



Nigeria-Niger Relations and Challenges in Enhancing Counter Insurgency Operations in North Eastern Nigeria (2010 to 2023)

Abstract

This study examined the challenges of Nigeria-Niger Relations towards Enhancing Counter Insurgency Operations in North Eastern Nigeria from 2010 to 2023. With the rise of insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the region, cross-border cooperation between Nigeria and Niger had become crucial in addressing security challenges and promoting regional stability. The study adopted the survey research design method. Data was obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OPHK and the MNJTF. Members of staff from the office of the NSA were sampled using Krajeicie and Morgan method of sample size. A total of 380 population were arrived at as the population sample of the study. Primary data were obtained using questionnaires and interviews which were administered to the chosen population. The responses gave credibility and validity to the research work. Data collected from the quantitative method were analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentages and frequency distribution tables. These were bar charts and pie charts, as well as Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Through a comprehensive analysis of diplomatic, military, and socio-economic factors, the study investigated the challenges of bilateral relations between the two countries and how it influenced the effectiveness of Counter Insurgency Operations in North East Nigeria. This was predicated on the background that the collaborative efforts in Counter Insurgency Operations between these countries were rooted in Nigeria's foreign policy approach towards enhancing internal and regional security in the West African sub-region. The study found that effective cooperation between Nigeria and Niger was required to achieve good foreign policy objectives that would address shared security challenges. The research identified some issues which included ineffective COIN strategies for enhanced security in the NE zone of Nigeria. The study further underscored the impact of bilateral relations between Nigeria and Niger on the effectiveness of COIN operations in NE Nigeria. It was observed that the bilateral relations were fruitless occasioned by failed diplomatic, economic and political ties. The proffered strategy to mitigate the issues therefore require close cooperation, coordination and collaboration between Nigeria and Niger. Implementing these strategies in a coordinated and sustained manner could enhance Counter Insurgency Operations and contribute to peace building and stability in North Eastern Nigeria.

Keywords: Bilateral relations, Insurgency, Counter Insurgency, Niger Niger

Introduction

Nigeria's relations with Niger Republic, as with the rest of the world, were initially built upon historical and political connections (Vasudevan, 2014). The bilateral relations between both countries which were initiated after Nigeria's

independence have considerably expanded in recent years with both nations building strategic and commercial ties (Eton, 2016). Thus, significant progress has been made by successive Nigerian Governments to promote diplomatic ties with Niger in the social, economic and defence spheres. In

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recognition of the geo-strategic nature of interactions and the expanding scope of socio-economic relations and partnership, Nigeria and Niger signed a number of bilateral agreements including Security Cooperation Agreement, Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement, and Bilateral Air Service Agreement (BASA) in 2014. However, a number of these agreements, especially the security cooperation agreement has remained moribund, thereby culminating into inefficient management of emerging security threats, particularly insurgency which have bedeviled both nations in recent times (Illiya, 2019).

The Maitasine uprising in the 1980s serves as an example of the prevalence of insurgency activities, but the emergence of the Boko Haram (BH) insurgent group in 2002 has posed significant challenges for Nigeria. The BH insurgents operates cells along Nigeria's borders in the Lake Chad region especially within the North Eastern (NE) zone of Nigeria, making it difficult for Nigeria to control the situation without support from neighboring countries. Initially, these neighbouring countries couldn't offer much assistance. Considering the high intensity of insurgency attacks and destructions within the Lake Chad region which extended to NE Nigeria, informed the need to reinvigorate efforts to decimate BN insurgents (Duruji, Chidozie, Olanrewaju, and Duruji-Moses, 2019).

The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) is a multinational agency comprising member States from Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroun, setup to enhance defence cooperation and the protection of the shared natural resources of Lake Chad. The LCBC member states have suffered several attacks carried out by BH insurgents, which ruined the peace of the LCBC, thereby threatening the national security of member States (African Union, 2015). Nigeria and the Republic of Niger have suffered several attacks carried out by

BH insurgents and Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) Terrorists, which threatens the territorial integrity of both nations. This prompted both countries to strengthen bilateral relations with a view to conducting efficient COIN operations (Saidu, 2017).

Accordingly, Nigeria and Niger entered into a defence bilateral cooperation which was subsequently replaced with a multilateral arrangement through the auspices of the MNJTF established by LCBC member states. Although BH insurgents in January 2015 overran a military base in the NE zone of Nigeria that was the Headquarters (HQ) of the MNJTF in Baga, Borno State, the MNJTF was subsequently remodeled in 2016, through an improved defence cooperation framework with a new HQ sited in Ndjamena, Chad (Ahmadu, 2019).

The Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) has embarked on COIN operations due to the intense activities of BH insurgents and ISWAP in the NE zone. A Joint Task Force (JTF) COIN operation previously code-named Operation LAFIYA DOLE (OPLD) but renamed Operation HADIN KAI (OPHK) has been employed as a mechanism for curtailing activities of BH insurgents in the NE zone which shares borders with Niger Republic (Suleiman, 2020). The increasing menace of the BH insurgency has brought to the fore, the imperative for enhanced defence security collaboration and the necessity for the military forces of Nigeria and the Republic of Niger to work together in order to achieve success against a common enemy.

Nigeria and the Republic of Niger have extended maximum military cooperation and have always obliged each other with all the required information and intelligence on the activities of insurgents and associated criminal elements whenever necessary. The Nigeria-Niger bilateral relations which had each of the country contingents deployed within its own national

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boundaries enabled the MNJTF to regain control of some areas under the insurgents' occupation thereby supporting local agencies to maintain State authority, and provide protection to the civilian population of the countries (Haruna, 2022). Despite the efforts of the MNJTF Operations within the framework of defense bilateral agreements to restore order and enhance security in the region, each participating nation appears primarily focused on defending its own territory and reacting to insurgency threats accordingly. This approach has constrained the effectiveness of the defense cooperation between Nigeria and Niger, particularly impacting COIN operations in NE Nigeria. Consequently, there's a need for a comprehensive study aimed at evaluating the challenges of Nigeria-Niger bilateral relations on COIN efforts in NE Nigeria. The researcher aims to propose suitable strategies to address the perceived deficiencies in the defense cooperation agreements between Nigeria and the Republic of Niger, with the goal of enhancing COIN efforts in both NE Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

Conceptual Framework

Bilateral Relations

Bilateral relations refers to relationships that exist between only two countries, coming together to cooperate and achieve certain mutual objectives, which may be political, economic, social, or collective security (Ravenbill, 2011). Bilateral Security relation is therefore an aspect of bilateral relations that basically focuses on security matters affecting two countries such as border security, banditry, transborder piracy, smuggling of contraband items, human trafficking, armed robbery, drugs dealing, terrorism, transnational insurgence etc.

Bilateralism generally concerns relations or policies of joint action between two parties or countries. Typically, bilateralism has applications concerning

political, economic, diplomatic, cultural and security matters between two states. The term 'bilateralism', however, stands for an organizing principle of bilateral conduct and, as postulated in political science literature, appears to have a more implicit meaning on institutional form than just 'relations involving two states or parties (Kiatpongson, 2023). For example, as Baumann pointed out in the framework of multilateralism, bilateralism carries two generic senses. The first one connotes the patterns of relations among states in international relations while the second generic sense describes the orientation of a state's foreign policy conduct (Baumann, 2001).

In establishing an understanding of the nature of bilateral relations, Holsti (2005) posits that bilateral relations between nations are principally influenced by their foreign policies. Wanjohi (2011) highlights that good understanding of foreign policies of nations and factors influencing them are crucial to attainment of maximal benefits from bilateral relations. He further posits that a country's bilateral relations framework, is a set of goals outlining how the country will interact with other countries economically, politically, socially and militarily, and to a lesser extent, how the country will interact with non-state actors.

Webber & Smith (2013) submit that the nature of bilateral relations primarily shapes the boundaries between the external environment of the nation state and the internal or domestic environment, with its variety of sub-national sources of influence. Thus, bilateral relations according to the authors are designed to help protect a country's national interests, national security, ideological goals, and economic prosperity. This can occur as a result of peaceful cooperation with other nations, or through exploitation.

After reviewing and evaluating various scholastic definition of the concept of bilateral relations, it is worthy of note at this juncture that Ravenbill's

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conceptualization both acknowledges the political, economic, social and collective security which all fall under the realms of the nature and character of Nigeria-Niger relations. This perspective is therefore considered suitable and adopted for this study.

Insurgency

The concept insurgency has been seen used differently in many literatures. However, the popular definition is one put forward by the United State as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.” Moreover, from its legal point of view, an insurgency is seen as a violent protest carried out by rebels against a constituted authority or state that has been recognized by the (United Nations, n.d) cited in (Gana, 2023). Ibiang (2018) have given more characterization of insurgency as a battle that it is usually the product of asymmetric conflict, where one party has an overwhelming force and incontestable physical influence and other instruments of coercion over the other.

Insurgency is the actions of an organized, often ideologically motivated group that seeks to effect or prevent political change of a governing authority within a region, and the actions focused on persuading or coercing the population through the use of violence and subversion (North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, 2011). In the same vein, the British Army Field Manual (AFM) defined insurgency as “the actions of a minority group within a state that tend toward forcing political change by a means of a mixture of subversion, propaganda and military pressure, aiming to persuade or intimidate people to accept such a change” (cited in Liolio, 2013). For Metz & Millen (2004), insurgency is a strategy adopted by groups, which cannot attain their political objectives through a quick seizure of power but often characterized by protracted, asymmetric

violence, ambiguity as well as the use of complex terrain such as jungles, mountains, urban areas, psychological warfare, and political mobilization - all designed to protect the insurgents and eventually alter the balance of power in their favour. Simply put, Beck (2008) conceives insurgency as a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities where the non-ruling group deliberately uses a combination of politics and violence to further its cause. However, when this happened, the state needs to take COIN measures to suppress it.

Subsequent to the conceptualization of insurgency, it is pertinent to note that the study is convinced and at par with Ibiang’s postulation which both acknowledges the two actors in the realm of insurgency, the insurgents and the counter insurgents (government). Perhaps, he considered insurgency as a product of asymmetric conflict, where one party has an overwhelming force and incontestable physical influence and other instruments of coercion over the other. This perspective is therefore considered suitable and adopted for this study.

Counter-Insurgency

Counter-insurgency is the opposite of insurgency frequently refers as an acronym COIN. By definition, Counter-insurgency is a combination of measures undertaken by legitimate government of a state or country to curb or suppress an insurgency taken up against it (Liolio, 2013). The U.S. COIN Guide (2009), defined COIN as a "comprehensive civilian-military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes." For Davidson (2016), it is “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency”. And it requires a comprehensive assessment of the root causes, strategy and technique of the insurgents.

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Similarly, NATO (2011) conceived it as set of political, economic, social, military, law enforcement, civil and psychological activities with the aim to defeat insurgency and address any core grievances. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents employ varied tactics and methods. These include political, military, economic, social, information and infrastructure activities (ways), in an attempt to reach a favourable outcome (ends) and within the resources available, including time (means). If this broad array is generally categorized as political and military in nature, political considerations are of much greater importance than military considerations in a struggle for the consent of the population. Anyway, this is contestable. In comparison, Liolio (2013) notes that, while insurgents for instance try to overthrow the existing political authority in order to establish theirs, the counterinsurgent forces try to reinstate the existing political structures as well as reduce or annihilate the usurping authority of the insurgents. Hence, in this study borderline is seen as a defence line, line of demarcation between Nigeria and her north-eastern African neighbours. Insurgency is viewed as the violence asymmetric strategy by Boko Haram militants aiming at gaining political authority in some states in the Nigeria's north-eastern region. While, counter-insurgency is the various measures the Nigeria governments is employing in collaboration with other African neighbours to suppress the Boko Haram violence activities in the region.

Counter-insurgency operations: refers to all military and humanitarian efforts deployed by the Nigerian state to address the Boko Haram insurgency in the north east region of Nigeria. In this regard, COIN operations cover both military offensive against Boko Haram and defensive provision of security for internally displaced persons and camps by COIN forces. This definition is consistent with the Buhari Plan

(2016: 21), which identifies security agencies as key partners in the management of IDP camps in the north east.

Ogbonnaya (2013) views Counter-insurgency Operations as an integrated set of political, economic, social, and security measures intended to end and prevent the recurrence of armed violence, create and maintain stable political, economic, and social structures, and resolve the underlying causes of an insurgency in order to establish and sustain the conditions necessary for lasting stability.

As examined above the conceptualization of counter-insurgency by different authorities, it significant to state that the conceptualization of Ogbonnaya resonates well with the researcher simply because the conceptualization both acknowledges the causes and dynamics of insurgency and the three-dimensional complexity of dealing with them and places of military and security operations firmly within the wider context of the conflict. Perhaps most important, it also establishes the end-state of successful Counter-insurgency which is a major mandate of Nigeria-Niger agreements. This perspective is therefore considered suitable and adopted for this study.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

Sowale & Orogun (2021), *Bilateral Relations and the Challenges of Multinational Joint Task Force in West Africa*. The paper adopts the qualitative and content method of data collection and analysis respectively. Findings of the study unveiled that despite the establishment of MJTF, Boko Haram continues to wreck devastations in the North east Nigeria and other neighbouring states. The study concluded defective bilateral relations of Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBCs) countries adversely affect the functionality of MNJTF. It is therefore recommended that Lake Chad Basin Countries (LCBCs) need to correct problematic bilateral relations in

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order to successfully combat Boko haram menace in the West Africa sub-region.

Shehuri, Muhammad & Musa (2018) in their study titled “Challenges of Nigeria-Chad Bilateral Relations” adopted the use of both primary and secondary (structured interview) sources of data in arriving at their research findings. The authors posited that Nigeria and the Republic of Chad share a common border of the Lake-Chad Basin, which stretches to 85 Square kilometres. The two countries have enjoyed diplomatic relations over the years culminating in the exchange diplomatic missions and various bilateral relations on trade, culture, education, defence and security, with a view to promoting their mutual national interests. Their study concluded that there is the need for Nigeria and Chad to address the alarming security challenges, especially insurgency that tried to hamper their relations. Their study however did not investigate the nature of Nigeria-Nigerrelations, and also failed to evaluate the influence of the state of their relations on the conduct of COIN operations in Nigeria.

Olufade, Ibrahim, Baban’umma, & Abdul (2023), Challenges of Diplomacy in Securing External Defense Arrangement in Nigeria (2007-2022). The study adopted mixed research design using both qualitative and quantitative methods. It was found out that a lot still need to be done to improve the strategies and methods of securing diplomatic arrangements in a way that will favor Nigeria in dealing with the challenges encountered in diplomatic defense relations to combat the effect of terrorism both locally and regionally. The study recommended that Nigeria must intensify efforts at holding regional security summits for defense diplomats while intensifying joint military exercises for regional states in the Multi-national Joint Task Force to promote unity, improve communication and information sharing; and that the state must improve defense budgeting while joining multiple

counter terrorism coalition both regionally and globally.

Arzika (2023), Issues and Challenges in Nigeria- Niger Republic Border Security. Qualitative method was employed for this study. The paper employs reactive re-active model approach as a variant of linkage theory as a tool in understanding the study. The paper concluded that the government of the two countries should be proactive in securing their borders. The study recommended among others the need for an allied of bi-lateral arrangement of customs and immigration to enforce minimum standards at international travel. Government of the two countries should provide employment opportunities to the unemployed youths in the region in order to dissuade them from being indoctrinated in various crimes and terrorism

Ibiang (2018), Nigeria’s Insurgency and Counter-insurgency: Implications, Issues, and Lessons for National Security. The paper utilized qualitative and content method of data collection and analysis respectively. Disagreeing with the human needs centred view on national security and drawing from studies by other scholars, this paper uses the state-centric perspective on national security to examine the interaction between insurgency, counter-insurgency, and national security. It points out the issues and lessons emanating from the interaction and their implications for national security. The paper concluded and recommended among others that national security efforts should be more dynamic and responsive to a certain range of problems and issues in the COIN operation.

Ugwueze & Onuoha (2020), Hard Versus Soft Measures to Security: Explaining the Failure of Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Nigeria. The paper utilized qualitative and textual method of data collection and analysis respectively. The study observed that Nigeria continues to face the challenge of containing terrorism despite adopting diverse counter-terrorism

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measures. While extant literature has evaluated the impacts of these measures, explaining why terrorist attacks in Nigeria persist despite a robust hard approach through the traditional use of force is still lacking. The paper concluded and recommended among others that to effectively address the threat posed by terrorism, Nigeria needs to take concerted efforts to address the gap between what exists on paper and what it delivers in practice.

Gana, Ku-Samsu, & Ismail (2018), *Counter-insurgency Responses in Nigeria: Unveiling the Constraining Challenges*. The paper utilized qualitative and content method of data collection and analysis. To remedy the observed challenges in this study, the paper hence recommended for redesigning of counter-insurgency tactic to focus on winning the hearts and minds of the local population. It also recommended for strengthening the Civilian Joint Task Force through establish code of conduct to checkmate excess and abuses.

Eke (2015), *why this Charity Begins Abroad: Comparing Nigeria's Foreign Peacekeeping Undertakings and Domestic Counter-insurgency Operations*. The paper utilized secondary and content method of data collection and analysis. The paper identified the politicisation of and corruption within the military establishment as plausible explanations for the disconnect between the recorded past (victories) and the inadequacies of today. The study recommended among others the need for a holistic security sector reform in Nigeria.

Hussain, Okeke, Oyebanji, Akunne, & Omoruyie (2020), *Combat injuries sustained by troops on counter terrorism and counter-insurgency operations in North east Nigeria: Implications for intervention*. A retrospective cross-sectional study of combat casualties managed in 7 Division (Field) Hospital, an equivalent of UN Level 2 facility Maiduguri, North east Nigeria between November 2013 and October 2014.

The study utilized data obtained from a designed Operational Casualty Card that contains their socio-demographic characteristics, categorization (as Combat Arm, Combat Support Service, Civ-JTF), nature, mechanism and sites of injury as well as inpatients records. The data were collated and analysed using SPSS version 20. The results of the study revealed that a total of 209 casualties were treated. The study revealed that gunshot and IED/blasts on the extremities were the most frequent mechanism and pattern of injuries sustained with less than a tenth of the casualties resulting from friendly forces. The paper recommended among others the training of health personnel on CTC, deployment of combat lifesavers to improve pre-hospital CTC, employment of skilled Orthopaedic Surgeon and other relevant surgical subspecialties and timely air evacuation of critical cases from the Field Hospital to the Base Hospital.

From the body of literature search above, it can be deduced that, there is an observable gap in the body of literature in the area of Nigeria-Niger relations and the challenges in enhancing counter insurgency operations in North Eastern Nigeria which is considered to be left unattended to. This study therefore filled the observed gap and contribute to the body of existing literature.

Methodology

The study adopted mixed-method research design. The targeted population of the study is 40,128 which comprises of individuals drawn from selected participants affiliated with key institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Niger's embassy in Nigeria, the officers and troops of Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) Sector 3 (Nigeria) and Sector 4 (Niger), staff of the office of National Security Adviser and personnel responsible for counter insurgency operation within the ambit of Nigeria-Niger relations among others. These groups were carefully chosen because they

are positioned at the intersection of bilateral relations, community engagement, and counter insurgency operations, offering crucial perspectives relevant to the study's objectives. Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) statistical formula was employed to reduce the population of the study to a manageable standard of 380.

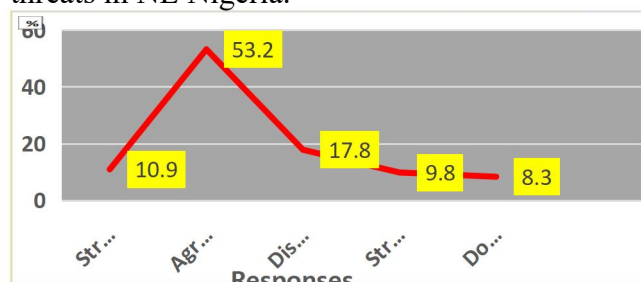
The study employed both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The instruments that were used in collecting data for this study are oral interview, questionnaires and secondary sources. Stratified and Random Sampling Techniques were used in selecting the respondents among different categories for the administration of questionnaire. For interview, purposive sampling technique was used. The sampling comprised of people with many similar characteristics such as deep knowledge on the subject of investigation, years of experience and age. This study made use of tables as a platform to present the research data and also analyze the data collected from the field on the subject matter using simple percentage and graphs as the case may be for the descriptive analysis. The version that was used for analyzing data for the study is SPSS 25. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative information.

Data Presentation on Nigeria-Niger Relations and Challenges in Enhancing Counter Insurgency Operations in North Eastern Nigeria.

The section presented data on the challenges confronting Nigeria-Niger relations towards enhancing COIN Operations in NE Nigeria. The study asked respondents appropriate questions and data generated are presented at Figures 1 to 2 and Table 1.

Figure 1: Respondents' Opinions on Whether Several Nigeria-Niger Relations' Defence Agreements are Moribund Which Culminates into Inefficient Management of Emerging Security Threats in NE Nigeria

Respondents were asked to ascertain whether several Nigeria-Niger relations defence agreements are moribund which culminates into inefficient management of emerging security threats in NE Nigeria.

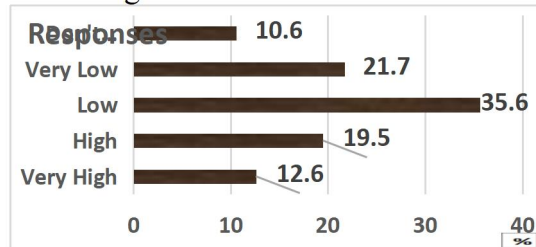


Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023.

As highlighted in Figure 1, 223 (64.1 per cent) respondents cumulatively affirmed the assertion that several Nigeria-Niger relations' defence agreements are moribund which culminates into inefficient management of emerging security threats in NE Nigeria. In addition, 27.6 per cent of respondents cumulatively opined that Nigeria-Niger relations defence agreements are not moribund. It could be surmised from the analysis that several defence agreements that emanated from Nigeria-Niger relations are moribund and not efficiently operationalized which culminates into inefficient management of emerging security threats in NE Nigeria. Hence, the need for the FGN to review the security agreement to Defence Cooperation Agreement with the Republic of Niger.

Figure 2: Respondents' Rating of the Level of Mistrust in the Conduct of Defence-Inclined Nigeria-Niger Relations with Implications for Enhanced COIN Operations in NE Nigeria.

Respondents were further asked to rate the level of mistrust in the conduct of defence-inclined Nigeria-Niger relations with implications for enhanced COIN Operations in NE Nigeria.



Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2023.

As highlighted in Figure 2, 199 (57.3 per cent) respondents cumulatively indicated that there was a low level of mistrust in the conduct of defence-inclined Nigeria-Niger relations with implications for enhanced COIN Operations in NE Nigeria. In addition, 112 (32.1 per cent) respondents cumulatively opined that there was a high level of mistrust in the conduct of defence-inclined Nigeria-Niger relations. It could be surmised from the analysis that the level of trust in the conduct of defence-inclined Nigeria-Niger relations was adequate towards enhancing effective COIN operations in NE Nigeria.

The analysis was supported by an interview with vast practical knowledge on the conduct of Nigeria’s diplomatic relations with Niger and senior staff of Posting and Passages MFA, who stated in an interview on (18/10/23) that there was a reasonable amount of trust in the management of Nigeria-Niger relations with a focus on defense. He pointed out that regular interagency security meetings, both formally and informally, have improved the defense-oriented bilateral relations between Nigeria and Niger, thereby reducing insecurity in Nigeria’s North East region. He continued by saying that the bilateral ties between Nigeria and Niger, which are oriented toward defense, gave the AFN and Nigerian troops the chance to collaborate toward a

shared goal. Therefore, in order to improve COIN operations in North Eastern Nigeria, it is essential to fortify the bilateral ties between Nigeria and Niger, which are oriented toward defense.

Challenges Affecting Nigeria-Niger Relations in Enhancing COIN Operations in NE Nigeria

Another question was posed to respondents to rate the prominent challenges constraining the effectiveness of Nigeria-Niger relations towards enhancing COIN operations in NE Nigeria. Accordingly, the challenging factors posed to respondents include: incomprehensive policy and legal framework; difficult terrain and harsh weather conditions; weak economy of TCCs in MNJTF; language and socio-cultural barriers amongst troops of Nigeria and Niger; as well as deficits in intelligence gathering. Others include: inadequate manpower holding; weak command and control centre; as well as lack of high-tech armoury in MNJTF.

Table 1: Rating the Challenges Affecting Nigeria-Niger Relations towards Enhancing COIN Operations in NE Nigeria.

Challenges	Yes	No	Don’t Know
Incomprehensive Policy and Legal Framework	55.3	37.9	6.8
Difficult Terrain and Harsh Weather Conditions	63.5	29.3	7.2
Weak Economy of Troop Contributing Countries in MNJTF	67.1	25.3	7.6
Language and Socio-Cultural Barriers amongst troops of Nigeria and Niger	74.2	19.3	6.5
Deficits in Intelligence Gathering	69.0	23.6	7.4
Inadequate Manpower Holding	64.8	27.3	7.9
Weak Command and Control Centre	39.4	52.5	8.1
Lack of High-Tech Armoury in MNJTF	68.7	23.8	7.5

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Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023.

As evident on Table 1, majority of respondent gave high ratings to most of the indices, thereby affirming them as prominent challenge confronting the effectiveness of Nigeria-Niger relations towards enhancing COIN operations in NE Nigeria. However, a high number of respondents ranking 52.5 per cent indicated the weak Command and Control Centre in MNJTF did not constitute a challenge.

In an interview, a Major in the MNJTF (22/10/23) said that the use of amphibious equipment is necessary due to the characteristics of the AOO in North Eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Area. He said that other neighboring countries, including Niger, do not have amphibious forces, with the exception of Sectors 1 (Cameroun) and 3 (Nigeria). But it is important to note that Sectors 1 and 3's amphibious forces are woefully underequipped. Additionally, they lack the necessary platforms to guarantee effective amphibious operations around Lake Chad. The amphibious elements would need to be outfitted in the OPHK Theatre with flat-bottom boats and other swift assault craft, along with the related equipment, in order to stop this situation.

From a diplomatic standpoint, non-enforcement of laws pertaining to the violation of immigrants' rights and poor community relations among Nigerian-Nigeria citizens are some of the challenges associated with the conduct of Nigeria-Niger relations that limit collaborative effort towards enhancing COIN operations in NE Nigeria.

According to a Senior Official of African Bilateral Affairs Department MFA (25/10/23), who said in order to strengthen the defense-oriented mechanisms of Nigeria-Nigeria bilateral relations and enable enhanced COIN operations in North Eastern Nigeria, all of the aforementioned challenges will need to be addressed with the appropriate policies and plans.

Discussion of Findings

Nigeria-Niger Relations and Challenges in Enhancing Counter Insurgency Operations in North Eastern Nigeria.

The study established that several defence agreements that emanated from Nigeria-Niger relations are moribund and not efficiently operationalized which culminates into inefficient management of emerging security threats in NE Nigeria. It was revealed that the level of trust in the conduct of defence-inclined Nigeria-Niger relations was adequate towards enhancing effective COIN operations in NE Nigeria. The challenges constraining the effectiveness of Nigeria-Niger relations towards enhancing COIN operations in NE Nigeria were found out to include: weak economy of TCCs in MNJTF; language and socio-cultural barriers amongst troops of Nigeria and Niger deficits in intelligence gathering, inadequate manpower holding; as well as lack of high-tech armoury in MNJTF.

Accordingly, this study established that the nature of the Area of Operation (AOO) of the NE Nigeria and the Lake Chad Area requires the employment of amphibious equipment. The Force Commander MNJTF, stated in a KII that apart from the Sectors 1 (Cameroun) and 3 (Nigeria) that have amphibious elements, other neighbouring countries including Niger do not have. It was equally noted that the amphibious elements of both Sectors 3 and 4 are ill-equipped. This

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constrains efficient COIN operations in NE Nigeria. This finding is in consonance with the works of Zagga and Yakubu (2016) who posited that the MNJTF has addressed the challenges of insecurity as a result of insurgency in the Lake Chad region, although the outfit is faced with problems of inadequate funds, equipment and manpower to engage and curtail the menace of insurgency in the region.

Result/Findings

- i. Several defence agreements that emanated from Nigeria-Niger bilateral relations are moribund and not efficiently operationalised which culminates into inefficient management of emerging security threats in NE Nigeria
- ii. The level of trust in the conduct of defence-inclined Nigeria-Niger bilateral relations was adequate towards enhancing effective COIN operations NE Nigeria. However, the recent coup in Nigeria and threat for ECOWAS military led intervention championed by Nigeria has created animosity posing threat to the counter insurgency operations in the North Eastern Nigeria.
- iii. The current economic challenges being faced by Nigeria and Niger is really creating enormous challenges in the fight against BH insurgents in the NE zone of Nigeria.
- iv. The amphibious elements of both Sectors and 4 of MNJTF are ill-equipped.
- v. Non-enforcement of laws that relates to the violation of immigrants' rights; and poor community relations among Nigerian-Niger citizens are significant challenges of Nigeria-Niger bilateral relations.

Conclusion

Nigerien forces operate outside the defence cooperation agreement with Nigeria

which portends great danger in North Eastern Nigeria. In addition, the objectives of Nigeria-Niger relations in terms of the defence cooperation agreements and operations of MNJTF in the NE zone of Nigeria are yet to be achieved, which informed this investigation.

Nigeria-Niger relations is a vital mechanism that must be sustained towards enhancing effective COIN operations in NE Nigeria. Niger's defence pacts based on its financial capacity and military capability to combat insurgency has shown that the country has in most instances focused on quelling insurgency threats within the Nigerian territory. It was however noted that the operationalisation of the MNJTF framework has facilitated an extension of COIN measures of Niger to the COIN AOO in NE Nigeria. The study further established that MNJTF troops of Nigeria and Niger are deficient in terms of facilitating systematic surveillance which could constrain efforts to enhance effectiveness of COIN operations in NE Nigeria. Hence, the DHQ needs to put in place measures to strengthen the systematic surveillance and reconnoitring mechanisms of MNJTF troops of the AFN in order to engender efficient COIN operations in NE Nigeria.

There are challenges constraining the effectiveness of Nigeria-Niger relations towards enhancing COIN operations in NE Nigeria and these include, among others weak economy of TCCs in MNJTF; language and socio-cultural barriers amongst troops of Nigeria and Niger, deficits in intelligence gathering, inadequate manpower holding; inadequate logistics requirements in MNJTF, as well as lack of high-tech armoury in MNJTF.

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations and implementation strategies are proffered.

Recommendations

- i. The Nigeria and Nigerien government should work assiduously towards addressing language and socio-cultural barriers amongst troops of Nigeria and Niger, enhance intelligence gathering,

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- improved manpower holding; as well as high-tech armoury in MNJTF in order to achieve the desired goal of the Counter Insurgency Operations in North Eastern Nigeria.
- ii. There is need for increased bilateral trade exchange, improved border security and enhanced intelligence sharing between Nigeria and Niger which would strengthen the effectiveness of COIN operations in NE Nigeria.
 - iii. It is absolutely necessary for HQ MNJTF in collaboration with HQ OPHK to be adequately empowered to augment the logistics requirement provided by Troop Contributing Countries (TCC's) to the Sectors.
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