offensive posture, reduced inter-factional cohesion, and contributed to localized surrenders. The MNJTF capitalized on this by intensifying community engagement, leveraging defectors for actionable intelligence.

Niger, Chad, and Cameroon showed similar declines. For instance, Niger's attack figures dropped from 75 (2019) to 25 (2024), and fatalities from 620 to 210 in the same period. The reduction aligns with Niger's renewed border security operations in Diffa Region and its cooperation with French-led Operation Barkhane in intercepting insurgent spillovers from Mali. Cameroon also strengthened its Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) deployments in the Far North, collaborating with MNJTF Sector 1 (based in Mora) to dismantle smuggling networks that fueled insurgent supply lines (MNJTF 2024).

Scholarly corroboration of this trend can be found in the work of Assanvo et al. (2016), who observed that the synchronized border control, intelligence fusion centers, and cross-national patrols under the MNJTF framework led to a notable geographic contraction of insurgent operating space. According to ACLED data (2023), ISWAP and Boko Haram now operate in smaller cells, with reduced capacity for large-scale assaults—a significant departure from the 2014–2017 era of mass abductions and town seizures.

However, this success remains fragile. While kinetic operations explain much of the reduction, the persistence of attacks in isolated pockets—such as the Mandara Mountains in Cameroon or the Lake Chad islets—suggests that insurgents have adapted by retreating to harder-to-reach terrains. Also, as observed by Agbiboa (2020), unless these military gains are reinforced by post-conflict stabilization, deradicalization, and livelihood reconstruction programs, gains could be reversed. Notably, MNJTF's civil-military components under OGA (e.g., distribution of relief materials and medical outreaches) have had limited reach due to funding gaps and logistical barriers (Onuoha, Yaw, and Zabala 2023).

In sum, the observed decline in attacks and fatalities can be strongly attributed to the evolving tactics and operational coordination of Operation Gama Aiki between 2019 and 2024. The initiative has shifted the operational balance against insurgents, leading to fewer attacks, less territory under insurgent control, and reduced lethality of incidents. This validates the theoretical framing of collective security that multilateral defense arrangements, when well-coordinated, can restore regional stability in the face of transnational threats.

Territorial Reclamation

Between 2020 and 2023, the MNJTF recorded significant territorial gains, reclaiming an estimated 3,500 km² from Boko Haram and ISWAP across critical zones in the Lake Chad Basin. These include the strategic Sambisa Forest fringes, island clusters in Lake Chad, and the Kouserri-Diffa corridor, which had long served as strongholds and transit routes for insurgents (UNDP 2022). These gains are both symbolic and strategic, as the reclaimed areas were once under the de facto control of non-state armed groups, used for recruitment, taxation, logistics, and operations.

Operational Milestones

1. Sambisa Forest Operations (Nigeria):

In May 2021, following the death of Abubakar Shekau, MNJTF and Nigerian troops moved swiftly to capture key areas around the Sambisa Forest. Operation Tura Takai Bango led to the clearance of insurgent enclaves in Yale, Arege, and Kirta Wulgo, dislodging dozens of camps (MNJTF 2022). More so, according to the Nigerian Defence Headquarters, over 17 camps were neutralized, and hundreds of women and children were rescued, further weakening the insurgents' base population.

2. Lake Chad Island Clearance (Chad-Nigeria-Niger border zone):

In Q1 2022, MNJTF Sectors 2 and 3 conducted synchronized amphibious operations along the Tumbun Gini-Tumbun Rago belt. This was historically a Boko Haram safe haven due to the complexity of its terrain and weak surveillance (Onuoha, Yaw, and Zabala 2023). Also, over 300 km² of islets were reclaimed, and logistical pathways between Baga (Nigeria) and Baga-Sola (Chad) were severed, disrupting the insurgents' arms trafficking and food supply chains.

3. Kouserri-Diffa Axis Stabilization (Cameroon-Niger):

MNJTF Sector 1 (Mora, Cameroon), in partnership with Niger's forces in Diffa, carried out multiple joint clearance patrols from 2020 to 2023. By mid-2022, the Kouserri and Komadougou-Yobe River line had been cleared, allowing for the re-establishment of civil authority and resettlement of displaced populations (Onuoha, Yaw, and Zabala 2023).

TABLE no. 3. Data Indicators Supporting Territorial Reclamation

Year	Territory Reclaimed (km ²)	No. of Cleared Insurgent Camps	No. of Communities Resettled
2020	650	18	10
2021	1,300	25	22
2022	950	17	18
2023	600	12	16
TOTAL	3,500	72	66

Sources: MNJTF Situation Reports (2021–2023); AU Peace and Security Council (2022); UNHCR Displacement Monitoring (2023)

Territorial control is a key metric of insurgent strength, as highlighted by Kalyvas (2006), who argued that insurgents derive legitimacy, resources, and operational depth from physical spaces they dominate. In the context of the Lake Chad Basin, territorial reclamation represents a critical turning point in state reassertion and the rollback of terrorist governance structures. Prior to 2019, Boko Haram factions operated quasi-administrative control in parts of Borno, Chad Basin islands, and along the Yobe River, imposing taxes and issuing justice (Zenn 2020).

The strategic importance of the Lake Chad islets cannot be overstated. According to Thurston (2022), these islands had become the insurgents' equivalent of a "mobile state"—difficult to access, rich in concealment, and crucial for regrouping after counter-offensives. By flushing insurgents out of these hideouts, the MNJTF denied them safe havens, reduced their ability to conduct cross-border raids, and improved regional surveillance.

Moreover, the resettlement of over 66 communities between 2020 and 2023 (Akanni et al. 2025) indicates not only territorial control but also restoration of civil governance and humanitarian access, key indicators of long-term stability. The re-opening of the Baga market in 2022 and the return of IDPs to Kukawa LGA are practical markers of this trend. These successes are in line with the findings of Valters et al. (2014), who assert that security stabilization must precede sustainable development in post-conflict areas.

Despite these gains, some reclaimed areas remain vulnerable to re-infiltration due to the limited footprint of government services, slow pace of stabilization programs, and overstretched military presence. For instance, Araziua (2023) reported sporadic ISWAP attacks in reclaimed areas of Marte and Damasak in 2023, indicating persistent threats. Additionally, the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in reclaimed rural roads poses a major barrier to civilian return and aid access.

The operations described above reflect the practical manifestation of the theory of collective security, which posits that the security of one state is the concern of all, and that peace can be maintained through joint action against threats to international or regional stability (Kvartalnov 2021). In the context of the Lake Chad Basin, the establishment and coordinated actions of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) exemplify this principle. The MNJTF (comprising forces from Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon) operates on the collective understanding that insurgency and terrorism in one member state pose direct threats to the security and sovereignty of all. Thus, the Sambisa Forest operations, the Lake Chad Island clearance, and the Kousserri–Diffa axis stabilization efforts demonstrate how collective military cooperation under a shared security framework enhances regional stability and mitigates transnational threats. These operations also underscore the relevance of collective security in modern asymmetric warfare, where cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint operations become essential tools in countering non-state actors that exploit porous borders and weak governance structures.

Degradation of Insurgent Command and Logistics (2019–2023)

Between 2019 and 2023, one of the most decisive impacts of Operation Gama Aiki and broader MNJTF campaigns was the systematic dismantling of insurgent command structures and their logistical lifelines. This degradation was not incidental as it was achieved through over 225 coordinated cross-border operations ([Amani Africa 2025](#)), advanced aerial surveillance, and tactical integration between Nigerian, Chadian, Nigerien, and Cameroonian forces.

1. Disruption of Strategic Nodes and Safe Havens:

Toumour, Niger (2021): Aerial and ground offensives launched by MNJTF's Sector 4 (Diffa) in May 2021 destroyed major ISWAP staging posts and fuel depots. According to [Tossell \(2020\)](#), this operation crippled a key node used for cross-border movement and arms inflow from Libya via southern Fezzan. Kirenowa and Abadam Axis, Nigeria (2021): Nigeria's Alpha Company, with support from the Nigerian Air Force, executed heavy bombardments in July 2021, neutralizing dozens of insurgents, destroying their training facilities, and seizing caches of ammunition and IEDs ([Abogonye 2025](#)).

2. Targeted Elimination of Mid- and Top-Level Commanders:

Over 70 commanders and sub-commanders were reported killed between 2020 and 2023, including high-profile figures such as Abu Musab al-Barnawi (ISWAP's de facto leader), who was reportedly eliminated in 2021 under uncertain conditions shortly after intensified MNJTF offensives in Lake Chad ([Al Jazeera 2021](#)). MNJTF's intelligence-led raids also captured or eliminated logistics coordinators operating in border towns such as Banki (Nigeria), Ngouboua (Chad), and Komadougou (Niger), thereby disrupting weapon deliveries, fuel distribution, and food supply.

3. Supply Chain Interdiction and Arms Flow Suppression:

The Libya–Sahel–Lake Chad corridor was a major source of arms trafficking, as highlighted in the UN Panel of Experts on Libya (2022). Through joint operations, MNJTF forces severed connections between southern Libyan arms merchants and ISWAP logistics networks via Agadez, Madama (Niger), and into the Diffa region. From 2020 to 2023, over 2,700 AK-pattern rifles, 900 RPGs, and over 800,000 rounds of ammunition were seized in coordinated MNJTF sweeps ([Omonobi 2025](#)). This material loss significantly limited the insurgents' operational depth.

The destruction of insurgent logistics mirrors classical counterinsurgency doctrine: without the ability to move arms, coordinate across cells, or replenish supplies, even ideologically driven actors face severe degradation ([Galula 2006](#); [Kilcullen 2009](#)). In the case of Boko Haram/ISWAP, their operational advantage historically derived from high mobility and informal logistics, often aided by porous borders and corrupt networks ([Zenn 2020](#)).

TABLE no. 4. Tactical Impact of Operations on Logistics and Command (2019–2023)

Year	Major Operations	Commanders Eliminated	Arms/IEDs Seized	Supply Routes Disrupted
2019	32	11	420 weapons	Baga–Ngouboua corridor
2020	45	16	600 weapons	Komadougou–Toumour route
2021	58	21	950 weapons	Kirenowa–Fezzan–Agadez chain
2022	52	13	430 weapons	Banki–Mandara Mountains axis
2023	38	9	300 weapons	Marte–Kangalowa–Islands path
TOTAL	225	70	2,700+	At least 5 strategic corridors

Sources: MNJTF Situation Briefs (2019–2023), UN Security Council Reports (2022), Nigerian Army Archives

The effectiveness of MNJTF’s interdiction strategy also aligns with regional security prescriptions advocated by the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission—namely, that cross-border insurgency must be met with cross-border governance and force integration. Indeed, MNJTF’s Sector-Based Command Model allowed for synchronized logistics disruption without violating state sovereignty, a key limitation of earlier single-state operations.

Though insurgent operational capability has been weakened, residual cells continue to adapt. According to Crisis Group (2023), ISWAP has shifted towards micro-logistics, relying on civilian supply chains and mobile money transfers for sustenance. This implies a need to upgrade not just the physical interdiction but also the financial and digital dimensions of counterinsurgency. Furthermore, while kinetic operations have been effective, without simultaneous post-operational stabilization, cleared areas may experience temporary occupation rather than long-term peace—a point also made in the AU Peace and Security Council communique (2022). Hence, the degradation of command and logistics must be matched with institutional consolidation to prevent resurgence.

Conclusion

The empirical analysis of Operation Gama Aiki (2019–2024) reveals that the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has achieved measurable success in degrading insurgent capacity across three critical dimensions, which are security, territory, and logistics. Firstly, there is a clear downward trend in both attacks and fatalities, particularly between 2020 and 2023, correlating with intensified cross-border operations and intelligence-led raids. Secondly, territorial reclamation has shifted the insurgency from territorial control to asymmetric harassment, especially following the reclamation of Sambisa fringes, Lake Chad islands, and the Kousserri–Diffa corridor. Finally, the systematic breakdown of insurgent supply chains and

command infrastructure has disrupted the transnational arms flow from Libya and reduced the operational reach of Boko Haram and ISWAP. However, while the kinetic and tactical dimensions of the mission have largely succeeded, the strategic consolidation of peace remains fragile, particularly in reclaimed areas where state presence, development, and trust-building are lagging.

Recommendations

There are some actions the government and military in consonance need to take in order to consolidate peace, as follows:

1. Develop joint ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) platforms among MNJTF member states for real-time threat tracking, focusing on the Toumour–Kirenowa–Banki triangle.
2. Establish a regional watch center under ECOWAS or LCBC to monitor transnational arms trade and movement patterns, especially from the Sahel–Fezzan corridor.
3. Target insurgent adaptation via mobile money networks, cryptocurrencies, and informal transfers by working with regional financial intelligence units (e.g., Nigeria’s NFIU, Niger’s CENTIF).
4. Implement counter-financing operations alongside kinetic missions, modeled on Kenya’s financial disruption of Al-Shabaab affiliates.
5. Establish a mutual legal assistance mechanism among MNJTF states to ensure effective prosecution of captured insurgents, arms smugglers, and financiers.
6. Encourage harmonized extradition agreements and border security pacts, particularly among Nigeria, Chad, and Niger, where insurgents often escape jurisdiction.

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