Regional and Transregional Currents in the Shallows of Lake Chad

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ABSTRACTS

Der Beitrag analysiert die Spannung zwischen der Interpretation eines Konflikts und den regionalen oder transregionalen Reaktionen darauf. Den empirischen Fokus bildet das militärische Vorgehen der Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) – Benin, Kamerun, Tschad, Niger und Nigeria – gegen Boko Haram. Dieses Vorgehen ist zwar in einem regionalen Kontext verankert und wird von der Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) koordiniert, doch zugleich auch in einem transregionalen Kontext, im Rahmen der Kooperation zwischen zwei Regional Economic Communities, der Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) und der Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Keine dieser beiden räumlichen Verankerungen sind einfach gegeben, vielmehr sind es bestimmte Akteure, die den regionalen oder transregionalen Charakter des Konflikts und der entsprechenden Reaktionen produzieren und reproduzieren.

This article addresses the tension between the conception of a conflict and the ensuing response as regional or as transregional. The empirical focus is the military response within the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) – comprised of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – against Boko Haram. This response is situated in a regional context, as its coordinating forum is the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), but also in a transregional one, through the cooperation between two Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). This article cautions that neither of these two framings is a given. Rather, particular actors produce and reproduce the regional or respectively transregional character of a security concern as well as its response.

1. Introduction

This article addresses the tension between the conception of a conflict and the ensuing response as regional or as transregional. The empirical focus is the military response within the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram,[1] which is situated both in a regional context, as its coordinating forum is the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), and in a transregional one, through the cooperation between two regional economic communities (RECs), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The article cautions that neither of these two framings is a given. Rather, specific actors produce and reproduce the regional or respectively transregional character of a security concern as well as its response.

The body of literature on these and related empirical issues is substantial. One strand of it analyses the violence in the Lake Chad Basin by taking into account water and environmental issues and their impact on local livelihoods, for example focusing on the interlinkages between environmental change, vulnerability, and security issues.[2] Other authors emphasize particular governance forms that evolved from the historical entanglements between the evolving nation state and the military-economic nexus in the border areas.[3] Regarding Boko Haram, authors focus on the rise of the group in Nigeria, often attributed to bad governance and corruption.[4] Further, its impact on Nigerian society[5]

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1   For practical reasons and because this non-state armed group is not the focus of this analysis, I will simply refer to it as Boko Haram, as do most of the actors and agencies that are the focus here, such as the African Union and United Nations. Nevertheless, the phenomenon commonly captured in the label Boko Harm includes more than simply the activities of the institutionalized strand(s) of this group. Boko Haram has become a catchall category for criminal and sinister activities and all that is bad, so that thieves, kidnappers and subsistence criminals have often been assumed under the label of the group. For an in-depth account on the origins of the group, which used to call itself Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JASLWJ), the current dynamics within the movement as well as its fractioning and alliances see e.g. L. Ploch Blanchard and K. T. Cavigelli, Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province, in: Focus, 28 June 2018. Congressional Research Service. Washington, DC.; O. S. Mahmood, Ch. A. Ndubuisi, Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Research Report July 2018.

2   U. T. Okpara, L. C. Stringer, A. J. Dougill and M. D. Bila, Conflicts about water in Lake Chad: Are environmental, vulnerability and security issues linked?, in: Progress in Development Studies 15 (2015) 4, pp. 308–325. The article focuses on the political construction of the region, not on ecological or geophysical aspects. However, these often surface in arguments for or against a certain spatiality of the (political) region. This observation should be explored further by retracing the evolution of the debates within the natural sciences on the Lake Chad Basin and their entanglement with developmental and environmental discourses over time.

3   J. Roitman, La garnison-entrepôt: une manière de gouverner dans le bassin du lac Tchad, in: Critique internationale 2 (2003) 19, pp. 93–115. Id., The Garrison-Entrepôt, in: Cahiers d'études africaines 38 (1998) 150–152, pp. 297–329.

4   M. N. Suleiman/M. A. Karim, Cycle of bad governance and corruption: The rise of boko haram in Nigeria, in: SAGE Open 5 (2015) 1, pp. 1–11. For a more historical focus on the pre-existing religious movements see A. Walker, 'Eat the Heart of the Infidel': The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram, London 2016; V. Comolli, Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency, Oxford 2015.

5   D. E. Agbiboa and B. Maiangwa, Boko Haram, Religious Violence, and the Crisis of National Identity in Nigeria: Towards a Non-killing Approach, in: Journal of Developing Societies 29 (2013) 4, pp. 379–403; O. Tade and P. Ch. Nwanosike, "Nobody is sure of tomorrow": Using the Health Belief Model to explain safety behaviours among Boko Haram victims in Kano, Nigeria, in: International Review of Victimology 22 (2016) 3, pp. 339–355.

and reception in Nigerian and international media[6] is discussed. Eka Ikpe, senior lecturer in development economics in Africa at King's College London, analyses the impact of the group's activities on the economic development on the national and subnational level.[7] Oluwaseun Tella from the Department of Political Sciences at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, examines the soft power of Boko Haram that appeals to certain Nigerians and the potential for the inclusion of a corresponding approach in current counter-terrorism measures.[8] Other authors assess the Nigerian governments' efforts to combat Boko Haram[9] and the importance of political leadership in the fight against Boko Haram, for example by assessing the different responses under President Goodluck Jonathan vis-à-vis President Muhammadu Buhari.[10] Akinbode Fasakin from the African Leadership Centre at King's College London draws attention to the impact of the United States (US) "War on Terror" on Nigerian leadership and the intersection with its own security agendas and argues for a shift towards a more citizen-centred processual approach in countering the violence of the armed group.[11] Elysée Martin Atangana in turn focuses on the Chadian leadership and argues for its primacy in the process of reviving the MNJTF.[12] Apart from the cooperation between Nigeria and its neighbouring states in the fight against Boko Haram,[13] the various forms of international engagement have also been discussed.[14] Regarding the LCBC, its history[15] and its qualities as nascent security architecture within a regional security complex have received attention.[16] Olawale (Wale) Ismail, also from the African Leadership Centre at King's College London, and

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6   A. Osisanwo, Discursive representation of Boko Haram terrorism in selected Nigerian newspapers, in: Discourse and Communication 10 (2016) 4, pp. 341–362; E. Połońska-Kimunguyi and M. Gillespie, European international broadcasting and Islamist terrorism in Africa: The case of Boko Haram on France 24; Deutsche Welle, in: International Communication Gazette 79 (2017) 3, pp. 245–275.

7   E. Ikpe, Counting the development costs of the conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria: the economic impact of the Boko Haram-led insurgency, in: Conflict, Security and Development 17 (2017) 5, pp. 381–409.

8   O. Tella, Boko Haram Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: The Soft Power Context, in: Journal of Asian and African Studies 53 (2018) 6, pp. 815–829.

9   Comolli, Boko Haram.

10   H. Onapajo, Has Nigeria defeated Boko Haram? An appraisal of the counter-terrorism approach under the Buhari administration, in: Strategic Analysis 41 (2017) 1, pp. 61–73.

11   A. Fasakin, Leadership and national security: an interrogation of the Boko Haram violence in Nigeria, in: African Security Review 26 (2017) 1, pp. 87–108.

12   E. M. Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic of regional security cooperation against Boko Haram, in: Africa Review 10 (2018) 2, pp. 206–215.

13   B. F. Obamamoye, Insurgency and Nigeria's Relations with Her Immediate Neighbors in the Twenty-first Century, in: Jadavpur Journal of International Relations 20 (2017) 2, pp. 157–177; O. Ogunnubi, H. Onapajo and Ch. Isike, A Failing Regional Power? Nigeria's International Status in the Age of Boko Haram, in: Politikon 44 (2017) 3, pp. 446–465.

14   S. Omotuyi, Russo/Nigerian Relations in the Context of Counterinsurgency Operation in Nigeria, in: Jadavpur Journal of International Relations (2018), pp. 1–21; Ogunnubi et al., A Failing Regional Power?.

15   M. Z. Njeuma and D. Malaquais, Coopération internationale et tansformation du Bassin du Lac Tchad: Le cas de la Commission du bassin du lac Tchad, in: Politique africaine 94 (2004) 2, pp. 23–41.

16   U. A. Tar and M. Mustapha, The emerging architecture of a regional security complex in the lake Chad basin, in: Africa Development 42 (2017) 3, pp. 99–118.

Alagaw Ababu Kife, research associate at the African Leadership Centre, Nairobi, analyse the MNJTF from a perspective of "collective security".[17]

Conceptually, some authors draw on Buzan and Waever's "regional security complex theory" to capture "the intertwined regional security issues and peculiarities in the Lake Chad region."[18]. However, aside from highlighting transnational entanglements of security concerns, this concept is little utilized by the authors and the main value of the articles is their focus on more pressing empirical problems as well as ethical or political concerns. Moreover, the "regional security complex theory" assumes an almost teleological end state for such a region. It thus fails to account for dynamics of change and multiplicity as well as agency in the making of different regions, when actors drive particular regional projects based on their spatial imaginations and manifesting in practices of region-making.[19]

None of the publications on the MNJTF or the cooperation across the Lake Chad Basin address in more broad strokes the tension between the different spatial semantics chosen by actors in framing either their assessment of the conflict or their response.[20] Or, in other words, none ask: how to understand the coexistence of different framings of the violence – seen by some as regional and by others as transregional – in the Lake Chad Basin?

I propose to approach these two different conflict framings from the perspective of those who respond to it,[21] that is to say national political and military elites as well as organizations such as the LCBC, the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, ECCAS, or the United Nations and its United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The LCBC addresses the violence through the regional lens, supported by international organizations such as the UNDP, while for the two bordering RECs, ECOWAS and ECCAS, the development and coordination of their counter-terrorism policies towards armed groups like Boko Haram has become a transregional challenge – with implication for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Then again, the troop contributing countries of the MNJTF (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) in their fight against Boko Haram strategically engage in this ambivalence to access resources while maintaining the maximal control possible over their national troops and security politics.

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17 O. Ismail and A. A. Kife, New Collective Security Arrangements in the Sahel: a comparative study of the MNJTF and G-5 Sahel. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa, Dakar-Fann 2018.

18 B. Buzan and O. Wæver, Regions and Power. The Structure of International Security, Cambridge 2003; B. F. Obamamoye, Counter-terrorism, Multinational Joint Task Force and the missing components, in: African Identities 15 (2017) 4, pp. 428–440, at 429; Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic, 208.

19 U. Engel, Regionalismen, Berlin and Boston 2018, p. 26.

20 On "Raumsemantiken", i.a. spatial semantics, see ibid.

21 It is also necessary to be conscious of this perspective, as there is little information on the spatial imaginations of the leadership within Boko Haram (or its current fractions), apart from reports of a desire to establish a West African caliphate or its pledged allegiances to the Islamic State (see e.g. Ploch Blanchard and Cavigelli, Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province).

All these aforementioned actors and organizations contribute to the *becoming* of a region. Here, the term becoming not so much refers to a teleological development towards a postulated essential endstate, but rather highlights an open-ended and ongoing process.[22] In imagining, creating, making, and shaping different institutions, actors form multiple relations between them. The product of these interrelations is spatial, a space that is "always under construction", open, and preconditioned by multiplicity.[23] The multiplicity and at times simultaneity of the becoming of different regional organizations, institutions, and structures can result in friction once these different projects interact. This article analyses these processes of becoming for the Lake Chad Basin as a region; the creation, neglect, and revival of the LCBC; and the interaction between this regional organization with its MNJTF and the APSA structure, which potentially result in consequences for the African Union.

The article proceeds in three parts. In the first part, the (re)production of the Lake Chad Basin as a region is addressed as an ongoing becoming. In the second part, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, as a regional organization, and the Multinational Joint Task Force are introduced. In the third part, the hitherto very successful regionalization of ECOWAS and ECCAS within the APSA process is introduced together with the impact on its structure by the alternative regionalization discussed in part two.

2. Becoming the Lake Chad Basin Region

Spatial semantics concerning the Lake Chad Basin abound. In most publications, it is referred to as the "Lake Chad region".[24] The "Lake Chad region" is, in these cases, determined by a set of neighbouring countries: Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.[25] Nevertheless, some authors also include Benin, which is also a troop contributing country to the MNJTF against Boko Haram.[26] In this context, the group is described as a "transnational threat,"[27] "transregional / regional problem",[28] "transnational insurgency",[29] or as a "regionalised problem" that necessitates the engagement of Nigeria's neighbouring coun-

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22 See among others E. Grosz (ed.), Becomings. Explorations in time, memory, and futures, Ithaka1999; https://books.google.de/books?id=aBAfJyJUCRAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

23 D. B. Massey, For space, repr. London: SAGE 2015, pp. 9, 59, 91.

24 Obamamoye, Counter-terrorism, p. 429; F. Krampe, Climate-Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region: Scope for Conflict Prevention and Resilience Building, Stockholm 2017; Onapajo, Has Nigeria defeated Boko Haram?; S. Oyewole, Boko Haram: Insurgency and the War against Terrorism in the Lake Chad Region, in: Strategic Analysis 39 (2015), 4, pp. 428–432, at 428.

25 Krampe, Climate-Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region.

26 See e.g. Onapajo, Has Nigeria defeated Boko Haram?.

27 E. M. Atangana, Le Bassin du Lac Tchad face aux nouvelles formes de menace: La difficile dynamique de réponse régionale face à la montée en puissance du groupe terroriste islamiste Boko Haram, Université de Montréal, Montréal 2017.

28 Obamamoye, Counter-terrorism, p. 428.

29 M. Brubacher, E. K. Damman and Ch. Day, The AU Task Forces: an African response to transnational armed groups, in: The Journal of Modern African Studies 55 (2017) 2, pp. 275–299, at 294.

tries.[30] Thus, Boko Haram itself is seen as the constituting feature that creates the region, whereby the security concern defines the common ground.[31] However, depending on the position of the observer, Boko Haram is described as a threat to the "West African sub-region" or is grouped among the security concerns facing the Central African region.[32] In addition, there are further designations that each imply different underlying assumptions about the spatial order in the region and highlight different political, social, or economic aspects. The International Crisis Group (ICG), for example, in a 2015 report drew attention to the "Central Sahel", which encompasses the "the Fezzan in Libya's south, Niger and the Lake Chad Basin".[33] Here, a wider regional lens connects the conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin – most prominently associated with the activities of Boko Haram – with those in the Sahel. A region often characterized by concerns about transnational organized crime (TOC) as well as the activities of groups such as al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), especially since the 2012 escalation of the conflict in Mali. Such a wider regional frame does justice to the dynamics of arms and weapons circulation from former Libyan depots after the disintegration of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 as well as the reports of connections between the various armed groups in the area.

Apart from the spatial semantics that provide the conceptual frame for the Lake Chad Basin, it is worth noting that there are a number of recurring issues that are used to characterize the region. These characteristics, which organizations, think tanks, analysts, and

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30   Ibid., p. 91.

31   See, in general, N. Ansorg, Wars without borders: Conditions for the development of regional conflict systems in sub-Saharan Africa, in: International Area Studies Review 17 (2014) 3, pp. 295–312. Specific to Boko Haram among others Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic, p. 208; V. Comolli, The Regional Problem of Boko Haram, in: Survival 57 (2015) 4, pp. 109–117. This kind of regionalization-by-armed-group could also be observed in the Sahel with the creation of the G5 Sahel (and later its Joint Force). There, the European Union, for example worked with a particular definition of where the area of activity of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was located and drew its Sahel strategy accordingly to include, apart from Mali, also Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Mauritania, the five countries that eventually formed the G5 Sahel, see European Union External Action Service 2011. Both with regard to Boko Haram as well as AQIM, it is noteworthy that it is not so much the armed group itself (or alone) that drives this kind of regionalization, but rather (or also) the actors responding to its activity to define their space for intervention, see K. P. W. Döring and J. Herpolsheimer, The spaces of intervention for Mali and Guinea-Bissau, in: South African Journal of International Affairs 25 (3018) 1, pp. 61–82.

32   See Onapajo, Has Nigeria defeated Boko Haram? On Boko Haram as a security concern in Central Africa, see, e.g., the Reports of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa: "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2015/339)", New York, 14 May 2015; "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2015/914)", New York, 30 November 2015; "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2017/465)", New York, 31 May 2017. In addition, the Lord's Resistance Army and piracy of the Gulf of Guinea are mentioned as cross-border concerns. Regarding the latter, see the article by Jens Herpolsheimer on maritime security cooperation in this volume.

33   International Crisis Group (Brussels), The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm, in: Africa Report (2015) 227, p. i, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/niger/central-sahel-perfect-sandstorm.

policy-makers invoke in describing the region, are framed in challenges (security, social, developmental, environmental, or otherwise) that constituted this region.

Transnational organized crime (TOC), kidnapping for ransom, as well as all kinds of cross-border trade or smuggling and trafficking have been reported. This has been observed at times in close connection with activities of armed groups, described as terrorist. These phenomena are countered by initiatives to increase border controls and security, police work, counter-terrorism, and military cooperation. As terrorism is increasingly understood as not only a military but also a social phenomenon, violent extremism has become a major concern. This has led to numerous attempts in countering violent extremism (CVE) in the region. In addition to the violence caused by Boko Haram, farmer-herder conflicts as well as racial and ethnic tensions have added instances of armed violence, so that the mobility and immobility of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) has become a major concern.[34] As both cause and consequence, a dire economic situation, unemployment, the so-called youth bulge,[35] ecological degradation, arid conditions and a fluctuating lake volume, food insecurity, and state failure are frequently mentioned. This staggering array of challenges is completed with a reference to climate change. Far from positive visions of development and prosperity, in a manner of resignation, mere "resilience" is left as the goal. In short, the "Lake Chad region" (with Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) is characterized as a space where "unemployment, depleted resources, poverty and conflict interact with climate change".[36]

The validity of these concerns notwithstanding, they are by no way exclusive to the Lake Chad Basin. Other regions, such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, or the Great Lakes region (see the respective articles in this edited volume) are described in similar terms. Thus, rather than defining or delineating features of a region, these issues are emblematic of contemporary forms of understanding societal and political issues and of current security and development discourses.

These developmental and security concerns are selected – not created in themselves, but selected as concerns – by particular actors that created knowledge on them and respond to them. One major international actor in this regard is the UNDP. The UNDP continues to play a role in the becoming of the Lake Chad Basin which it defines through the four littoral countries Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.[37] The UNDP has country offices in all four capitals and suboffices in the areas much closer to the lake. In addition,

34   S. O. Oginni, M. P. Opoku and B. A. Alupo, Terrorism in the Lake Chad Region: Integration of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, in: Journal of Borderlands Studies 30 (2018) 1, pp. 1–17; A.-N. Mbiyozo, Fleeing terror, fighting terror. The truth about refugees and violent extremism. Institute for Security Studies (ISS), East Africa Report, 17 (2018).

35   J. Gow, F. Olonisakin and E. Dijxhoorn, Deep history and international security: social conditions and competition, militancy and violence in West Africa, in: Conflict, Security & Development 13 (2013), 2, pp. 231–258.

36   Krampe, Climate-Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Region.

37   UNDP and OCHA, Background paper on Resilience for Sustainable Development in the Lake Chad Basin, 2018, https://lakechadberlin.de/wp-eb6f4-content/uploads/2018/09/UN_Background-Paper_Resilience-LCB.pdf.

the UNDP works closely with the LCBC, supports its capacity-building and contributed to such vital processes as the development of the LCBC-AU regional strategy.[38]

Over the last decades, the UNDP has mainly drawn attention to the significance of urban spaces in its publications and work.[39] An internal mapping exercise by the organization revealed certain hubs of activity around the urban centres in the countries, with the border areas often receiving less attention. Support programmes for job creation and entrepreneurship, for example, largely targeted urban populations with more suitable educational backgrounds. Internal reflections in recent years have raised awareness of the potential detrimental influence of reinforcing inequalities in such a way.[40]

In particular, since the UNDP's study on radicalization and violent extremism, "Journey to Extremism in Africa", it has emerged as common wisdom that those neglected national peripheries have increasingly impacted national security and development agendas. Accordingly, the study formulates one of the key findings like this:

> *Starting with the "accident of geography" that is place of childhood, experiences related to living in highly peripheral regions of Africa – often borderlands and traditionally marginalized regions – begin to shape individuals' worldview and vulnerability. Long-standing realities of "centre/periphery" divides have, if anything, been exacerbated by the recent economic growth enjoyed overall in Africa.*[41]

Given that all littoral states have such marginalized areas in their countries and that some of them border the Lake Chad Basin, it makes sense from the perspective of humanitarian and developmental actors to address the issues around the Lake Chad from a joint regional perspective emphasizing this commonality instead of just through country programmes. At the same time, this is part of a periodic renewal of assumptions about development and foci in aid policies. Hence, after the UNDP study "Journey to Extremism", the periphery has been highlighted.[42]

By working through the frame of the Lake Chad Basin, developmental actors co-create this region. Another practice that maintains and creates the Lake Chad Basin region is

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38 Communiqué (PSC/PR/COMM [DCCCXVI]), 816th Meeting, Addis Ababa, 5 December 2018. Interview with UNDP Senior Staff, New York, 4 December 2018.

39 D. A. Rondinelli, UNDP assistance for urban development: an assessment of institution-building efforts in developing countries, in: International Review of Administrative Sciences 58 (1992), pp. 519–537; UNDP, Sustainable Urbanization Strategy. UNDP's support to sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities in the developing world, New York 2016.

40 Interview with UNDP Senior Staff, New York, 4 December 2018.

41 UNDP, Journey to extremism in africa, New York 2017, p. 4; http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/journey-to-extremism.html.

42 This trend regarding the region around the Lake Chad Basin is mirrored by similar spatial semantics regarding the Sahel. Depiction of this region are laced with references to "ungoverned spaces", "remote areas", and a sense of conflicts originating from peripheral areas that affect the urban centres, most importantly the capital. This is epitomized in the justification given for the Franco-Chadian Operation Serval in Mali in 2013, where the movement of the non-state armed groups from the north (traditionally associated in Mali with remoteness and rebellion of ethnically different groups of people) towards the south, and Bamako is given as the final trigger for troop deployment.

the corresponding regional organization, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, which will be discussed in the following section.

3. The Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multi-national Joint Task Force

The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) was founded in 1964 by the littoral countries of the Lake Chad, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. A summit meeting in 1985 resulted in efforts to enlarge the organization, which led to admitting of the Central African Republic into the commission in 1996 due to plans for an interbasin water transfer from the Oubangui River.[43] In 2008, Libya was admitted into the organization as the sixth member state.[44] Gaddafi sought to use the LCBC to further promote his Pan-Africanist ambitions and to potentially access new freshwater reserves.[45] In addition, Sudan, Egypt, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have status as observatory members.[46]

The regional organization, with its Executive Secretariat in N'Djamena, Chad, has the mandate to ensure the sustainable and equitable water resource management among the member states, primarily concerning the Lake Chad Basin, but also extending to related water sources. This includes the preservation of the basin's ecosystem as well as the promotion of economic and infrastructural integration as well as the concern for trans-border peace and security.[47]

The early history of the organization was still marked by the legacy of British, French, and German colonial expansion in the area. While there was some coordination among the three concerning their interests in the Lake Chad Basin, this was reduced to co-operation between Britain and France after Germany lost its colonial territories in the aftermath of World War I.[48] Once Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria had gained independence, they followed the path towards coordinated resources management of the Lake Chad Basin. France had an immediate influence in the establishment of the LCBC by financially and technically supporting the first summit.[49]

The commission was confronted with severe strain and conflict between its member states, which hampered its effectiveness and reach. Among others, the colonial legacy

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43 G. Galeazzi, A. Medinilla, T.C. Ebiede, and S. Desmidt, Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC): Water and security at inter-regional cross-roads. ECDPM – European Centre for Development Policy Management (Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations [PEDRO]) 2017, p. 7; https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/LCBC-Background-Paper-Pedro-Political-Economy-Dynamics-Regional-Organisations-Africa-ecdpm-2017.pdf.

44 La Commission du Basin du Lac Tchad, 2018, http://www.cblt.org/fr/la-commission-du-bassin-du-lac-tchad (accessed 31 December 2018).

45 Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 17.

46 Commission du Basin du Lac Tchad, 2018.

47 Ibid.

48 M. Z. Njeuma and D. Malaquais, Coopération internationale et transformation du Bassin du Lac Tchad: Le cas de la Commission du bassin du lac Tchad, in: Politique africaine 94 (2004) 2, pp. 23–41.

49 Ibid.

transformed into an anglophone-francophone divide between the member states. Further, the simultaneous development of two other regional organizations with a focus on economic integration, ECOWAS and ECCAS, exacerbated the division between the LCBC member states, with Niger and Nigeria belonging to the former and Cameroon and Chad to the latter. Another strain on the relations among the LCBC member states was the mistrust between them, such as between Nigeria and Cameroon as well as Nigeria and Chad over joint border issues.[50]

The LCBC is organized into three organs, the Summit of Heads of State and Government, the Council of Ministers, and the Executive Secretariat with the Executive Secretary and the Departments, headed by directors-general.[51] The position of Executive Secretary is central in the execution of policies and decision-making within the Executive Secretariat and "de facto the only decision-making figure as power is not delegated to staff in the Secretariat".[52] The Executive Secretary's mandate is limited to three years with the possibility of renewal for one additional term.[53] Under Abubakar Bobboi Jauro, Executive Secretary from 1988 to 2000, however, this period was extended, together with his personal influence.[54] Like Abubakar Bobboi Jauro, all the other Executive Secretaries were Nigerian (with the exception of M. Mustafa Sam, 1982–1988, who was Cameroonian[55]), while the Under Secretaries have been Cameroonian.[56]

New impetus for increasing the very limited activities of the commission came in 1998, when Chad, Niger, and Nigeria established the Multinational Joint Security Force (MNJSF) to address cross-border crime and banditry.[57] Since 2009, the activities and strength of Boko Haram has increased and spread across the borders of Nigeria.[58] For a long time, Boko Haram had been considered a Nigerian problem and engaged mostly national security forces. Over time, the activities have spilled over to Cameroon and to a lesser extent to Chad and Niger.[59] Subsequently, in 2012, the MNJSF was relaunched as the Multinational Joint Task Force with the added task of conducting counter-terrorism operations against the group. However, the task force remained Nigerian-led.[60]

At the same time, there were some bilateral military agreements between the states involved, such as between Chad and Nigeria[61] or the bilateral permit of Nigeria's President

50 I. O. Albert, Rethinking the functionality of the multinational joint task force in managing the boko haram crisis in the lake Chad basin, in: Africa Development 42 (2017) 3, pp. 119–135.
51 Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 10.
52 Ibid.
53 Jeuma and Malaquais, Coopération internationale et transformation du Bassin du Lac Tchad, p. 32.
54 Ibid., p. 33.
55 This was not specified on the Lake Chad Basin Commission homepage, but it could be cross-checked with a list of delegates to an event of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, see Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2019.
56 Commission du Basin du Lac Tchad 2019.
57 Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 8.
58 Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic, p. 207.
59 Oyewole, Boko Haram: Insurgency and the War against Terrorism, p. 430.
60 Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 17.
61 Oyewole, Boko Haram: Insurgency and the War against Terrorism; Brubacher, Damman, and Day, The AU Task Forces.

Jonathan, which allowed troops from Chad and Niger to pursue into Nigerian territory during an operation against Boko Haram.[62] However, all the different attempts lacked the operational and logistical capacity to be decisive. The mismatch between the MNJTF and Boko Haram was forcefully brought home when the group attacked the MNJTF headquarters on 3 January 2015.[63] This major caesura ended the initial multi-lateral security cooperation against Boko Haram.

The leadership in the participating countries immediately set out to resurrect the force, only this time it would be decisively within the institutional structure of APSA. During a meeting in Niamey on 20 January 2015, the ministers of foreign affairs and defence of Chad, Nigeria, and Niger plus Benin formally requested the AU to create a revised MNJTF. Just over a week later, on 29 January 2015, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorized the MNJTF, with an initial troop strength of 7,500, which was increased to 10,000 later in March.[64] The area of operation was divided into four sectors, one based at Mora in Cameroon, the second at Baga-Sola in Chad, the third at Baga in Nigeria, and the fourth sector with a base in Diffa in Niger.[65]

The revival of the MNJTF and increased willingness for cooperation between the neighbouring states was not just due to the urgency of fighting Boko Haram, but was also facilitated by some shifts in the concerns, interests, and attitudes of the leadership of the involved troop contributing countries.

For the Cameroonian political leadership, Boko Haram had long been a negligible issue, as the group was perceived as a Nigerian problem, despite linguistic and communal continuities across the join border areas. Moreover, Cameroon and Nigeria were in longstanding disputes over border issues. The ensuing mistrust prevented Cameroon from participating in the joint force in the 1990s and even in the later fight against Boko Haram – as late as 2013 – Cameroon did not allow the Nigerian army the right to cross its borders in hot pursuit. This disinterest from the Cameroonian leadership drastically changed when local politicians were kidnapped. Thereafter, Cameroonian military presence was increased in the north; curfews as well as other regulatory security measures were introduced, such as a ban on full-face veils; and the border to Nigeria was at times also closed. Beyond the national realm, Cameroon re-engaged its neighbours, bilaterally in a joint operation with Chad and within the MNJTF and the LCBC while even starting information sharing and coordination with Nigeria.[66]

The main concern of the Chadian leadership in light of Boko Haram's activities is to maintain internal stability and to protect its economic and trade interests.[67] The coun-

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62   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 18.
63   Brubacher, Damman, and Day, The AU Task Forces, p. 292.
64   Ibid.
65   Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic, p. 212.
66   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 18. The potential intersection of all this with the current armed conflict around separatist ambitions by groups of anglophone Cameroonians has received no attention so far.
67   Ibid., p. 19.

try's military is capable and influential and has an international reputation for its commitment to multilateral and international missions, like the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). At the same time, the army has a deplorable human rights record. Chad is a traditional ally of the USA, with its military engagement in the region, and is a notorious ally of French military activities in the Sahel and across West Africa. In recent years, President Idriss Déby has prominently pursued ambitions to position his country as a regional and continental (security) power house as he pushed for the revival of the MNJTF.[68] Additionally, Chad contributes to another regional counter-terrorism task force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and the election of the Chadian politician Moussa Faki Mahamat as the African Union Commission chairperson is widely seen as another success of Déby's ambitions.

Since 2016, Niger has witnessed increasing activities by Boko Haram as well as armed groups from Mali. However, the country's military is overstretched and has had to rely on a deployment of 2,000 Chadian troops to Bosso (an area bordering Nigeria and the Lake Chad) to control the armed group.[69] Large parts of the country's population face pressing food insecurity, making humanitarian crises a constant threat. US and French counter-terrorism activities in the Sahel rely heavily on Niger for hosting their bases and the European Union has deployed and EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) Sahel to Niamey. However, the military contribution by Niger to the MNJTF is seen as insignificant.[70]

Simultaneously, the Nigerian attitude towards an internationally coordinated response to Boko Haram had changed with the election of the new president Buhari. Before, Nigeria was reluctant to give any entry point to international organizations and their missions on its territory in the fight against Boko Haram. Nigeria itself exercises significant influence over other countries within and through ECOWAS and knows the organization's power, so that it has been reluctant as the established regional power house to submit itself under ECOWAS control. Moreover, Nigeria's then President Jonathan had been against any AU involvement.[71] However, this isolated approach in the response against Boko Haram had its limits. In August 2014, Nigerian troops were disarmed by their Cameroonian counter parts after crossing unilaterally into the neighbours territory in hot pursuit of Boko Haram, which clearly demonstrate the necessity of effective regional coordination and even cooperation.[72] When Buhari was elected, he actively sought the support of neighbouring countries to revive the LCBC, which may have been part of an attempt to improve Nigeria's international reputation.[73] Despite this change in attitudes,

68   Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic, p. 207f.; A. Tisseron, Tchad: L'émergence d'une puissance régionale? Institut Thomas More, Brussels/Paris 2015, Note d'actualité, p. 34.
69   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 19.
70   Ibid.
71   Brubacher, Damman, and Day, The AU Task Forces, p. 292.
72   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, pp. 17f.
73   Onapajo, Has Nigeria defeated Boko Haram?: Under Jonathan, corruption in the military and mismanagement led to a failure of his military offensive (as well as the parallel development programme and educational programme); this incuded altercations with the US over human rights abuses and a subsequent discontinuation of

Nigeria – who has the largest military capacities in the region – continues to seek to steer and control the multilateral MNJTF. Grand gestures, like the contribution of USD 100 million, pledged during the June 2015 LCBC Summit of Heads of State and Government, as well as persistence in keeping MNJTF leadership demonstrate this.[74]

Despite being under the aegis of the LCBC, the MNJTF membership diverges from that of the commission. Libya and the Central African Republic do not contribute to the force, but Benin does.

The involvement of Benin in the MNJTF has mostly been attributed to the country's close ties with Nigeria or a general sense of regional security responsibility,[75] which can be backed up by a long bilateral history of Beninese support for Nigerian politics within ECOWAS. However, another factor in Benin's involvement was the arrest of Beninese citizens active in Boko Haram in the north of Nigeria[76]. This is apparently linked to concerns within Benin over the growing popularity of more conservative Islam fractions.[77] Benin, which also contributes to MINUSMA, has deployed 150 troops to the MNJTF, mainly tasked with securing the MNJTF main base and escort services for the force.[78]

The MNJTF receives support from a number of non-African security actors, both bilaterally and through the LCBC directly. The US, for example, provides intelligence and military support to the Nigerian army in its fight against Boko Haram, as does the United Kingdom.[79] Also, France works through bilateral support, first and foremost with Chad. The European Union assists with funds through the African Peace Facility. Such multilateral support avenues only opened through the formal authorization of the MNJTF by the African Union's Peace and Security Council. While Nigeria remained sceptical of the potential loss of independence, Chad and some members of the Peace and Security Council even pushed for a Chapter VII mandate by the United Nations Security Council, which would have given the force access to the full United Nations logistics and financial support.[80]

In the bow wave of the LCBC's renewed importance to access international support structures, several donors / partners have adapted their engagement in the region and through the commission. Much of this is driven by an attempt to counterbalance the narrow military focus of the MNJTF. The UNDP, for example, not only has country projects concerned with the violence around the Lake Chad, but also has programmes

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arms trading. Buhari then rearranged the military leadership, exchanged top brass, and led an anti-corruption campaign and re-established relationship with US (see also previous illegal arms deals and deals with Russia and China). Buhari also sought the support of Nigeria's neighbours, which lead to the revival of the LCBC. Perhaps the "transregional" formation of the MNJTF was part of Buhari's attempt to improve Nigeria's international reputation.

74   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 18.
75   Atangana, The underlying reasons for the emerging dynamic, p. 213.
76   Interview, ECOWAS Standby Force Chief of Staff, Abuja, 24 September 2018.
77   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 19.
78   Ibid.
79   Oyewole, Boko Haram: Insurgency and the War against Terrorism, p. 430f.
80   Brubacher, Damman, and Day, The AU Task Forces, p. 293.

directly with and through the LCBC. However, as the commission's staff is often appointed in a non-transparent way and rather based on internal politics than merit, the absorption capacities of the Executive Secretariat in face of the many different bilateral and multilateral projects and programmes are strongly limited.[81] This deficiency is also exhibited by the inability of the LCBC Excecutive Secretary to be decisive in his role as the civilian head of mission of the MNJTF. The UNDP has decided to second one senior officers to the Executive Secretariat in an attempt to increase the commission's capacities.[82] In wake of increased donor investment in the LCBC, the commission, which thus far was merely a political forum for coordination of the littoral heads of state and government, might develop a noticeable capacity to act at the Executive Secretariat. If this remains only for the processing of funds or might over time contribute to the development of a distinct bureaucratic agency remains to be seen.

Through revival of the MNJTF, the activities around the LCBC were started again. While the commission remains mainly a political forum for the littoral heads of state and government to coordinate their counter-terrorist activities in the region, the authorization of the MNJTF by the PSC has increased the recognition and formal role of the LCBC. On the one hand, this has strengthened the regional organization and its status, yet, on the other hand, has brought the military response to Boko Haram into the APSA structure. The next section considers the implication of this.

4. Transregional Dynamics Around a Regional Force: African Peace and Security Architecture and the MNJTF

Long before the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union and the subsequent establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the early 2000s, the continent had already seen different waves of establishing regional organizations. Some of these focused on agriculture, ecology, and environmental issues, like the LCBC; others on monetary integration; and those most prominent on economic integration. The latter led to the creation of RECs, which were set up in West and Central Africa. ECOWAS was established in 1975 and ECCAS in 1983. The establishment of APSA was driven by the creation of the African Union's Peace and Security Council as well as different institutions to support its work; among them, the African Standby Force (ASF) was designed for multidimensional conflict interventions. The ASF was envisioned not as a standing army but as a multi-dimensional force with civilian, military, and police components and divided into regional brigades (today called forces) to which member states pledge military capacities. The regional forces were established each for North, East, South, Central and West Africa and related to corresponding pre-existing RECs. The East and North African regions were an exception as there was no

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81   Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 10.
82   Interview with UNDP Senior Staff, New York, 4 December 2018.

one suitable REC. As a result, the ASF's specific regional mechanisms were created. Under APSA, eight RECs are privileged partners of the AU[83] in addressing matters of peace and security on the continent and for the ASF there are three RECs plus two RMs.[84]

The overlapping multiplicity of regional organizations with their ongoing changes in relevance has become a fluctuating constant within African regionalism. Actors, mostly heads of state and government and to a lesser extent civil society organizations (or their networks), may at times be highly engaged by working through one organization and / or then again shifting their focus to another or alter their commitment. This ebbing and flowing of different topical issues or the currents of changing alliances was to some degree channelled by the APSA. The process of establishing this policy structure manifested the relevance of eight regional organizations for continental peace and security. In addition, the creation of the ASF in the form of five regional forces, each with the respective responsibility for North, East, South, Central and West Africa, inscribed a certain ASF-geography.[85]

This attempt to fix a particular spatial imagination created a spatial order that has become very successful. The intersecting of key legal texts has defined a particular relationship between African and non-African organizations with regard to peace and security on the continent, which is manifested in the building of technical and institutional capacities (e.g. African Union-United Nations relations). This included the creation of the five regional forces of the ASF and the development of the structures and capacities of the African Union Peace Support Operations (PSO), such as the Peace Support Operations Division at the African Union Commission, as well as trainings at the regional training centres of excellence and through continental exercises. The ASF was modelled after the multi-dimensional peacekeeping paradigm that was sought by organizations like the United Nations at the time to confront armed violence on the continent.

The establishment of the MNJTF showed that – at least the involved – heads of state and government with their national military leadership desired a different model for military collaboration in the region. The MNJTF was a convenient tool for Nigeria to gain legitimacy and support through the African Union and United Nations while maintaining firm control over its military and the operations against Boko Haram. In a similar vein, the MNJTF format allowed the governments of Biya in Cameroon and Déby in Chad to access training and funding arrangements for their national armies, which boosted their performance and increased domestic legitimacy. And, as within the MNJTF, the contributing armies operate mostly in their own territories with support that could be obtained

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83   These eight regional organizations that are officially recognized as partners of the African Union under APSA are ECOWAS, SADC, ECCAS, IGAD, EAC, AMU, CEN-SAD and COMESA.

84   Protocol Relaing to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (1st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU), 9 July 2002, Durban, South Africa; Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the Area of Peace and Security between the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2008.

85   K. P. W. Döring, The changing ASF geography: From the intervention experience in Mali to the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises and the Nouakchott Process, in: African Security 11 (2018) 1, pp. 32–58.

through the multilateral format, which translated into national military successes that could be claimed by the presidents.[86]

The primary responsibility for the MNJTF lies formally with the LCBC, in cooperation with the African Union. However, as the commission does not have experience in conducting such operations, the task force essentially liaises with the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa when necessary.[87] Yet, the two major RECs bordering the force's area of operation, ECOWAS and ECCAS, were marginal to the establishment of the force and have only recently found a joint format for engagement with it.

At the time ECOWAS and ECCAS were established, those two RECs were the preferred structures for cooperation by the political leadership. Later, the creation of the MNJTF indicates that these preferences have changed, certainly regarding military deployment, as the concerned heads of state and government did not purse cooperation through ECOWAS or ECCAS in their fight against Boko Haram.

ECOWAS was not involved in the establishment of the MNJTF beyond expressions of support. Instead, rather the AU became the strategic partner for the MNJTF in terms of logistics and finances with a strategic support office established in Addis Ababa to coordinated, among other issues, donor assistance.[88] The European Union, the United Kingdom, and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) were among the donors, most of them pledging support during the February 2016 donors' conference in Addis Ababa.[89] Nevertheless, the financial burden was mostly carried by the MNJTF member states themselves, first and foremost Nigeria.[90]

ECCAS, instead, promised CFA (XAF) 50,000 billion (about USD 87 million) during an extraordinary summit of the Central African Peace and Security Council (COPAX) in Yaoundé, Caameroon, in February 2015 – at a time when Chadian President Idriss Déby Itno held the chair of ECCAS.[91] The same meeting also called for a joint ECOWAS-ECCAS summit on a common strategy against Boko Haram.[92] The joint summit that was initially scheduled for October 2015 only took place in July 2018, despite repeated encouragement towards such a joint summit and offers of support in organizing it by the United Nations secretary-general and the United Nations Security Council.[93]

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86   Brubacher, Damman, and Day, The AU Task Forces, p. 294.

87   PSC, Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Implementation of Communiqué PSC/AHG/COMM.2(CDLXXXIV) on the Boko Haram Terrorist Group and on other Related International Efforts, 489th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 March 2015; PSC, Communiqué (PSC/AHG/COMM.2[CDLXXXIV]), 484th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 29 January 2015; Galeazzi et al., Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission, p. 8.

88   W. Assanvo, J. E. A. Abatan, W. A. Sawadogo, Institute for Security Studies Cape Town, G, Pretoria, Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) 2016, p. 5.

89   Press Release: The African Union Commission holds a donors' conference in support of the Multinational Joint task force operations against Boko Haram terrorist group, Addis Ababa, 1 February 2016.

90   Assanvo et al., Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force, 9.

91   M. J. Nsang, The ECCAS will provide one hundred million dollars to fight against Boko Haram, 2015; https://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=6261&lang=en (accessed 7 January 2019).

92   Ibid.; United Nations Security Council: para. 64.

93   See United Nations Security Council: Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2015/914), New York, 30 November 2015, para. 22, 81; Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United

During the joint summit in Lomé, the heads of state and government of ECOWAS and ECCAS signed the Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism.[94] After the joint summit in June 2013 in Yaoundé on maritime security, this was another step towards transregional or interregional cooperation in matters of peace and security.[95]

While there are different ways of coordinating and realigning multinational forces like the MNJTF, with the AU PSO standards and ASF aims, some avenues are not explored (at all). There could have been a cooperation between the West African Standby Force (ESF) and the Central African Standby Force (FOMAC). Moreover, it would have been possible that one REC takes the lead and cooperates with the bordering neighbour states. ECOWAS could have engaged Chad and Cameroon to deploy a sort of ESF-*plus*.

The African Union maintains primary responsibility for peace and security on the continent[96] and derives much of its recognition from this default position. As such, it has a coordinating role and the task to respond to security challenges when just one regional organization alone is not able to.

In addition to the MNJTF, also the G5 Sahel Joint Force (comprised of Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania) has confronted the African Union with a military cooperation effort outside the APSA structures. The African Union has responded with a Peace and Security Council Communique that – while authorizing this force – reminded everyone about the importance of APSA and ECOWAS.[97] Further, a Peace and Security Council Communique was released in November 2017 concerning both "ad hoc regional initiatives" and their relationship to APSA, acknowledging the need "for the AU and Member states including the RECs to explore ways and means to adapt AU instruments in the framework of the APSA".[98] This attempt to reconcile some member states drive for ad hoc deployments with the longstanding development of the regional standby forces and APSA had already influenced the debates within the Nouakchott Process, initiated by the African Union Commission in early 2013.[99]

Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (S/2017/465), New York, 31 May 2017; Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2017/563), New York, 30 June 2017, para. 43; Resolution 2349, Adopted by the Security Council at its 7911th meeting (S/RES/2349), New York, 31 March 2017, para. 25.

94   Lomé Declaration on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Joint Summit of ECOWAS and ECCAS Heads of State and Government, Lomé, Togo, 30 July 2018.

95   Final Communiqué, Joint Summit of ECOWAS and ECCAS Heads of State and Government on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Lomé, Togo, 30 July 2018.

96   Protocol Relaing to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union" (1st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU), 9 July 2002, Durban, South Africa; Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2008.

97   Communiqué (PSC/PR/COMM [DCLXXIX]), 679th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13 April 2017.

98   Communiqué (PSC/PR/COMM. [DCCXXXIII]), 733th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13 November 2017, para. 13.

99   Ministerial Meeting on the Enhancement of Security Cooperation and the Operationalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan Region: Nouakchott Conclusions, 17 March 2013.

These efforts to hold on to existing security arrangements on the continent notwithstanding, currently it seems that the five regional standby forces have merely a sort of routine legacy support from some member states. An influential member state of ECOWAS and the AU, Nigeria was opposed to the establishment of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC),[100] which it saw as detrimental to the operationalization of the ASF. Yet, at the same time it did not support the deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force in the context of its own fight against Boko Haram.[101] Member states, like Nigeria and Chad, seem to prefer to deploy their troops through an arrangement like the MNJTF which allows them to maintain more control over their troops and face less scrutiny regarding human rights standards, as it would be within an African Union Peace Support Operations or United Nations Peacekeeping Mission. In the context of this trend, the African Union will continue to face the challenges in accommodating simultaneous processes of spatialization through different transregional arrangements.

5. Conclusion

This article set out to caution against a naturalization of spatial imaginations of different regions. Instead of taking for granted pre-given regions that are easily definable, I contend that specific actors produce and reproduce the regional or respectively transregional character of a security concern as well as its response. The three parts of the article sought to understand the co-existence of the framing of the violence in the Lake Chad Basin as regional and as transregional. Part one gave an overview of the abundant spatial semantics that invoke different locations and regionalizations of the security concerns in the area. Here, the role of an organization like the UNDP in co-creating regional structures was chosen as an example. The second part focused on the becoming of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force, highlighting some of the concerns and interests of the heads of state and government that contribute troops to this force. Finally, the third part examined the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture, with its particular regional division. As ECOWAS and ECCAS seek transregional cooperation in their counter-terrorism efforts, the African Union tries to bridge the tension between this very successful regionalization project and the current restarting of alternative projects, here exemplified by the revival of the LCBC.

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100 The African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) is a proposal for an lead-nation based coalition of willing states to deploy in a more flexible manner than through the prearranged regional forces, see Sixth Ordinary Meeting, Preparatory Meeting of Chiefs of Staff: Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Operationalisation of the Rapid Deplyoment Capability of the African Standby Force and the Establishment of an "African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises", RPT/Exp/VI/STCDSS/(i-a)2013 (29-30 April 2013). It was introduced by the African Union Commission Chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and greatly supported by South Africa, who had a successful experience of a coalition-based intervention against the armed groups M23 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, together with Tanzania and Malawi.

101 Yet, the ESF was still deployed in a national context, as in Guinea-Bissau and Gambia.

As noted in the introductory literature overview, when discussing the security responses by governments and international organizations in the Lake Chad Basin the spatial semantics in delineating the appropriate regional (or transregional) frame are not reflected upon. A fruitful avenue for future research would be to focus on these framings and trace which actors desire which regional framing, why at a given time, and how they co-produce it.

The limited space of this article allowed only for a cursory overview while highlighting some aspects or rather sketching out an entry point for future analysis of the spatial imaginations and semantics that drive the becoming of regions. Such an analysis needs to take into account the following interlinked aspects. First, the becoming of regions are not pregiven but instead social artefacts that are desired, shaped, and made by actors over time. Second, these actors may have different understandings of what or where the region is and what it is constituted by and that those understandings may, also, change over time. Third, the different understandings of the region may be similar to those of other actors or different from them, which in turn affects the possibility for cooperation and / or competition. Fourth, while there might be a topical concurrence among the actors (e.g. counter-Boko Haram stance among the African Union, ECOWAS, ECCAS, the LCBC, or the UNDP) or a shared assessment of the conflict situation, their spatial imaginations of the issue may vary and may increase tensions between them or introduce difficulties for collaboration.