



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Bachelor's Degree in International Relations

The European Union's response to the threat posed by Boko Haram (2015-2025)

Author: Lucía Hernán Ramos

Supervisor: Miguel Paradela López

Madrid, April 2026

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

- *Martin Luther King Jr.*

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the European Union's response to Boko Haram's threat in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin from 2015 to 2025. It analyses the EU's use of diplomatic, security, humanitarian, and development instruments under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and evaluates their coherence with the Union's normative framework. Using a human security approach and state fragility theories, the study assesses the extent to which the EU's action has contributed to mitigating violence and improving civilian security. The dissertation concludes that the EU has adopted a comprehensive but uneven strategy: while it has supported regional cooperation and provided relevant assistance, its effectiveness has been limited by fragmented implementation and by structural conditions that continue to fuel insecurity.

Keywords: European Union, Boko Haram, Lake Chad Basin, terrorism, security, state fragility, Common Foreign and Security Policy.

APPENDIX: Declaration on the use of generative AI tools

Degree:	International Relations and Global Communication
Student:	Lucía Hernán Ramos
Final-Year Project coordinators:	Belén García-Noblejas Floriano, Javier Gil Pérez
Supervisor of the Final-Year Project:	Miguel Paradela López

I hereby declare that generative artificial intelligence has been used as a support tool in the preparation of this final-year dissertation.	<u>YES</u>	NO
--	-------------------	----

Generative AI Use**Ethical Use**

	YES	NO
When using the AI tool, have you included any sensitive or personal data (such as real photos or personal details) in the prompts you've used?		
Have you been using it to replace your own work without critically reviewing the output generated by the AI tool?		
Have you taken into account the academic advice you've been given specifically on the degree course regarding what is and isn't permitted with AI?		

Technical use made:

I have used several AI tools: ChatGPT (standard version), Perplexity (Pro version), NotebookLM (standard version), Claude (standard version), and Grammarly (standard version).

- ☐ Text Generation
☒ Rewriting → Claude
☒ Translation /proofreading → Grammarly, Perplexity
☒ Structure suggestion → Perplexity
☒ Methodological support → ChatGPT, NotebookLM.
☒ Search for or cite references → Perplexity, NotebookLM.
☐ Generate audiovisual content (videos, infographics, audio, images, graphics)
☐ Other

I confirm that the final content has been reviewed, corrected and validated in its entirety by me, as the author, and I accept full academic responsibility for it. The use of AI has not replaced the critical analysis, personal reflection or original intellectual work required in a Bachelor's thesis.

Signature:


Table of contents

List of abbreviations	6
Introduction	8
i. Justification of the topic	8
ii. Research objectives	11
iii. Research questions and hypothesis	12
1. Methodology	12
2. State of art.....	13
2.1 Academic approaches to contemporary terrorism	13
2.2 Terrorism and Fragile States in Sub-Saharan Africa	15
2.3 The human security approach on the study of terrorism.....	17
2.4 Debates about international response to terrorism	17
2.5 Gaps in the literature.....	18
3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	18
3.1 Human Security Approach	18
3.2. Theories of Terrorism.....	21
4. Boko Haram and Regional Instability in the Lake Chad Basin.....	26
4.1 Emergence and evolution of Boko Haram.....	26
4.2 Boko Haram as a threat to regional security.....	32
5. The European Union's Response to Boko Haram (2015–2025).....	33
5.1 The EU as a security actor: Common Foreign and Security Policy principles and instruments	33
5.2 Security and development: an integrated EU approach	35
5.3 Cooperation in security and diplomacy.....	38
5.4 Humanitarian assistance and development instruments	41
6. Critical Assessment of the EU's Response	43
6.1 Coherence with CFSP objectives and the human security approach	43
6.2 Effectiveness and impact on human security in the Lake Chad Basin.....	46
6.3 Member States' geostrategic interests and constraints: Limitations and Implications as a Global Security Actor	47
7. Conclusions	51
8. Proposals	52
Bibliography	54

List of abbreviations

AFD: Agence Française de Développement

APF: African Peace Facility

APSA: African Peace and Security Architecture

AU: African Union

CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy

CJEU: Court of Justice of the EU

CSDP: Common Security and Defence Policy

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration

DG DEVCO: Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development

DG NEAR: Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

ECCAS: Economic Community of Central African States

ECHO: European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

EDF: European Development Fund

EEAS: European Union External Action Service

EU: European Union

EUCAP Sahel Niger: European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger

EUSR: European Union Special Representatives

EUTF: European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

EUTM Mali: European Union Training Mission in Mali

GCTF: Global Counter-Terrorism Forum

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HDI: Human Development Index

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IED: Improvised Explosive Device

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

INTCEN: EU Intelligence and Situation Centre

INTERPOL: International Criminal Police Organization

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

ISIL: Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

ISWAP: Islamic State-West Africa Province

JAS: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad

LCBC: Lake Chad Basin Commission

MNJTF: Multinational Joint Task Force

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

RACC: Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell

R2P: Responsibility to Protect

RESILAC: Lake Chad Inclusive Economic and Social Recovery Project

RSF: Regional Stabilisation Facility

TEU: Treaty on European Union

TFEU: Treaty on The Functioning of the European Union

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Introduction

i. Justification of the topic

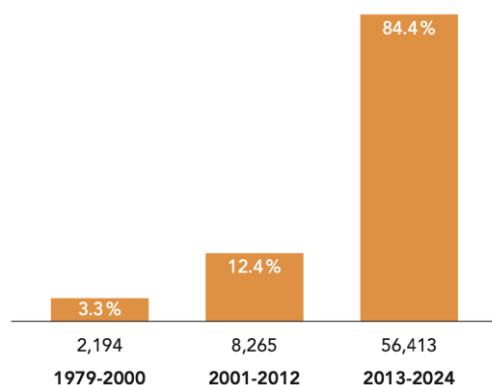
Nowadays, terrorism continues to pose a threat to many countries and can take many different forms. The emergence of Islamic terrorism can be traced to the 1980s and 1990s, influenced by the Iranian Revolution (1979) and the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989). The Iranian Revolution showed how an Islamic movement could overthrow a Western-backed regime and establish an Islamic state, providing a powerful illustration of Islam's potential as a revolutionary political ideology. This example, alongside the Afghan jihad, contributed to the broader belief among various Islamist groups (both within and beyond the Sunni world) that Islam could be used as a mobilising force against Western-backed political orders. In other words, it provided a modern illustration of Islam's long-standing capacity to serve as a revolutionary political ideology, now directed against an Occident-backed order. Along these lines, the Soviet-Afghan War brought together the Sunni world to fight for their interests as it internationalised the jihad and radicalised combatants. From that moment on, many terrorist groups began to emerge. Some stayed within one country, whilst others grew into transnational movements. The growth and persistence of Boko Haram in West Africa highlights the fact that Islamist terrorism is not a threat confined to Europe, but directly affects regional stability and the strategic interests of external actors like the European Union. In this context, these dynamics showcase the importance of examining the EU's external action in the fight against Boko Haram, as well as the role of international cooperation and the use of security and development tools in addressing what has become a global security concern. In this paper, the term Boko Haram is used to refer specifically to the faction known as JAS. It should be noted that, following the split in 2016, the group divided into two main factions: on the one hand, ISWAP (aligned with the self-proclaimed Islamic State), and on the other, JAS (which retained the original Arabic name of Boko Haram and operates independently). For the purpose of this study, the analysis will focus mainly on JAS (also referred to as Boko Haram), whose dynamics, objectives, and capacity for international projection differ from those of ISWAP.

Fighting terrorism has always been a top priority for the European Union, especially after the 2015 terrorist attacks suffered by various Member States. Since then, EU leaders have committed to ensuring the security of their citizens by preventing radicalisation and cooperating with international partners. For this reason, it is crucial to recognise that Boko

Haram is a regional threat that could eventually evolve into a more significant transnational threat and reach Europe. Hence, this International Relations Dissertation will analyse how the EU anticipates and halts the growth of this terrorist group so that it does not disrupt the stability of its region and does not reach Europe. The temporal scope for this paper starts in 2015, as it coincides with the year that Europe suffered the most jihadist attacks and Member States acknowledged the great threat of terrorism. In fact, the data shows how Islamist terrorism worldwide is more frequent than ever before.

Figure 1

Number of Islamist attacks worldwide between 1979 and 2024.

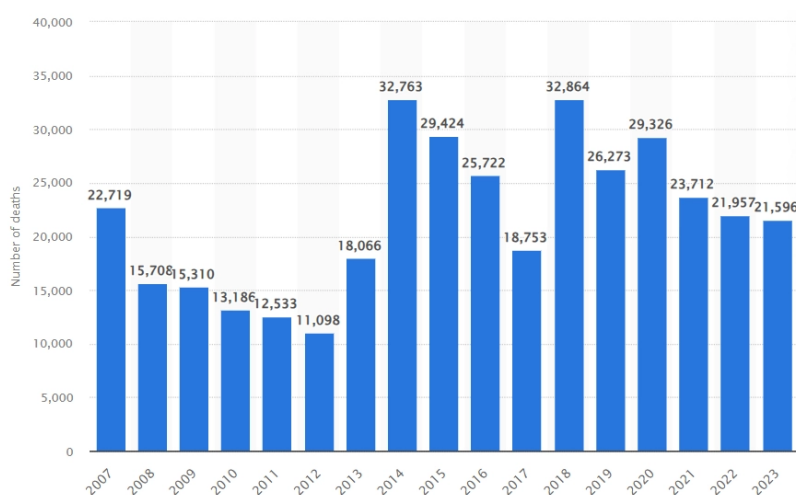


Note. The graph shows the number of Islamist attacks that took place worldwide, portraying the huge increase in these attacks since 2013. Graph taken from <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/islamist-terrorist-attacks-in-the-world-1979-2024/#chap-1>.

As we can see in Figure 1, 84.4% of all recorded attacks since 1979 occurred between 2013 and 2024, which explains the sudden concern that the world had about terrorism. In fact, if one delves into how terrorism surged in 2014 and remained a major threat, one can understand the concern it generated and why regional organisations organised themselves to protect their areas of interest. In Figure 2, we can see how in 2014, the number of deaths due to terrorist attacks worldwide almost doubled from 2013's figure. Not only that, but numbers remained high after that, reaching a pinnacle in 2018 and overall being higher than in 2014.

Figure 2

Number of fatalities due to terrorist attacks worldwide between 2007 and 2023.



Note. The graph shows how, after 2013, terrorist attacks rocketed with a notable decrease in 2017, only to shoot up again, reaching their peak in 2018 with 32,864 people killed by terrorists worldwide. Taken from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/202871/number-of-fatalities-by-terrorist-attacks-worldwide/> (Statista Research Department, 2025).

This research stems from the European Union's growing interest in promoting security and stability in regions particularly affected by violent extremism, like sub-Saharan Africa. The selection of the terrorist group Boko Haram as a case study is justified by its evolution since its emergence in the early 2000s in Maiduguri (north-eastern Nigeria). Over the past two decades, the group has established itself as one of the main threats to regional stability in West and Central Africa, particularly affecting countries in the Lake Chad basin. In fact, has become one of the deadliest organisations in the world, precipitating a crisis that affected 15 million people, displaced more than 2 million people and killed an estimated 20, 000 to 30,000 people in Nigeria and neighbouring Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (EASO, 2021). According to the Global Terrorism Index (2026), Nigeria had a significant deterioration in its security landscape in 2025, marked by a 43 per cent increase in terrorist incidents and a 46 per cent surge in fatalities, reaching a total of 750 deaths, the highest toll since 2020. This escalation is mainly driven by the persistent activities of the ISWAP and Boko Haram, which collectively accounted for over 80 per cent of terrorism-related deaths. While ISWAP has emerged as a dominant actor, Boko Haram remains highly lethal, with its operations largely concentrated in Borno State and along the Cameroon-Nigeria border, resulting in a sharp rise in civilian casualties. The regional security environment is further complicated by internal factional violence between these two groups. Beyond direct militancy, this uptick in violence occurs within a broader context of social and economic instability, where weakened

governance and persistent grievances continue to facilitate radicalisation and insurgent recruitment. This evolving threat landscape underscores the continued relevance of examining how external actors respond to the insurgency.

In this context, this dissertation will examine the actions, strategies, and policies adopted by the European Union, either through direct action or through support for organisations, to counter the expansion and impact of Boko Haram, and assess their consistency with the principles and objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. It also aims to identify the factors that have influenced the European response, such as cooperation with African regional actors, coordination with international organisations and the geostrategic interests of Member States. This analysis seeks to provide a critical view of the effectiveness and limitations of the EU's role in the face of unconventional threats, contributing to a better understanding of its role as a global actor in security matters and its commitment to international stability.

ii. Research objectives

This investigation aims to analyse the European Union's response to the threat of the terrorist group Boko Haram within the period of 2015-2025. It will evaluate the actions, strategies, and policies adopted, as well as their coherence with the principles and objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). To break down the main objective further, the following secondary objectives can be identified:

1. Analyse the evolution of Boko Haram as a terrorist actor and its impact on the security and stability of West and Central Africa, focusing especially on the region of the Lake Chad Basin.
2. Identify the main actions, strategies, and policies adopted by the European Union to address the threat posed by Boko Haram during the specified time period.
3. Analyse the level of cooperation between the European Union and African regional actors in the fight against violent extremism.
4. Assess the European Union's coordination with international organisations and other relevant actors in the response to Boko Haram.
5. Identify the political, strategic, and geostrategic factors that have influenced the response of the European Union and its Member States.
6. Assess the efficacy and limitations of the European Union's response to unconventional threats, such as jihadist terrorism.

iii. Research questions and hypothesis

By defining the scope of the study, the research is guided by the following central question:

What strategies has the European Union adopted to address the threat posed by Boko Haram and its underlying structural drivers in the Lake Chad Basin?

To answer this central question, the research addresses the following secondary questions:

1. Has the EU's integrated approach produced a coherent, coordinated response, or has institutional fragmentation undermined its strategic consistency?
2. How has the EU balanced its normative commitments (such as human rights and democratic governance) with the operational imperatives of security cooperation with regional partners?
3. To what degree has the EU support, particularly for the MNJTF, improved the human security of affected populations, and has it effectively tackled the root causes of the conflict (e.g. governance failure, marginalisation, and environmental crisis)?

This dissertation hypothesises that the European Union has adopted a comprehensive strategy combining security and development tools to address Boko Haram and its underlying structural drivers, although its effectiveness is limited by structural and regional constraints.

1. Methodology

In order to carry out this research, a qualitative methodology will be used with an analytical and descriptive focus. For this purpose, there will be a thorough review of the literature relating to each of the fundamental parts into which the investigation is divided. It is important to highlight that this investigation is based on a case study, which allows for an in-depth analysis of a specific phenomenon within a defined time frame. For this matter, the research will have the following structure.

Firstly, there will be a descriptive analysis of the origin, evolution, and the activity of Boko Haram, as well as its impact on regional security. For this matter, there will be an evaluation of international organisations' reports as well as scholarly articles.

Secondly, there will be a theoretical framework based on the human security approach, the main theories of terrorism, and the conceptualisation of the European Union as a

security actor. This section draws on academic articles and relevant institutional documents.

Thirdly, the role of the European Union in security matters in sub-Saharan Africa is analysed by studying the principles and objectives of the CFSP, the integrated approach to security and development, and the limitations arising from the geostrategic interests of Member States. The main technique used is documentary analysis of official EU sources.

Fourthly, there will be an analysis of the case study drawing on primary and secondary sources, including strategies, speeches, missions in the framework of the CFSP, reports of the European External Action Service (EEAS), as well as other regional organisations.

Lastly, there will be an evaluation of how coherent the response of the EU is with the objectives of the CFSP and its focus on human security. This evaluation will be supported with an analysis of the efficiency and impact of the EU and its main limitations as a global security actor.

2. State of art

2.1 Academic approaches to contemporary terrorism

Academic literature about contemporary terrorism has delved into many different approaches that are used to conceptualise this phenomenon as well as to understand its political, social, and economic dynamics. According to Sandler (2015), terrorism is the deliberate use of violence, or the threat of it, by individuals or non-state groups to achieve political or social goals by instilling fear. This definition emphasises two key aspects: that the perpetrators are non-state actors and that the violence serves a psychological and symbolic purpose.

Furthermore, many authors agree that terrorism should be understood as a tactic, not as a full form of warfare. Marks (2006) argues that while terrorism remains a tactical tool, referred to as the 'weapon of the weaker side', its use by nationalist insurgents has transformed it into a strategic component of their long-term campaigns. Sandler (2015) reinforces this, distinguishing terrorism from guerrilla warfare and insurrection. Guerrilla groups control territory and operate with military organisation, insurrections seek to overthrow the state and mobilise the population, while terrorism purposely uses violence against civilians to intimidate and coerce. Boko Haram is a hybrid actor because its use of terrorism takes the form of mass kidnappings or suicide bombings, whilst at the same

time seeking to control territory, which responds to guerrilla characteristics. This explains why purely military solutions often fail. Additionally, Schanzer (2017) sees terrorism as a tactic that can be used by many different actors (from lone individuals to proto-states) whose only common feature is the intentional use of violence against civilians for political purposes. In other words, terrorism is what actors do, not what they are. Viewed this way, Boko Haram should not be understood only as a group of violent actors that must be eliminated, but as an actor within a wider political conflict that is grounded in unresolved grievances, such as state neglect in north-eastern Nigeria, economic marginalisation, or governance failures. Schanzer (2017) warns that focusing too much on the violent methods and too little on the political drivers behind them leads to counterterrorism policies that prioritise killing or dismantling groups rather than addressing the conditions that generate them in the first place. This logic helps explain why jihadist organisations keep reappearing in the Lake Chad region, as new ones or splinters from prior existing ones. However, addressing these drivers also requires an analysis of the internal processes through which these groups legitimise their violence; specifically, how they construct ideological frameworks to justify the systematic targeting of civilians as a necessary component of their project.

Furthermore, academics have pointed out the difference between domestic terrorism and transnational terrorism. They mainly differ in that whilst the first-mentioned acts in the internal sphere of the State, the latter creates externalities that affect third countries, whether due to the crossing of borders, the nationality of the victims or the involvement of international interests (Sandler, 2015). Boko Haram's actions have become transnational as it operates in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, which has caused regional instability in the Lake Chad region, spilling across borders and spreading contagion. This change explains why international actors enter the conflict and the work done by multilateral organisations in contexts where terrorist violence transcends national borders.

Nonetheless, contrary to common assumptions, state weakness and economic underdevelopment do not sufficiently explain the emergence of domestic terrorism (Choi & Piazza, 2016). Instead, it is the political exclusion of ethnic groups from executive power that creates grievances and an "us vs. them" dynamic that can mobilise violence. In the case of Boko Haram, religious and cultural identity are instrumentalised to deepen a sense of alienation between the Muslim north and the more westernised, largely Christian south. Boko Haram sees that anything that resembles the West should be

prohibited; thus, the “us vs. them” narrative drives their opposition to the South. Indeed, moving from moderate to high levels of ethno-political exclusion has been associated with a 116% increase in domestic terrorist incidents (Choi & Piazza, 2016).

On counterterrorism, academics distinguish between defensive and proactive measures. Defensive countermeasures protect potential targets by increasing the cost or reducing the likelihood of successful attacks, though they are reactive and risk merely displacing violence rather than eliminating it (Sandler, 2015). Contrastingly, proactive measures directly confront terrorist capabilities through military operations, intelligence, financial disruption, and the removal of safe havens, but they generate collective action problems in transnational contexts, as benefits are non-excludable and states tend to free-ride (Bandyopadhyay & Sandler, 2023). Marks (2006) extends this framework by arguing that effective counterterrorism ultimately requires restoring legitimate and competent governance, since countries with functional governments do not produce the types of terrorist organisations that constitute contemporary threats. Furthermore, Schanzer (2017) argues that counterterrorism lacks conceptual coherence because it groups very different kinds of threats under one umbrella. As they are all treated as the same problem, policy responses become overly simplistic and focus only on security and military action, treating only the symptoms (violence) while ignoring the root causes (political failures or social grievances). When political solutions get sidelined by security priorities, the result is a vicious cycle where dismantling one organisation creates conditions for another to emerge in its place. An example of this is al-Qaeda in Iraq morphing into ISIS. The same logic can be applied to Boko Haram; therefore, durable counterterrorism requires restoring legitimate governance rather than just relying on military suppression.

Lastly, scholars have noted the increasing hybridisation of contemporary terrorism with other forms of criminal activity like drug trafficking, kidnapping and arms smuggling for self-financing, which is also seen in Boko Haram. Marks (2006) identified this as a part of the broader internationalisation of both terrorism and organised crime, creating challenges that overpower individual governments and demand multilateral responses combining diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments.

2.2 *Terrorism and Fragile States in Sub-Saharan Africa*

It is crucial to place violent extremist movements within their political, social, and institutional contexts in order to comprehend modern terrorism. Terrorism is a tactic used by non-state actors operating within specific structural conditions, not an isolated security

issue. A state with extensive territory but with a limited capacity to ensure security across the territory may struggle to stop the emergence of non-state armed groups aiming to acquire territory or resources. For this reason, violence committed against civilians by non-state armed groups is linked to the state's failure to protect the population's security (Andersen-Rodgers & Crawford, 2023).

Due to their limited military capacity, poor and weak states are vulnerable to terrorism and rely on foreign aid for security. In these environments, poor governance is a structural facilitator, enabling terrorist groups to recruit members and exert territorial control.

Terrorism is understood as a tactic rather than an ideology or a type of warfare in itself. Groups may use terrorism at first as a tactical instrument but gradually incorporate it into broader political and military strategies. In fragile environments, where state authority is disputed or unequally distributed, terrorist violence can evolve into hybrid forms that combine insurgency, territorial control, and governance functions. The problem is that this evolution complicates traditional counterterrorism approaches, especially when the boundaries between terrorism, rebellion, and organised violence become blurred (Marks, 2006).

Moreover, corruption creates resentment among citizens and undermines the state's capacity to address insecurity. Thurston (2018) underscores that African jihadist movements should not be viewed solely as extensions of global extremist ideologies. Instead, they are deeply embedded in local political dynamics, historical injustices, and patterns of state neglect. This perspective challenges simplistic explanations that link radicalisation exclusively to religious extremism and highlights the importance of domestic political conditions.

Collectively, the literature read indicates that terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa arises from the convergence of tactical violence, governance shortcomings, socio-economic exclusion, and regional influences. Grasping these structural conditions is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of global responses, especially those aiming to integrate security, development, and institutional assistance. This analytical structure provides the necessary foundation for investigating specific cases of violent extremism and evaluating the role of external actors in addressing both the symptoms and root causes of insecurity.

2.3 *The human security approach on the study of terrorism*

Beyond institutional fragility, scholars have increasingly incorporated the concept of human security into the analysis of terrorism. The concept of human security was formally introduced in 1994. This approach shifts the focus to the protection of individuals and communities, highlighting aspects such as food security, health, education, human rights, and human dignity. A human security framework allows for a multidimensional understanding of the effects of terrorism, moving beyond state-centric ideas of security (Andersen-Rodgers & Crawford, 2023). The erosion of livelihoods, social cohesiveness, and access to essential services can be just as disruptive in precarious situations as direct armed violence. Therefore, this approach challenges purely militarised responses and emphasises the need to address both structural drivers of insecurity and immediate security threats. Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens (2006) suggest that shortcomings in human security (including poverty, inequality, lack of education, and limited political participation) might act as structural causes of terrorism. Looking at it from this lens, terrorism is both a consequence and a creator of insecurity. Violence intensifies humanitarian crises, displaces populations, and hinders development, while pre-existing weaknesses promote recruitment and radicalisation.

2.4 *Debates about international response to terrorism*

The literature about counterterrorism has highlighted the limitations of responses focused solely on the use of force. Indeed, military measures can temporarily reduce the operational capacity of terrorist groups, but numerous studies have shown that these approaches tend to be insufficient when not accompanied by policies that tackle the structural causes of conflict. Moreover, transnational terrorist incidents often generate transnational externalities. For instance, when offenders from one country impose uncompensated costs on victims of another country or if a country offers a safe haven to a transnational terrorist group that attacks other countries. These effects can also emerge from the counterterrorism responses of affected states, as their policies may lead to suboptimal or inefficient outcomes (Sandler, 2015). This notion of transnational externalities helps explain why international cooperation is important. The truth is that when terrorists' actions cross borders, unilateral responses are inefficient and create simultaneously collective action problems. Therefore, international organisations and multilateral actors play a key role in the coordination and provision of public security goods mechanisms. In this sense, it is understood why the EU prefers multilateral

frameworks and supports regional cooperation in Africa. Indeed, many times the EU avoids unilateral military action in exchange for funding capacity-building and coordination. More and more literature advocates for comprehensive approaches that combine security measures with development policies, institutional strengthening, and the promotion of governance. These strategies aim not only to contain violence but also reduce the factors of vulnerability that enable terrorism to persist, thereby aligning themselves with the principles of the human security approach.

2.5 Gaps in the literature

Even though there is a great amount of work about jihadist terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa, human security and the international response to terrorism, there are indeed certain gaps in the academic analysis. Actually, Boko Haram is almost always analysed through a domestic lens, and few articles systematically examine the European Union's external action in response to the threat posed by Boko Haram, especially from a perspective that combines security and the protection of civilian populations. Along these lines, most existing studies are focused on specific periods of time or national responses, which leaves in the background the analysis of the period between 2015 and 2025, characterised by an intensification of the EU's comprehensive approach to Africa. In the same way, the explicit application of the human security approach to the study of EU external action in the Lake Chad Basin remains limited. For that reason, this paper aims to fill the gaps and contribute to these debates through a critical analysis of the European Union's response to Boko Haram during the period 2015-2025, assessing its coherence, effectiveness, and limitations from the perspective of human security.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.1 Human Security Approach

The Human Security Approach finds its origins in 1994, coinciding with the end of the Cold War, when the collapse of the US-Soviet rivalry opened space for rethinking what *security* really means. The first milestone was the 1994 United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report, as it provided the first definition of human security. The report responded to the unbalanced view of what security is, as traditionally, the concept of security had been centred on state conflicts and border threats, whilst individuals thought of security as stability and safety in their daily lives. (Andersen-Rodgers & Crawford, 2023). According to the Human Development Reports, human security is a broad concept that encompasses two variables. On the one hand, it involves

protecting people from constant dangers like hunger, illness, crime, and repression. On the other hand, it ensures that sudden disruptions (whether in homes, workplaces, communities, or the surrounding environment) do not undermine the stability and routine of everyday life (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). The concept has deeper roots in Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech (1941), which, like the later human security framework, shifts the focus of security from states to individuals and from military threats alone to a broader set of social, economic, and political conditions for a dignified life. Roosevelt's speech helped lay the normative groundwork for later international frameworks (like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) by presenting security as inseparable from basic needs, rights, and social justice (Sohn, 1995). In doing so, it anticipates the core logic of human security, reframing security around the individual rather than the state and linking peace and stability to freedom from want and fear, as well as to basic political and religious liberties.

Furthermore, Andersen-Rodgers & Crawford (2023) identify six core principles of human security. First, human security places the individual, rather than the state, at the centre of analysis. Unlike traditional national security, which focuses on protecting the state, or global security, which aims to stabilise the international system of states, human security starts by asking how people and their communities experience insecurity. From this perspective, the state itself can be a source of insecurity through practices such as ethnic cleansing, discriminatory access to rights, or an inability to protect its populations from violence and deprivation. Second, human security rests on two core pillars: *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*. Whilst *freedom from fear* refers to protection from immediate physical threats (i.e. armed conflict, violence, and terrorism) at the same time, *freedom from want* addresses chronic, long-term threats (i.e. poverty, hunger, disease, and structural deprivation), which undermine people's well-being even when there is no open conflict. Third, drawing on the UNDP (1994) formulation, human security is characterised by 4 key features. It is universal as it applies to all people regardless of their nationality or status; its dimensions are interdependent, meaning that security in one area can ripple across regions (through migration, environmental degradation or transnational crime); it is more effectively achieved through early prevention than through costly late-stage interventions, and it is people-centred (focused on the daily lives, capabilities, and freedoms). Fourth, human security also distinguishes between direct and structural violence. Direct violence means immediate physical harm caused by armed conflict,

terrorism, or repression, whilst structural violence arises from unjust social, political, and economic structures such as inequality or discrimination. Fifth, the concept implies a shift in responsibility for security provision. Human security challenges the idea that only the state is responsible for security. It opens the door to external actors (NGOs, international organisations, foreign states) stepping in when a government is unable or unwilling to protect its people. This is the theoretical basis for concepts like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Finally, for human security to work in practice, it needs to become a norm: a consensus among states and organisations that individuals are entitled to protection, specific actors are responsible for guaranteeing it, and there is a clear expected action to realise it.

Additionally, the human security approach prioritises non-traditional threats, such as terrorism. Human security is uniquely suited to address complex problems that traditional state security often ignores, namely, health insecurity (e.g. pandemics), environmental security (e.g. climate change), economic and food security, systemic inequality (e.g. gender inequality), or transnational crime (Andersen-Rodgers & Crawford, 2023). According to Callaway & Harrelson-Stephens (2006), terrorism is often a response to the systemic denial of political, subsistence, and security rights. In Nigeria, achieving human security requires effective governance and a stable state that provides social safety nets rather than just a military response. Due to the interdependent nature of non-traditional threats, insecurity in one region can extend globally; therefore, they require multilateral collaboration between states, international organisations and civil society. Nonetheless, applying human security too broadly can lead to the securitisation of human rights, which could invite unnecessary military intervention.

The human security framework proves highly applicable to the Boko Haram conflict, as the insurgency simultaneously threatens virtually every dimension of individual and community well-being identified by the UNDP's foundational conception of the term. Boko Haram is not a merely national security challenge in the traditional, state-centric sense, but a multidimensional assault on the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of ordinary people. Boko Haram undermines personal security, which is the most direct expression of freedom from fear. As Onu et al. (2017) note, the group's violence has generated an environment of terror, with over 3,120 people killed in 2015 alone, and systematic attacks targeting civilians, markets, schools, and places of worship.

Beyond direct violence, the conflict produces severe economic insecurity as foreign direct investment into Nigeria fell by 21% between 2011 and 2012 as a direct consequence of the insurgency, while revenue collection in the northeast collapsed to the point where Federal Inland Revenue Service offices had to close (Onu et al., 2017). Terrorism forces the government to redirect resources from development to defence spending, distorting macroeconomic stability and discouraging both domestic and foreign investment. This economic deterioration maps directly onto the human security concept of *freedom from want*. Food security represents another critical dimension. Nnam et al. (2020) highlight how Boko Haram's Scorch Earth Policy (SEP) devastated agricultural production in Northern Nigeria¹, leading to food shortages, rising prices, and deepening poverty. Insurgent attacks have disrupted supply chains, therefore pushing food prices beyond the reach of ordinary consumers and undermining livelihoods across both northern and southern Nigeria due to their longstanding trade interdependency. Moreover, Boko Haram has eroded traditional community structures, displaced over 1.4 million people across 5 northeastern states, and intensified ethno-religious tensions in receiving communities (Onu et al., 2017). Furthermore, Boko Haram did not emerge in a vacuum, but is deeply rooted in poverty, unemployment, developmental imbalances, and perceived political marginalisation. The structural nature of Boko Haram's terrorism confirms that addressing the group through a human security lens requires tackling not only direct violence but also the structural conditions that reproduce insecurity.

3.2. Theories of Terrorism

There is no official and internationally agreed-upon definition for terrorism due to its nature as a subjective, value-laden, and highly political concept. The primary obstacle to a consensus on terrorism is the subjective interpretation of political violence, often summarised by the cliché: "One man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter" (Marks, 2006). Moreover, the concept of *terrorism* refers to the violence committed, which is illegitimate or morally unacceptable. However, there is a double standard in how violence is judged, as States often view non-state violence as illegal, whilst they may view their own use of force as a legal right. Political disagreements within the United Nations prevent the adoption of a comprehensive definition of terrorism, as member states cannot agree on whether national liberation movements should be excluded, reflecting deeper

¹ A region that accounts for a significant share of the country's food supply.

divisions over legitimacy and self-determination (High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008). Additionally, a central definitional debate in terrorism studies concerns who counts as a victim or target and who can be a terrorist actor. Some definitions restrict terrorism to attacks on non-combatants, excluding violence against military forces, while others include non-combatant military personnel or peacekeepers. Similarly, many scholars limit terrorism to non-state or ‘lone wolf’ actors, intentionally leaving out ‘state terror’ though allowing for ‘state-sponsored terrorism’. Critics argue that this exclusion overlooks the systematic use of violence by governments against their own populations, revealing that normative judgements about legitimacy and agency shape definitions of terrorism (Sandler, 2015). Different actors define terrorism in divergent ways, reflecting their distinct legal, operational, and strategic priorities. The United Nations, for example, combines a broad political criterion (creating terror for political purposes) with Security Council language that stresses intentional killing, serious injury, or hostage-taking to coerce governments. The U.S. State Department narrows the definition and focuses on premeditated, politically motivated violence against non-combatant targets by non-state or clandestine actors (U.S. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, n.d.). The Global Terrorism Database, in turn, adopts a functional, data-driven approach that centres on non-state perpetrators using illegal force to achieve political, economic, religious, or social goals through fear (Choi & Piazza, 2016). Academics and economists reduce terrorism to an operational variable, mapping perpetrators, victims, and audiences to measure patterns and impacts. In contrast, human-security advocates treat terrorism as a core driver of human insecurity, linking it directly to the systematic denial of political, subsistence, and security rights (Callaway & Harrelson-Stephens, 2006). Together, these different definitions show that terrorism is not a neutral label, but a contested concept shaped by the interests and priorities of the actors who use it. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, we will use the definition of terrorism provided by Enders and Sandler. According to these authors, terrorism refers to the premeditated use or threat to use violence by individuals or subnational groups to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate non-combatant victims (Enders and Sandler, 2012, p.4).

Regarding the causes of terrorism, the literature has moved beyond mono-causal explanations. Indeed, Marks (2006) argues that political radicalism emerges from a complex motivational mix including social and political idealism, personal alienation,

mass unemployment, social humiliation, ethnic or national grievance, and religious fundamentalism, while emphasising the role of secular structural conditions such as high birth rates in stagnant economies and weak state institutions. Moreover, Callaway & Harrelson-Stephens (2006) argue that terrorism develops in environments where basic human rights are systematically denied. These human rights can be divided into 3 specific categories of rights: political and civil, personal security, and subsistence. Additionally, terrorism does not occur in a vacuum; hence, it is influenced by international factors such as the State's colonial history, globalisation (referring to the exportation of Western values), and systemic power (Callaway & Harrelson-Stephens, 2006). The emergence of radicalisation in Nigeria can be understood as the result of both social conditions and personal psychology working together. From a structural perspective, the *Blocked Opportunity Theory* suggests that when institutions fail to provide legitimate pathways for socio-economic advancement, individuals will most likely think that growth opportunities are permanently blocked. This structural deficit creates a fertile ground for radical narratives to take hold (Lynch, 2011). This perspective aligns with Okoro (2015), who argues that in the Nigerian context, terrorism is more a product of governance crisis due to the pervasive corruption, youth unemployment, and poverty, than of religious ideology per se, with Islamic rhetoric functioning as a mobilising and legitimising tool rather than a root cause. Relatedly, Mamman (2020) suggests many join the group in a search for 'food and fulfilment'. Drawing on Burton's Theory of Human Needs, Mamman argues that violence often acts as a 'tragic expression' of unmet requirements, such as security and distributive justice, which the state has failed to provide. While the author cautions that a direct empirical causal link between poverty and violent conflict remains difficult to prove, he characterises socio-economic grievances as 'pernicious drivers' that make populations very vulnerable to propaganda and the inducements of insurgent groups. At the same time, the *Significance Quest Theory* helps explain why these groups are appealing on a personal level. When people feel ignored, disrespected, or humiliated, they often look for ways to regain a sense of worth and meaning (Kruglanski et al., 2015). Boko Haram and ISWAP tap into this by offering more than just an ideology; they offer a sense of purpose. They turn feelings of frustration or humiliation into what feels like a meaningful, even 'heroic' cause. By giving recruits a sense of belonging, identity, and status (rewards they do not get from the state or society), these groups are able to channel personal and collective grievances into organised violence.

Moreover, Schanzer (2017) highlights that people fear terrorism way more than its actual body count would suggest, especially compared to other kinds of violence. This disproportion comes from terrorism's deliberate targeting of random civilians, who are attacked not as the primary political enemy, but as a means to coerce the government through public fear and social disruption. This reflects the triangular logic of terrorism: civilians are attacked to influence state behaviour and destabilise society indirectly. Consequently, this creates the perception that anyone can be a victim, framing attacks as an assault on democratic governance, thus, on the state and society itself. In Nigeria, this is showcased with Boko Haram's mass kidnappings and suicide bombings, which have created widespread fear that extends well beyond the immediate victims, undermining state legitimacy and eroding public trust in governmental institutions, thereby deepening the very fragility that enables the group's continued operation.

Terrorist violence can be analysed through 3 complementary theoretical lenses: rational choice/strategic perspectives, grievance-based explanations, and structural-institutional approaches linked to state fragility. First, rational choice and strategic approaches view terrorist groups as purposive actors who select tactics to maximise political impact at minimal cost. Violence serves as political communication to provoke fear, coerce governments, and mobilise support, often through asymmetric methods like mass displacement or attacks on soft targets (Nalbandov, 2013). Second, grievance-based explanations emphasise perceived injustices (such as political exclusion, cultural humiliation, or religious marginalisation), that fuel mobilisation when legitimate channels fail. Groups frame violence as righteous resistance, drawing on historical narratives to legitimise their cause (Choi & Piazza, 2014). Third, structural-institutional approaches root terrorism in governance failures: corruption, institutional weakness, and socio-economic deprivation create vacuums that armed groups exploit, offering an alternative order amid state neglect (Okoro, 2015). Moreover, a central concern in this regard has been how state fragility creates fertile ground for terrorism. Weak institutions, lack of legitimacy, vast ungoverned areas, and deep-rooted corruption make it easier for groups like Boko Haram to thrive, while poor countries with limited military strength must rely on foreign help as their weak governance lets terrorists control territory and recruit from populations frustrated by economic hardship (Sandler, 2015). Applied to Boko Haram, these lenses illuminate its persistence. The strategic perspective explains JAS's predatory tactics (e.g., kidnapping, IEDs) and intra-jihadist warfare against ISWAP as calculated

moves to control Lake Chad territories and recruit defectors. Grievance dynamics account for its mobilisation around anti-Western ideology, northern marginalisation, and Sokoto Caliphate legacies, positioning the group as defender of local communities against a perceived corrupt and marginalising state. Structural factors, such as Nigeria's governance crisis, youth unemployment, and Lake Chad's ecological collapse, provided the enabling environment, with state repression (Yusuf's 2009 execution) acting as a catalyst for escalation. Taken together, these theories suggest that Boko Haram's persistence is best understood not as an isolated ideological anomaly, but as the result of the interaction between deep-seated grievances, structural weaknesses and strategic decision-making, as the group adapts its tactics to the constraints of its environment.

Counterterrorism can be understood as the set of actions taken by states, alliances, or international organisations to reduce the threat and consequences of terrorism, as reflected in the United Nations Global Counterterrorism Strategy. The Strategy structures this effort around four pillars: measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; measures to prevent and combat terrorism; measures to build States' capacity and strengthen the role of the United Nations system; and measures to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law. In this sense, counterterrorism is not only a collection of operational responses to specific attacks, but a coordinated, multilateral approach that links national and international actors in a common framework for preventing, deterring, and responding to terrorism (United Nations, 2026). Counterterrorism can be either defensive or proactive. Defensive counterterrorism is carried out to protect targets and reduce the success of attacks, including through border controls, surveillance, and infrastructure protection. By contrast, proactive counterterrorism directly targets terrorist capabilities and includes military operations, intelligence sharing, and the removal of safe havens (Bandyopadhyay & Sandler, 2023). Nonetheless, both types create problems: defensive measures displaces attacks instead of eliminating them, pushing terrorist operations toward softer targets and incentivising states to overinvest in self-protection while free-riding on others' proactive efforts, whereas proactive measures generate collective-action problems internationally, since their benefits are shared by all but the costs fall on those who act. ISWAP exemplifies how terrorist organisations increasingly function as transnational networks, with local insurgencies embedded within a broader global jihadist infrastructure, which means that one country's security actions inevitably

affect others. Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa is therefore increasingly analysed not merely as a national security concern, but as a regional and international one.

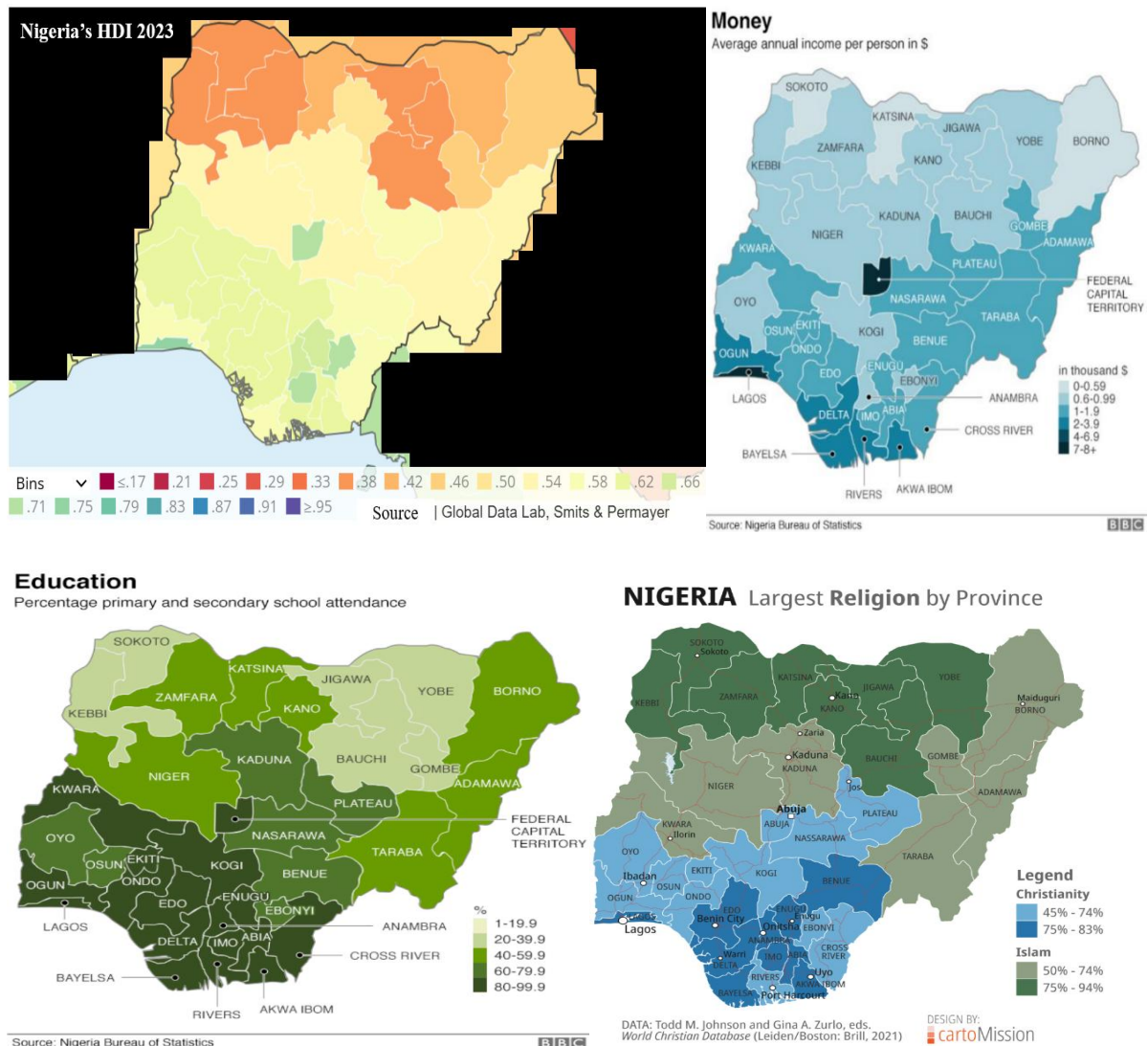
4. Boko Haram and Regional Instability in the Lake Chad Basin

4.1 Emergence and evolution of Boko Haram

Nigeria has indeed had a troubled history of colonisation by the British Empire. During British rule, many referred to Western education as being *boko* (fraud), which made Muslims think that Western-style education sought to mislead them into accepting false knowledge (Newman, 2013). Hence, Boko Haram attempted to instil the idea that Westernised elites and their practices contradict Islam, in this way prohibiting Western culture and imposing the superiority of Islamic culture. For that reason, across the history of what is now northern Nigeria, Islamic movements have emerged calling on local communities to reform morally, adopt Islamic law, and even reject foreign domination (Newman, 2013). Looking at Figure 3, one can understand how historical, economic, and cultural factors have produced a north-south divide in development and religious composition within Nigeria and have fuelled Boko Haram's emergence and continuance. This dichotomy is rooted in the colonial era, particularly the British policy of *Indirect Rule*, which managed the predominantly Muslim North and Christian-majority South as distinct entities, fostering divergent administrative, educational, and economic trajectories (Ukwandu, 2016). Consequently, the South benefited from greater exposure to Western-style schooling and infrastructure, while the North remained relatively isolated from these developments. Today, this legacy manifests in stark disparities: the South commands greater agricultural productivity and holds the majority of the country's oil reserves (the primary driver of Nigeria's GDP) while the North contends with economic stagnation and climatic vulnerability, creating a sense of systemic neglect that Boko Haram has actively exploited (Best Documentary, 2024).

Figure 3

Regional Socio-Economic and Religious Divisions in Nigeria



Note. This set of maps illustrates the strong regional contrasts across Nigeria in terms of human development, education, income, and religion. The southern states generally show a higher Human Development Index (HDI), greater school attendance, and higher average incomes, reflecting stronger economic development and greater access to Western-style education. In contrast, many northern states display lower development indicators and school attendance rates. The religious distribution map highlights a clear pattern; Islam predominates in the north, while Christianity is more common in the south.

Boko Haram finds its origins in the early 2000s in Maiduguri, a north-eastern city of Nigeria. Its scope of action covers the Lake Chad region, namely Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Boko Haram claims to act in the name of Islam, and it is considered one of the deadliest jihadist groups in the world (Thurston, 2018). Surprisingly, its name, Boko Haram, was actually a nickname created by outsiders (more precisely, scholars) due to the difficulty of pronouncing its name. If one dissects the name, *Boko* means fraud,

whilst *Haram* is an Islamic legal term designating a forbidden act (Thurston, 2018), it makes sense that it rejects Western-style education, even accusing it of violating Islamic law. The official Arabic name of the group came when Shekau took power; it became known as *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād*, which basically means people committed to the prophet's teachings for propagation and Jihad (Fahd, 2024, p.3). In addition, Boko Haram has gained power by positioning itself as a solution to widespread poverty, injustice, and corruption in Nigeria, even though it has ultimately wreaked havoc. Corruption and economic discrimination can reinforce these grievances, but the primary driver is political rather than economic. In fact, Boko Haram turned to violence when its founder, Muhammed Yusuf, got tired of preaching and turned to violence as he did not trust the government anymore because it continued to be corrupt, leaving the citizens unattended without making a real change and allowing the Christian south of Nigeria to be rich while the Islamic north did not have enough resources to live.

Boko Haram began as a mass religious movement, with non-violent actions and only wanted to purify Islam in northern Nigeria; however, violence found its way into the group, and it transitioned into an armed struggle. Boko Haram has posited Western-style education as the enemy, prohibited by Islam. (Thurston, 2018). The founders grew up in an unstable Nigeria with many weaknesses. For that reason, Boko Haram is actually the result of economic deprivation, unemployment, corruption, poor governance, educational backwardness and regional disparities (Thurston, 2018).

Boko Haram's evolution can be understood in five distinct phases. Firstly, going back to the 1970s-1990s, meaning before the creation of the movement, what would be the future founders were raised in a turbulent environment during political instability, rapid urban change, interreligious conflict, and intense public debate over the connection between Islam and politics. (Adela, 2021). Secondly, from 2001 to 2009, the group was dedicated to open preaching. The group turned to violence in 2009 with an uprising across various northern Nigerian states. The rebellion was crushed, and Muhammad Yusuf was killed by the police, after which Abubakar Shekau stepped in to lead the group. With Shekau, between 2010 and 2013, the group became more violent, undertaking terrorist actions, bombing major targets such as Abuja and causing assassinations and raids in Northeast Nigeria. Furthermore, in 2013-2015, Boko Haram managed to control north-eastern Nigeria as they offered civilians an ultimatum: either they embraced Boko Haram's brand of Islam, or they faced violence (Adela, 2021). Boko Haram had a great success in

wreaking havoc, as according to the Global Terrorism Index (2025), Boko Haram caused the most deaths in 2014, reaching 17 per cent of the global total. Furthermore, Boko Haram's most disreputable attack occurred on April 14th, 2014, when they kidnapped 276 schoolgirls, aged 12-17, in Chibok, located in Borno State. 165 of these girls were Christian, and they were forced to convert to Islam. With this attack, Boko Haram made the headlines worldwide for the first time, and the slogan “Bring back our girls” became a global movement. (Best Documentary, 2024). Unfortunately, this global unrest showed Boko Haram all the power and visibility that using women for their own interests gave them, which would further influence their use of women as suicide attackers. The last phase started when Boko Haram's state largely fell to militaries of Nigeria. They had to thus return to clandestine existence and intensified terrorism. It was here that Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) in March 2015, though it led to internal divisions within the group (Thurston, 2018).

These internal divisions came to a head in 2016, when Boko Haram split into two factions due to misunderstandings over ways of action, the indiscriminate murder of civilians — particularly Muslims — and disputes over leadership (Australian National Security, 2024; EASO, 2021). One faction continued under the name Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adi wal-Jihad (JAS), under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, whilst the other continued its allegiance to the Islamic State as the Islamic State-West Africa Province (ISWAP), headed by Abu Musab al Barnawi. Since the division, both groups have constantly fought and harmed each other, but together still command thousands of fighters and pose a significant threat.

On the one hand, JAS, with 1500-2000 members, uses more violent methods and attacks both Muslims and Christians. They believe that all those opposed to the group are government supporters; thus, all can be targeted. Reports have informed that JAS operated mainly along the Cameroonian border and in south-central Borno (including Maiduguri). It also has bases in Niger State and the northwest of Nigeria (EASO, 2021). It is reported that on May 19th 2021, Shekau detonated himself during a fight between the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram. Actually, ISWAP fighters gave Shekau the opportunity to back down and join them, but Shekau chose to die rather than join ISWAP, their rivals (BBC, 2021). After Shekau's death, Bakura Sahalaba initially took over as Shekau had designated him as his successor in his will. However, Bakura Doro was announced as the leader in May 2022 after a violent takeover from

Sahalaba. Bakura Doro decided to take over, as it is believed that Sahalaba was trying to mend relations with ISWAP. There is a stark contrast between Shekau's and Doro's leadership, as Shekau was eager to appear in videos as much as possible, whilst rarely fighting in battles, and Doro has shunned the media whilst operating alongside fighters in their operations. Despite ISWAP's grand appearances in the media, under Bakura Doro, Boko Haram has won territory from ISWAP around Lake Chad. The main shift taken by Bakura Doro is that Boko Haram has separated itself from the global jihadist movement with a few weak links to other transnational actors, which may be done to go under the radar and avoid some international counterterrorism pressure (Zenn, 2024).

On the other hand, ISWAP directs its attacks towards Christians and people who do not follow Sharia law, military institutions, government and security forces, traditional leaders, and has attempted to gain the support of local communities by offering services in exchange. Nevertheless, ISWAP's assaults in 2020 showed a shift in its approach, as the group began targeting unarmed Muslim civilians rather than solely governmental, military, and INGO targets, in that way, evolving into a more lethal organisation than JAS. ISWAP is especially active around Lake Chad, reaching northern Borno's rural areas and extending southward into Yobe state, parts of south-central Borno and Maiduguri. With between 3,500 and 5,000 members, ISWAP is militarily more powerful than JAS and represents an even greater threat to the Nigerian military (EASO, 2021). Furthermore, ISWAP's connection to the Islamic State appears to be strengthening operationally. This is showcased with ISWAP hosting the Islamic State's Maktab al-Furqan (West African branch), along with the deployment of kinetic drones, and a rise in foreign fighters that may indicate increased logistical support from the Islamic State (The Soufan Center, 2025).

Boko Haram's organisational structure is hierarchical and decentralised as it is based in Maiduguri, Borno and has 3 semi-autonomous units that focus its operations on the Lake Chad Basin, Gwoza Hills (Borno-Cameroon) and Dar al Gazuwa (Borno), as well as two main territorial strongholds with enclaves on the islands of Lake Chad and the Mandara mountains. Following the death of Shekau at the hands of ISWAP in 2021, JAS further devolved into several autonomous constituent units, which nonetheless remain loyal to the supreme leader, Bakura Doro. In an unexpected turn, JAS not only absorbed the blow of Shekau's death but also grew stronger under the leadership of Bakura Doro, an experienced commander. Since the end of 2022, JAS has pushed back hard against

ISWAP, taking control of most of the Lake Chad area, specifically its islands. Bakura leads a faction that is composed mostly of Buduma people, who are the ethnic group living around Lake Chad (Crisis Group, 2024). In fact, Kaila is a sub-unit commander who defected from ISWAP to JAS in early 2023. Kaila's Buduma connections made him a good ally for Bakura (Crisis Group, 2024). JAS has a high rotation rate because it takes in ISWAP defectors, but it also loses quitters. In terms of its operational logic, JAS finances itself almost entirely through predatory violence. They kill and steal from everyone (with no distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim civilians), while ISWAP generally spares Muslim non-combatants. This plunder-based economy is central to JAS's organisational incentive structure: when ISWAP tried absorbing JAS fighters after 2021, it banned pillage, which caused many fighters to resist or defect back. JAS functions through severe violence, looting, and sectarianism, sanctioning suicide bombings against civilians, mass killings, and the enslavement of those it considers "infidels". At the same time, ISWAP has attempted to use a more moderate strategy, limiting violence against Muslim civilians and favouring "taxation" over simple looting. Furthermore, JAS's main strategy is to anchor itself in terrain that is difficult for security forces to enter. For that reason, its enclaves are located in difficult terrain where only its fighters know it well and have the geographical advantage of being near the lake and the mountains that put JAS in a good position both to plunder civilian settlements and to raid military targets (Crisis Group, 2024). The Tumbuns islands at the margins of Lake Chad serve as JAS's supply centre, sanctuary, and staging area. Their presence there further helps the group raise funds through illegal fishing and cultivation (Amani Africa, 2025). The use of kidnapping for ransom by JAS in Cameroon more than doubled in 2024 compared to 2023, with the Chadian military's operations in November pushing many militants over the border into Cameroon, likely driving further reliance on kidnapping and theft (Serwat & Birru, 2025). As a matter of fact, the unit called Dar al-Gazuwa is focused on this criminal-predatory function. It is led by Alhaji Kale, who relies on the proceeds of crime to sustain itself; thus, it seldom confronts soldiers. JAS's loose command systems allow units to blend criminal predation with jihadism and finance themselves independently (Adebayo, 2025). JAS has found kidnapping school children especially effective for negotiating the release of arrested members and transferring large sums of ransom to purchase weapons and fund operations. Indeed, there have been more than 85 abduction incidents targeting schoolchildren since the Chibok kidnapping (Ayandele & Aniekwe, 2024). Moreover, JAS raids military positions to capture weapons and ammunition as it cannot easily

resupply from external networks. In fact, JAS fighters have been able to adapt by employing precision attacks and ambushes on MNJTF military patrols and escorts, as well as by shifting their areas of operations when surrounded by security forces (Ayandele & Aniekwe, 2024).

JAS also poses a threat through asymmetric tactics like the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide attacks, abductions, and attacks on civilian and military targets. In 2024, IEDs placed along main supply routes caused about 60% of MNJTF casualties (Amani Africa, 2025). One of the most noticeable recent shifts is JAS's effort to bring back former defectors who have struggled to rebuild their lives after leaving the group. Many reintegration programmes fall short of providing meaningful support or long-term opportunities, leaving ex-fighters with few prospects. As a result, they return to JAS, which is impossible in ISWAP because they execute deserters (Adebayo, 2025). Since 2022, JAS has made its war against ISWAP into a strategy to strengthen its position and reaffirm its legitimacy. By launching a sustained offensive and seizing control of much of the Lake Chad region, JAS has managed to weaken its rivals, attract recruits and solidify its power base amid ISWAP's internal fractures (Crisis Group, 2024).

4.2 Boko Haram as a threat to regional security

Boko Haram combines anti-Western propaganda, which frames global hegemony as an obstacle to the purification of Muslim society, with a strategy of extreme violence. This threat has been formally recognised by the international community: JAS and ISWAP were both designated on the UN sanctions list (2014 and 2020, respectively) (United Nations, 2026). Furthermore, the ICC Prosecutor has identified reasonable grounds to believe that Boko Haram's actions, including sexual slavery, forced marriage and pregnancy, enslavement and torture, hostage-taking, recruitment of child soldiers, and torture, constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity (ICC's Office of the Prosecutor, 2020).

The group's lethality is well-documented; since 2015, the Global Terrorism Index has consistently ranked Boko Haram among the world's deadliest organisations. By 2024, the group surpassed ISWAP as Nigeria's most lethal actor, accounting for 31% of fatalities and a significant share of all assaults in the country. This violence is inherently transnational; it has consistently spilt across borders into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad, where the group remains a primary security threat. As recent data shows, among the 50

worst terrorist attacks of 2024, Boko Haram was responsible for multiple incidents across these three states, illustrating its role as a regional destabiliser (Global Terrorism Index, 2025).

The expansion of operations across the Lake Chad Basin has severely strained neighbouring states, which already suffer from weak institutional capacity and fragile governance. This instability has created a humanitarian crisis, displacing over 2.4 million people and generating significant refugee flows. Consequently, the creation of the MNJTF serves as proof that the threat cannot be contained nationally and requires a coordinated multilateral response. Moreover, Boko Haram's 2015 allegiance to the Islamic State and the rise of ISWAP have embedded the insurgency within broader global jihadist networks, raising concerns regarding ideological diffusion and the influx of illicit arms, often sourced from the collapse of the Libyan state (UN, 2023).

Boko Haram also functions as a structural push factor for migration toward Europe. While most migration is not directly linked to terrorism, the group's role in exacerbating state fragility, poverty, and systemic insecurity creates the conditions that drive displacement. Many of these individuals eventually enter established migration routes toward the Central Mediterranean (Babos & Sinkó, 2020), making the conflict a relevant issue for European security.

Finally, the group's durability is best explained through resource mobilisation theory. Rather than acting as a mere franchise of global extremism, Boko Haram exploits domestic state neglect. As demonstrated by the parallel case of the 2012 Tuareg uprising in Mali, insurgent groups often gain popularity by assuming quasi-governmental roles—providing food, medicine, and infrastructure—in areas abandoned by the central state (Paradela-López & Jima-González, 2024). By integrating into local social structures and capitalising on historical grievances, these groups secure legitimacy that simple military suppression cannot dismantle.

5. The European Union's Response to Boko Haram (2015–2025)

5.1 The EU as a security actor: Common Foreign and Security Policy principles and instruments

The CFSP helps the European Union to act more coherently on the world stage, giving the EU a shared voice in foreign policy and international relations, and helping define a common defence policy. The CFSP was first established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992

and later consolidated by the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. The Lisbon Treaty gave the EU its own legal personality, allowing it to make agreements with other countries and international organisations. The CFSP is primarily governed by Title V of the TEU, specifically Articles 21 to 46, which detail the principles, objectives, and decision-making procedures of the CFSP. A key innovation was the creation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Council and heads the EEAS. This role helps ensure that the EU's external actions are more coordinated and consistent. At the same time, CFSP decision-making remains largely intergovernmental, relying on unanimity among Member States. This reflects the sensitive nature of foreign and security policy, where national governments are often reluctant to cede sovereignty (Massay-Kosubek, 2025).

In terms of objectives, Article 21 TEU states that the CFSP is guided by the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Its goals include protecting the EU's security, helping maintain international peace, preventing conflict in line with the UN Charter, and promoting multilateral cooperation and better global governance (European Union, 2012). Notably, the CFSP also includes a development dimension, as it aims to contribute to the eradication of poverty and to support sustainable development in third countries. To achieve these aims, the EU relies on three main types of instruments. First, the CSDP (an essential component of the CFSP) provides operational capacity through both civilian and military means. Civilian missions, such as EUCAP Sahel Niger, focus on rule of law, capacity-building, and counter-terrorism, while military operations (such as EUTM Mali) support peacekeeping and crisis management (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, 2026). The EPF, created in 2021, enables the EU to fund military equipment for partner countries. Second, the EU uses restrictive measures (i.e. sanctions) which are grounded in Article 215 of the TFEU (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, n.d.). These targeted measures (such as asset freezes, travel bans, and arms embargoes) are designed to limit the humanitarian impact on civilians while exerting political pressure on specific actors. Sanctions are unique among CFSP instruments because they fall under the jurisdiction of the CJEU. Third, diplomatic engagement acts as a cross-cutting tool, led by the EEAS and the High Representative, who conducts political dialogue with third parties, represents the EU at international forums, and coordinates with EU Special

Representatives appointed for specific regions or policy issues (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, n.d.).

Moreover, to address terrorism both internally and globally, the EU draws on a comprehensive suite of legislative, operational, and financial instruments. At the agency level, Europol provides police support and intelligence coordination, Frontex manages external border control, and the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (INTCEN) produces strategic analysis, complemented by key data-sharing tools such as the Schengen Information System (SIS), which enables real-time alerts across Member States, and the Passenger Name Records (PNR system), which allows for the tracking of traveller data for counter-terrorism purposes (Howard, 2024). Finally, the EU has pursued legislative harmonisation across Member States in areas such as terrorism-related offences, anti-money laundering, and the removal of online extremist content.

The EU's security engagement in Africa has evolved through three broad phases. Between 2003 and 2008, the EU conducted direct autonomous military operations, such as the Operation Artemis in the DRC, though these attracted criticism for neo-colonial perceptions (Sempijja & Eyita-Okon, 2022). From 2004 onwards, the EU shifted toward a security-development nexus, channelling roughly €3 billion through the African Peace Facility (APF) into African-led Peace Support Operations and prioritising Security Sector Reform and AU capacity-building (Hauck & Shiferaw, 2021). Since 2021, a third phase has emerged, marked by the replacement of the APF with the EPF, which allows the EU to supply military equipment directly to partner armies, and by the development of an integrated Sahel strategy under the 2022 Strategic Compass that conditions assistance on human rights accountability (Bergmann, 2025).

Despite this evolution, significant tensions remain. Critics argue that EU strategy has increasingly prioritised curbing irregular migration over addressing the structural drivers of instability (Sempijja & Eyita-Okon, 2022). The AU's financial dependence on EU funding has also produced a relationship closer to donorship than genuine partnership, undermining the principle of African ownership (Kangdim, Yorgancioğlu, Bulus, 2022). Finally, investment in forces such as the MNJTF has been complicated by allegations of human rights violations within local security apparatuses, raising questions about the accountability frameworks attached to EU assistance (Crisis Group, 2020).

5.2 Security and development: an integrated EU approach

The EU's Integrated Approach (reframed from the 'Comprehensive Approach' in 2021) is a strategic framework that brings together diplomacy, development cooperation, humanitarian aid, and security to tackle conflicts and crises more cohesively. The European External Action Service (EEAS) manages this operationally, using mechanisms like the Crisis Platform to connect previously segregated policy teams (EEAS Press Team, 2023). The EU's Comprehensive Approach framework rests on the security-development nexus: development cannot occur without security, and security is unsustainable without development. Poverty, weak governance, and absent basic services create the conditions in which armed groups and organised crime proliferate, while persistent insecurity in turn prevents the economic and institutional development needed to address those root causes.

The Sahel serves as the primary testing ground for this approach, notably through the 2011 Strategy for Security and Development (updated in 2021) targeting G5 countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania). While the strategy converges CSDP missions (such as EUCAP Sahel, which focuses on civilian counter-terrorism and border training, or EUTM Mali, which focuses on military capacity) with development plans targeting radicalisation via the Regional Action Plans (2015-2020), its success is defined by how these policies are implemented on the ground in the Lake Chad Basin.

In practice, this framework operationalises through two distinct but linked pillars. In the security realm, instead of just providing budgetary support, the EU has equipped the MNJTF with critical non-lethal assets (which include secure communication systems, reconnaissance vehicles, and protective gear) while also financing the construction of tactical sector headquarters in key locations like Baga Sola and Diffa (Expertise France, 2025). These measures are paired with technical training for local security forces on human rights and international humanitarian law, aiming to professionalise the response to insurgency. Concurrently, the EU's development pillar targets the root causes of radicalisation through tangible resilience projects. Programs like the deployment of 'Quick Impact Projects' have delivered solar-powered water boreholes, health centres, and educational kits in areas recently cleared of insurgent activity (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023). Against Boko Haram, the EU backs the MNJTF with €100M+ (€50M via APF/EPF for command infrastructure) while channelling €700M into resilience (like agriculture, jobs, services) to counter root causes (EEAS, 2017). This balances hard security with soft power in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger.

To execute this dual-track effort (which combines tactical capacity-building with essential services for the local population), the EU relies on evolving financial instruments. The EUTF, established at the 2015 Valletta Summit, provided the financial mechanism through which these instruments could be deployed with greater speed and flexibility than traditional aid channels allow. With over €4.5 billion disbursed across the continent, a significant share directed at the Sahel and Lake Chad window, the EUTF was intended to address the root causes of instability and irregular migration simultaneously across four areas: economic opportunity, community resilience, migration management, and governance (European Court of Auditors, 2024). More recently, the EPF, established in 2021, replaced and expanded previous instruments such as the APF, marking a significant institutional shift that allows the EU to provide direct military and defence assistance to partner countries and organisations on a global scale, including direct support to governments and regional coalitions, without necessarily routing disbursements through the AU Commission (Hauck & Shiferaw, 2021). This transition marked a hardening of the EU's security assistance posture, reflecting both the persistence of regional threats and the growing urgency of the strategic environment.

Nonetheless, this approach also faces significant criticism. Analysts and auditors frequently highlight the 'securitisation of development', where priorities like migration control and counter-terrorism overshadow long-term human development goals. Independent EUTF reviews found its funding too scattered across diverse actions without rigorous, evidence-based targeting (European Court of Auditors, 2024). More critically, the 2023-2024 military coups in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso (which prompted the withdrawal of several CSDP missions) exposed the limits of relying on institutional capacity-building and development aid to offset underlying deficits in political legitimacy. Instruments like the NDICI-Global Europe fund and the EPF operationalise this by building partner capacities for long-term stability, shifting from crisis response to prevention. Despite coups ending some missions (2023-2024), the strategy demands human rights accountability (Pichon, 2024).

The EU's integrated approach is conceptually coherent and represents a genuine advance over earlier frameworks that treated security assistance and development aid as parallel, unrelated tracks. Its core logic, that durable stability requires both the suppression of violence and the reduction of the conditions that generate it, is well-founded. The challenge lies in implementation: maintaining a genuine balance between the two pillars,

resisting the tendency to instrumentalise development for short-term security ends, and building accountability mechanisms strong enough to respond when conditions on the ground diverge from the assumptions on which the strategy was built. The evidence from the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin suggests that the framework remains a work in progress.

5.3 Cooperation in security and diplomacy

The EEAS and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy are responsible for coordinating the EU's multi-layered architecture of diplomatic, institutional, and operational tools used in the security engagement in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel region. At the diplomatic level, the High Representative represents the EU at international forums and conducts political dialogues with third-party governments. A key example is the EU-Nigeria Ministerial Dialogue (the most recent one was held this March), which coordinates bilateral positions on security and the rule of law (EEAS Press Team, 2026). Additionally, the EU uses EUSRs, with specific regional mandates and tasked with promoting EU interests, to coordinate regional policies and maintain 'a single point of contact' for complex crises in areas like the Sahel. Election Observation Missions (EOMs) further represent the EU's political engagement by assessing democratic processes in countries such as Nigeria, Mali, and Zimbabwe. This reflects the EU's commitment to democratic governance as a condition for long-term stability. The 2021 Sahel Integrated Strategy guides this diplomatic engagement, marking a 'civilian and political leap forward' by prioritising state institutions and basic services over purely military efforts. It stresses mutual accountability between the EU and the G5 Sahel countries, while conditioning continued aid on progress in human rights and rule of law. At the multilateral level, the EU aligns with UN Security Council Resolution 2349 (2017), which internationalises the Lake Chad Basin response and establishes a common framework for coordinated action.

The EU prioritises a 'regionalised' response, recognising that insurgencies exploit porous borders. For this reason, the EU supports sub-regional coalitions that operate outside traditional structures, such as the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF, encouraging synergy between these two actors. Along these lines, the EU maintains a long-standing partnership with the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like ECOWAS. The EU has been a primary financial backer of the African Peace and Security

Architecture (APSA), contributing approximately €2.9 billion between 2004 and 2019 via the African Peace Facility (APF). The EU also cooperates with ECOWAS through regular ministerial dialogues, including structured meetings such as the 22nd Political Dialogue in Abuja, which facilitate convergence on governance, migration, and security. Efforts have additionally been made to foster operational synergy between ECOWAS and ECCAS frameworks in addressing the Boko Haram threat, given the cross-border nature of the insurgency.

The EU situates its regional engagement within a broader multilateral web of counter-terrorism cooperation. Its primary institutional reference is the United Nations, with which it maintains a trilateral coordination format alongside the AU to align strategies for conflicts in the Sahel, Somalia, and Libya. The EU co-chairs the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) with Egypt, where Africa constitutes the primary geographical priority for developing operational best practices.

Through its UN delegation, the EU advocates for African-led counter-terrorism initiatives and coordinates with specialised agencies such as the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) on tracking terrorist financing and disrupting organised criminal networks that intersect with armed groups like Boko Haram. Additional cooperation extends to INTERPOL, whose databases on stolen travel documents and suspected individuals are used to reinforce border security across the region, and to NATO on the protection of critical infrastructure with an anti-terrorism dimension.

EUCAP Sahel Niger was a civilian CSDP mission launched in 2012 to provide advice, training, and technical assistance to Nigerian security forces (including police, gendarmerie, and national guard) to improve their capacity to combat terrorism, organised crime, and irregular migration. Critically, the term Nigerien refers exclusively to the forces of the Republic of Niger (distinct from Nigerian, which denotes the forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a separate actor that leads Sector 3 of the MNJTF in Monguno). This terminological distinction is essential for accurate geopolitical analysis of the Sahel. Rather than providing generic training, the mission focused on highly specialised technical and normative capacity-building across several key areas. These included criminal investigation and forensic capabilities to process terrorism and organised crime cases, border management and counter-trafficking operations (reinforced from 2015 onwards through a dedicated antenna in Agadez), and interoperability between the three security forces to enable a unified operational response. Crucially, the mission

embedded human rights, international humanitarian law, and gender justice throughout its curriculum, reflecting the EU's normative preference for a security sector that operates under the rule of law and generates direct benefits for the civilian population. From 2017, its mandate evolved further towards high-level strategic advisory support, helping to implement Niger's National Internal Security Strategy.

Its focus on civilian security sector reform reflects the EU's preference for capacity-building over direct combat involvement. EUCAP Sahel Niger was formally closed on June 30, 2024, following the revocation of its mandate by Nigerian authorities in December 2023; a direct consequence of the July 2023 coup and the subsequent rupture in relations with the EU and ECOWAS. This was not a planned transition but an abrupt political break, and it left a deeply ambivalent legacy. Despite over a decade of investment in civilian institution-building, these capacities proved insufficient to prevent the collapse of constitutional order or to guarantee human security in the face of political instability. The closure also meant the end of European on-the-ground monitoring of human rights compliance, raising serious concerns that previously transferred technical training may now be instrumentalised by a military government without international oversight. Furthermore, with the suspension of Niger from the MNJTF by the African Union and the expulsion of France-linked forces, the regional cooperation architecture that the EU had helped construct was substantially fractured, weakening the coordinated response against Boko Haram in the border sector. The resulting power vacuum has increasingly been filled by actors such as Russia and the Wagner Group, further exacerbating civilian insecurity. The EU has since maintained a RACC in Mauritania to coordinate residual CSDP activities across the Sahel, though direct engagement with Niger has collapsed entirely. Taken together, the trajectory of EUCAP Sahel Niger highlights both the structural vulnerability of CSDP missions to shifts in host-state political will, and the wider limits of civilian capacity-building as a stabilisation strategy when underlying deficits in political legitimacy remain unaddressed.

While the mission achieved measurable success in technical areas (such as the operationalisation of the Mobile Companies for Border Control and the training of local instructors), these gains were often overshadowed by the socio-economic fallout of migration-control policies like Nigerien Law 036 (Bøås, 2021). By restricting local transit economies without providing viable alternatives, the mission inadvertently weakened the

social contract in northern regions, creating a vacuum that insurgent networks were quick to exploit.

5.4 Humanitarian assistance and development instruments

Nigeria's security strategy against Boko Haram evolved from an initial reliance on heavy-handed military crackdowns into a more multifaceted approach that attempts to balance kinetic force with non-kinetic stabilisation. Central to its kinetic efforts are proactive operations like Operation Lafiya Dole and the deployment of the Joint Task Force, supplemented by the community-based Civilian Joint Task Force to facilitate local intelligence-gathering; however, the persistent use of excessive force and documented human rights abuses by these security actors have frequently alienated local populations, complicating efforts to build trust (Ogbozor, 2026). Complementing this, the state has increasingly turned towards non-kinetic initiatives (such as Operation Safe Corridor for the rehabilitation and reintegration of repentant fighters, and various counter-messaging programmes) to address the ideological drivers of the insurgency. Furthermore, Nigeria serves as the primary driver of the MNJTF, leveraging regional cooperation with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger to tackle the transnational nature of the threat. Despite this more holistic framework, the strategy remains significantly hampered by endemic corruption within military procurement, a persistent dilemma regarding the legitimacy of security actions, and a widening gap between official government claims of being 'technically defeated' and the reality of the group's continued asymmetric violence.

Parallel to national efforts, the European Union has positioned itself as a critical financial partner in the Lake Chad Basin. The MJNTF represents the main regional security mechanism addressing Boko Haram and ISWAP in the Lake Chad Basin, and the EU has been one of its most important external financial partners. In 2016, the EU signed a €50 million agreement, channelled through the APF to the AU Commission, to strengthen the MNJTF's command and control capabilities through the provision of infrastructure, secure communications, and transportation assets. There is no single figure for EU expenditure directed at countering Boko Haram because EU funding is dispersed across multiple instruments, many of which address the Lake Chad Basin and the broader Sahel as a whole, without disaggregating allocations by country or by specific threat actor. When these instruments are added up, the EU's total financial engagement in the Lake Chad Basin between 2015 and 2025 is estimated at €1- €1.5 billion. This includes several hundred million euros in cumulative ECHO humanitarian aid across the four Lake Chad

riparian states (EEAS, 2017). This figure rises if one includes the EU's proportional share of the broader Sahel and Lake Chad EUTF window, annual ECHO allocations before 2023, and the EU's contribution to multilateral mechanisms such as the UNDP Regional Stabilisation Facility. Though it must be noted that approximately 26% of total EUTF expenditure was directed at migration governance instead of development or security directly. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the implementation of the EU support has encountered administrative constraints within the AU Commission in Addis Ababa which have caused procurement delays, hindering the timely delivery of equipment to operational units.

Beyond direct security support, the EU prioritises community-level stabilisation and the reintegration of former combatants. The RESILAC Programme, launched in 2018, is funded through the EUTF and has the objective of helping communities recover and become more stable after conflict. For this matter, it targets Cameroon's Far North Region directly, alongside Nigeria's Borno State, Niger's Diffa Region, and Chad's Lake Region (EEAS, 2019). Moreover, the RESILAC 2 programme (the second phase of this initiative, launched in 2025) is co-funded by the EU and AFD. It provides €40 million to support economic recovery, access to basic services, social cohesion, and local governance in the Lake Chad region, and is explicitly framed as contributing to stabilisation in areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency (Erunke, 2025). Furthermore, several national and regional efforts are under way to reintegrate defectors from Boko Haram, usually presented as DDR programmes in Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon. First, Operation Safe Corridor in Nigeria is a national initiative aimed at rehabilitating repentant Boko Haram members. It offers ex-combatants psycho-social and spiritual support before assisting them to return to their communities (Kangdim et al., 2024). Second, Niger has created a program where ex-militants will be in transition camps and will receive vocational and technical training to improve job skills and reduce the risk of radicalising again (UN Security Council Mission to the Lake Chad Basin, 2017). Third, the Cameroonian government has developed a policy to reintegrate defectors, noting that a vast majority (80%-90%) of captured or surrendered fighters are foreign nationals. Moreover, the UN Security Council Resolution 2349 (2017) formally encouraged Lake Chad Basin governments to develop coordinated DDR strategies that are transparent, inclusive, and respect human rights. These programs are viewed by regional leaders such as Cameroon's

President Biya as essential to “initiating an era of hope” (UN Security Council Mission to the Lake Chad Basin, 2017).

Finally, these operational activities are managed through a broader institutional architecture. DG DEVCO (renamed DG INTPA in 2021) is one of the main EU institutions responsible for developing and implementing policy for Nigeria. It works alongside the EEAS, DG ECHO, and the EU delegation to manage instruments such as the EDF. The 11th EDF (2014-2020) allocated €512 million to Nigeria, focusing on sectors like governance (strengthening democracy and justice reform) and social resilience (Hogendoorn, 2018). The 25th anniversary of the EU-Africa partnership in 2025 highlighted the importance of this long-standing relationship. The partnership aligns with the Joint Vision 2030 Pillars (Prosperity, Peace, People, Planet), advancing Agenda 2063 amid challenges like Sahel coups (Niño Pérez, 2025). Yet, its effectiveness still depends on sustained political dialogue and African-led solutions, signalling a gradual shift from a donor-recipient dynamic toward a more equal partnership. This evolution strengthens the EU’s comprehensive approach, even as geopolitical tensions continue to test mutual accountability.

6. Critical Assessment of the EU’s Response

This chapter provides a critical evaluation of the EU’s response to the Boko Haram insurgency, moving from high-level strategic frameworks to operational realities on the ground. The assessment is structured into three parts. Section 6.1 examines the normative coherence of the EU’s actions by testing whether its interventions align with the principles of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its human security commitments. Section 6.2 shifts focus to operational effectiveness, analysing the actual impact of security and development instruments on the ground in the Lake Chad Basin. Finally, section 6.3 addresses the geostrategic limitations of the EU as a global actor, exploring how internal Member State interests, institutional constraints, and the dynamics of the EU-Africa partnership shape and limit the sustainability of regional stabilisation efforts. Through this tripartite structure, the chapter aims to identify the factors that explain the persistent gap between EU strategic planning and conflict-affected realities.

6.1 Coherence with CFSP objectives and the human security approach

The European Union’s actions in the Lake Chad Basin against Boko Haram are formally aligned with the objectives of the CFSP as defined in Article 21 of the TEU. On paper,

these initiatives are designed to address the core pillars of peace and security, democratic governance, human rights, multilateral cooperation and development. In practice, the EU's security role in the region begins with Article 21(2)(c), which calls for the preservation of peace and the prevention of conflict. This is reflected in the mobilisation of over €100 million in support of the MNJTF, including a €50 million grant through the APF to strengthen its command and control, as well as the deployment of EUCAP Sahel Niger (EEAS, 2017). At the same time, the EU seeks to consolidate democratic governance and the rule of law, as outlined in Article 21 (2)(b) of the TEU. EUCAP Sahel Niger provides strategic advice and technical training to the police, gendarmerie, and national guard, while high-level EU-Nigeria Ministerial Dialogues coordinate justice sector reform and arms control measures designed to ground security efforts in legal and institutional legitimacy. Underpinning both of these pillars is a commitment, enshrined in Article 21 (1), to the universality and indivisibility of human rights. CSDP missions integrate mandatory training on International Humanitarian Law, gender equality, and civilian protection into their curricula, and EU funding channelled through the AU is formally linked to human rights compliance, including support for a civilian monitoring team at MNJTF headquarters tasked with overseeing troop conduct and the treatment of captured fighters. At the multilateral level, Article 21(2)(h)'s commitment to stronger international cooperation is reflected in the EU's tripartite framework with the AU and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. This arrangement aims to empower regional actors to lead counter-terrorism initiatives while the EU provides financial and technical enabling support. Finally, the EU's alignment with Article 21(2)(d) on sustainable development is most visible in the approximately €700 million allocated through the EUTF for the Lake Chad region, including the RESILAC programme and RSF. This initiative targets agriculture, food security, and youth employment, aiming to address the socio-economic root causes of radicalisation (EEAS, 2017). In this way, the EU expresses its core belief that security is a precondition for development, and that stabilisation efforts must be closely tied to long-term resilience building for conflict-affected populations. These instruments have moved beyond abstract policy goals to produce tangible results on the ground: for instance, support for the RSF has enabled the physical reconstruction of conflict-devastated communities like Ngarannam in Nigeria (where the restoration of housing, schools, and local markets has directly facilitated the return of displaced populations) while EU backing for the MNJTF has successfully transitioned regional forces from fragmented national units into a more cohesive multinational posture capable

of executing complex counter-insurgency operations. These outcomes validate the EU's core belief that security is a precondition for development, and that stabilisation must be tied to the visible restoration of state authority and basic services. In this way, the EU expresses its commitment to a human-centric stabilisation model, even if, as discussed in the following sections, this model faces persistent implementation challenges.

The EU's integrated approach and the security-development nexus start from the idea that conflicts like Boko Haram's insurgency feed on underdevelopment (for example, on poverty, inequality and exclusion) that leave governance gaps for extremists to exploit. To break this cycle, it pushes for tackling those root causes head-on with aid, while blending diplomacy, military support, and humanitarian efforts to rebuild capable, legitimate state institutions that can actually deliver for people. Nonetheless, in practice, the application of these principles in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin shows a big gap between policy and praxis. Determining whether this constitutes a 'balanced nexus' or an over-reliance on the 'securitisation of development' depends on the metrics of evaluation applied: from a state-centric perspective, however, this subordination of long-term aid to short-term security and migration management is inherently counterproductive. This fundamental divergence explains why critics argue that donor priorities often sideline the immediate struggles of conflict-affected populations in favour of broader EU geopolitical and border-control interests. Ultimately, the 'correctness' of either position is not found in the rhetoric, but in the evidence of whether EU instruments (such as the EUTF) have managed to create durable stability or simply preserved an unsustainable status quo.

Mapping the EU's engagement in the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel through a human security lens reveals a complex picture: high-level policy goals often clash with the realities on the ground. Under the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, the EU emphasises individual resilience and targeted social protection, yet critics argue that interventions remain more driven by European interests than by the actual needs of local communities. Migration management concerns often push the micro-level needs of conflict-affected populations to the margins. Moreover, the 2021 Integrated Strategy for the Sahel promised to move away from one-size-fits-all models following the death of Chadian President Idriss Déby. In practice, however, observers note that EU and UN missions continue to rely on standardised Western state-building models, which often leave out local traditions and exclude vulnerable groups from decision-making. Finally, on the question of durability, the EU stresses the importance of security sector reform and

improvements to justice systems, recognising that terrorism often stems from deep-rooted governance failures. At the same time, it faces a serious challenge: providing financial and political support to regional forces such as the MNJTF, which have been accused of human rights abuses, could deepen the same grievances that fuel the insurgency.

6.2 Effectiveness and impact on human security in the Lake Chad Basin

EU support to the MNJTF has produced measurable short-term operational successes. With €234.4 million invested to date (mainly in command, control, and coordination), the force has conducted landmark operations such as Lake Sanity I (2022) and Lake Sanity II (2024), the latter alone generating over 800 surrenders, with subsequent waves adding 263 more fighters (ADF, 2024). Since 2019, more than 100,000 individuals (combatants, associates, and civilians from insurgent-controlled areas) have surrendered to security forces, particularly in Borno State (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023). Crucially, these operations balanced kinetic pressure with civil outreach, including medical awareness programmes in local communities, reflecting a regional stabilisation logic that integrates combat with non-kinetic efforts (Hoinathy & Delanga, 2024).

However, these tactical gains have not translated into proportional advances in human security. Insurgent factions have demonstrated persistent resilience: in early 2023, JAS recaptured ISWAP's key Lake Chad islands (including the faction's headquarters and main market), seizing weapons, fuel, and supplies in the process (Foucher, 2024). The transition from surrender to durable reintegration also remains fragile. Among 920 refugees returning from Cameroon, officials identified at least nine confirmed Boko Haram members and around 100 accomplices posing as civilians (Babos & Sinkó, 2020). Meanwhile, thousands of fighters who disarmed after Shekau's death in 2021 later found conditions under ISWAP or state authority intolerable, drifting into JAS-linked sub-groups in the Gwoza Hills or onto Bakura Doro's islands (Foucher, 2024). Structural deficits compound these challenges. The Council of Europe's Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2023–2027) notes that disengagement and reintegration programmes for women and children remain rare or largely ad hoc, creating systemic risk that age and gender dimensions are overlooked (Committee of Ministers Council of Europe, 2023). Within the MNJTF itself, AU-funded civilian components (including human rights and gender monitoring offices) report to the Military Force Commander rather than to the civilian Head of Mission or the LCBC, making it easier for the military hierarchy to sideline reports of troop misconduct (Crisis Group, 2020). A shortage of female personnel in IDP

camp security has further left displaced women and girls exposed to exploitation and sexual abuse by the very officials mandated to protect them (United Nations, 2017).

Taken together, the evidence points to a consistent gap between hard-security outputs and durable stabilisation. Progress in military capacity-building has not been matched by equivalent advances in reintegration, civilian protection, or governance reform, revealing the limits of a predominantly military-centric approach in the absence of parallel political and socio-economic investment.

6.3 Member States' geostrategic interests and constraints: Limitations and Implications as a Global Security Actor

The EU's approach to the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin is shaped by a mix of national interests, structural constraints, and changing policy priorities. Instead of having a single strategy, the EU's engagement is shaped by the different goals of EU Member States, the challenges of coordinating across EU institutions, and increasing pressure to control migration. France has historically acted as the main Western security actor in the Sahel, most visibly through Operations Serval and Barkhane (Angyal, 2025). In practice, this leading role has pulled EU security priorities in the direction of French strategic interests, such as preserving political and economic influence in francophone Africa, securing access to resources, and controlling migration routes into Europe. France's influence can also be seen in the way projects are designed and funded. For example, the RESILAC project is funded jointly by the EU and the AFD. France often supports a more security-focused and militarily-led approach, but other EU countries tend to have different priorities. Germany has generally focused more on long-term development and strengthening institutions, while Spain and Italy have paid closer attention to migration management and border control. These different priorities can create tensions within the overall EU policy. At the root of these tensions lies the absence of a genuinely unified European foreign policy. The CFSP remains largely intergovernmental, meaning that diverging national interests routinely constrain collective action and produce the fragmented, inconsistent engagement visible across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin.

At the multi-sectoral level, the EU coordinates diplomacy, CSDP, and humanitarian aid through the EEAS within a broader multilateral web involving the AU, LCBC, and ECOWAS, yet collaborative efforts are routinely obstaculised due to procurement delays and red tape that slow the delivery of critical assets. Moreover, one of the biggest barriers to a stronger EU foreign policy is the rule that all Member States must agree on major

decisions under the CFSP. Since every country has a veto, the EU often ends up settling for the least controversial option, which makes it harder to take bold, high-risk, or expensive interventions. This helps explain why the EU often relies on regional organisations to handle security issues instead of sending its own combat forces. Groups like the AU, ECOWAS, and the MNJTF are usually placed at the centre of security efforts, while the EU provides funding and political backing. By doing this, the EU can still influence events and support stability without having to deal with the political and legal difficulties of direct military involvement. Furthermore, the EU's security engagement in the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel is undermined by three interconnected coherence challenges and operational realities. First, the tension between migration control and security, where developmental aid is increasingly instrumentalised to serve European interests instead of long-term needs of local people. For instance, the EUTF allocated 31% of its funds towards migration management (European Court of Auditors, 2024), and the mandate of EUCAP Sahel Niger was expanded to tackle irregular migration, which is a shift that critics say turn the EU's strengths in social programs into mere border enforcement, distancing communities and ignoring deeper instability factors (Bello, 2012). Second, institutional fragmentation: bodies like the EEAS, DG INTPA, DG ECHO, and various CSDP missions often work in parallel with limited coordination. This is showcased in the contrast between EUCAP Sahel Niger's civilian capacity-building mandate and the European Peace Facility's provision of direct military assistance (including lethal equipment), which can end up working at cross-purposes. The EPF's bilateral arrangements with national governments, in turn, risk weakening the regional security frameworks centred on the African Union. The third, and perhaps most pressing, tension is normative: Article 21 TEU commits the EU to democracy, rule of law, and universal human rights, yet it has channelled substantial financial support to the MNJTF despite reports indicating that uniformed personnel accounted for about 40% of abuses in some conflict zones (Crisis Group, 2020). This problem is made worse by the lack of formal mechanisms to track or address human rights violations in EU-funded projects, as well as the lack of clear criteria for suspending support. This gap has allowed funding to continue in detention centres, despite well-documented abuses. By backing forces that local populations increasingly distrust, the EU risks reinforcing the very grievances of repression and exclusion that help sustain the insurgencies it seeks to counter.

For Mediterranean Member States such as Italy, Spain, and Malta, the main concern in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin is reducing irregular migration, even though counter-terrorism objectives are also part of the agenda. This has created a ‘migration securitisation dynamic’, where EU security and development policies are increasingly used to control migration, strengthen borders, and deter movement. One example is the EUTF, where about 31% of total expenditure has been channelled into ‘improved migration management’ (European Court of Auditors, 2024). This prioritisation often undermines the coherence of the EU: while the CFSP formally commits to long-term development, human security, and tackling root causes, in practice, resources are diverted toward short-term flow-management, border-control operations, and external partnerships, such as the EUCAP Sahel Niger (FRONTEX, 2022). As a result, development aid can end up serving the EU’s own security interests rather than addressing the poverty, lack of opportunity, and instability that drive both migrations and extremist recruitment in the Lake Chad Basin. Moreover, a European Court of Auditors report (2024) found that EUTF support was too scattered across development, humanitarian, and security actions to achieve meaningful impact. Several instruments also proved unsustainable, ceasing to function shortly after project completion. Within the EUTF itself, migration information centres became inactive as soon as funding stopped, and businesses established in the Sahel were found non-operational by 2023. The MNJTF, despite receiving EU economic aid, faced similar difficulties: funds for essential equipment were delayed for years in Addis Ababa, while the force’s reliance on rotating national units and external financing left its long-term effectiveness uncertain (EEAS, 2026). CSDP missions were equally fragile; despite training over 20,000 soldiers, EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUTM Mali were terminated following coups in 2023 and 2024 respectively, and their impact was further weakened by the EU’s inability to equip the units it had trained (Pichon, 2024). The prevention-oriented dimension is reflected in EU efforts to address structural drivers of radicalization. Nonetheless, the Research and Evidence facility, which was created to guide strategy, had limited influence because most of its findings were not available until after 90% of funds (around €4.4 billion) had already been committed and some funded projects barely touched the migration issues they were meant to fix (European Court of Auditors, 2024, p. 19).

The recent political upheavals in West Africa and the nature of the partnership between European and African institutions reveal deep structural weaknesses in the region’s

security architecture. Two closely linked crises now define the EU's position in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin: the sudden collapse of its security engagement following a wave of military coups, and the entrenched 'donorship' logic that has long prevented genuine African ownership of peace and security initiatives. Between 2023 and 2024, a series of military coups in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso severely undermined the EU's regional security framework. At the heart of this breakdown was the EU's heavy dependence on French-linked political relationships with fragile Sahelian governments. For over a decade, much of the EU's engagement had been anchored in French-led security structures such as Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Task Force. When the military overthrew these governments, they deliberately targeted those ties, expelling French forces and triggering a wider 'Saxelexit' from Western-backed bodies like the G5 Sahel. This caused immediate consequences on EU mission: in December 2023, Nigerien authorities withdrew the mandate of EUCAP Sahel Niger and EU Military Partnership Mission, while the mandate for EUTM Mali was not renewed and ended in May 2024. These ruptures demonstrated that EU strategy was not independently sustainable. Once the French bilateral pillar was removed, the broader EU-backed security architecture collapsed. The reliance on French military leadership also reinforced perceptions among local populations of the EU as an external actor reasserting control, deepening trust and making the rupture both more likely and harder to mend. The case of EUCAP Sahel Niger illustrates the failure to translate civilian capacity-building into stable human security. Despite years of EU training and advice designed to strengthen Niger's security sector, these efforts did not prevent the 2023 coup. After the coup and the regional political rupture that followed, the Nigerian authorities withdrew EUCAP Sahel Niger's mandate in December 2023 (Pichon, 2024). The mission's closure shows the limits of civilian-led engagement: it had not built enough legitimacy or institutional resilience to survive the return to military rule, and EU security cooperation with Niger effectively ended.

The structural problems, however, go beyond the coups themselves. The EU's long-standing relationship with the African Union has tended to reproduce a donor-recipient dynamic rather than a genuine partnership of equals. While the slogan "African solutions to African problems" remains the main goal, the reality is one of financial dependence and strategic constraint. The EU provides roughly 93% of the funding for African-led Peace Support Operations through the APF, meaning that much of the AU's peace and security architecture is built using resources provided by others. Routing support through

the APF and the European Peace Facility creates a system in which the AU often needs to align its priorities with donor conditions, limiting its ability to lead operations without external approval or funding and thus undermining the autonomy the partnership claims to promote. This donorship dynamic creates a tension around the MNJTF. While the force has successfully pushed back Boko Haram and its affiliates, its national contingents have also faced serious criticism for human rights abuses, reportedly responsible for around 40% of violations in some areas. The MNJTF's command structure has often minimised or silenced reports of misconduct, making meaningful external oversight difficult. The EU is therefore caught in an unenviable position: it can either continue supporting a force that delivers on the battlefield but risks fuelling local grievances, or it can link funding to human-rights compliance and risk delays, political friction, and loss of influence just as other global actors, with fewer governance constraints, enter the picture. The existence of this dilemma reflects the deeper structural dependency that has developed over time. The MNJTF functions less as a symbol of African ownership and more as a channel through which donor money flows into the regional security architecture. The EU's integrated approach in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin now faces a dual crisis that is deeply intertwined: one of political rupture and another of structural dependency. As long as African security institutions remain financially dependent on external actors, the conditions for genuine strategic autonomy and the local legitimacy that comes with it, will remain out of reach.

7. Conclusions

This dissertation confirms the central hypothesis: the EU adopted a comprehensive strategy combining security (€234.4M to MNJTF), development (EUTF resilience), and diplomacy to counter Boko Haram and its structural drivers. Yet its effectiveness was constrained by three interrelated factors: institutional fragmentation, securitised priorities, and fragile regional partners.

The findings reveal three interrelated constraints. First, chronic coordination failures between EEAS, DG DEVCO, and Member States undermined strategic coherence despite ambitious paper commitments. Second, migration control systematically trumped human development, not as implementation failure, but calculated geopolitical prioritisation driven by leading states like France. The 'securitisation of development' aligned EU resources with border security over socio-economic transformation. Third, tactical

successes proved reversible: Lake Sanity operations generated almost 100,000 surrenders since 2019, yet JAS's 2023 island recapture and re-infiltration (9/920 returnees) demonstrate dependence on unstable African partners, exemplified by EUCAP Sahel Niger's 2024 collapse.

Operationally relevant but strategically insufficient, EU support weakened insurgent capabilities without addressing structural drivers (poverty, youth exclusion, Lake Chad degradation). Persistent displacement and civilian protection gaps confirm military gains did not yield durable human security improvements. These limitations challenge 2022 Strategic Compass ambitions. Donor dependency, coordination gaps, and repeated sidelining of human security for counterterrorism erode strategic autonomy and geopolitical credibility. True global actor status demands bridging rhetoric of equal partnerships with donor-led realities.

In sum, the EU operates as regional enabler rather than decisive security actor. A systematic strategy remains essential to prevent insurgent regrouping, but effectiveness hinges on overcoming internal fragmentation and genuinely prioritising governance reform over migration containment.

8. Proposals

Five reforms stand out from the evidence and point toward a more coherent, principled, and locally grounded EU approach.

First, the EU should seek to rebalance its funding architecture away from short-term migration management and toward long-term structural development. However, this rebalancing is not a unilateral EU prerogative; it requires a renewed political dialogue with African partners to move beyond the current 'donor-driven' model. To be effective, any successor to the EUTF must be co-designed with regional actors to ensure that financial priorities are guided by independent, evidence-based targeting that reflects local developmental needs rather than the immediate security and migration concerns of the EU's most influential Member States.

Second, human rights conditionality needs to be made clearer and genuinely enforceable. This would mean establishing explicit criteria for suspending aid, creating a civilian-led monitoring body independent of the MNJTF command structure, and setting up a formal review process that is triggered whenever credible reports of abuse emerge. Critics often

argue that such measures carry the risk of triggering 'migratory blackmail' or regional instability if partners respond by weaponising migration flows or cutting security cooperation. However, this risk must be balanced against the strategic cost of the status quo: by funding forces accused of human rights abuses without meaningful oversight, the EU risks deepening the very grievances that fuel insurgency, thereby undermining the long-term effectiveness of its stabilisation efforts. Therefore, conditionality should not be viewed as an 'on-off' switch, but as a risk-mitigation tool based on 'graduated engagement', where support is dynamically recalibrated based on human rights compliance, while maintaining humanitarian channels that are decoupled from political or security cooperation to avoid abandoning vulnerable populations to the whims of the state.

Third, coordination between the EEAS, DG INTPA, DG ECHO, CSDP, and the EPF must be strengthened. This could be done through a dedicated coordination mechanism under the EUSR for the Sahel, designed to ensure that security and development efforts support each other rather than operating as separate, sometimes contradictory, tracks.

Fourth, the EU should move toward longer-term, community-embedded programming that addresses the structural drivers of radicalisation, rather than relying on short-term project cycles that have defined the EUTF. This shift would help break the “restart-and-re-contract” pattern on the ground and support more sustainable local ownership.

Fifth, the EU-AU partnership must move from a donor-recipient relationship toward genuine co-ownership, including support for the AU's independent financing capacity and revised procurement mechanisms that reduce the administrative constraints that have repeatedly delayed the delivery of critical assets to operational forces.

This research opens up several lines of investigation. A systematic study of the EPF's human rights conditionality (i.e. how it is designed on paper and how it actually works in practice) would fill a major gap in the literature. Longitudinal evaluations of RESILAC 2 and follow-on programmes would also generate much-needed evidence on the impact of EU development efforts in conflict-affected regions. Finally, the question of how the EU can move beyond the rhetoric of “African solutions to African problems” and develop genuine co-ownership with African institutions remains one of the most pressing and underexplored issues in EU-Africa security relations.

Bibliography

- Adebayo, T. (2025, September 11). *JAS resurgence deepens Lake Chad Basin's complex security crisis*. Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/jas-resurgence-deepens-lake-chad-basin-s-complex-security-crisis>
- Adela, G. (2021). "Small Fires Causing Large Fires": The rise of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria and its Transnational Posture in the Lake Chad Basin. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 4(2), 46–67. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i2.2952>
- ADF. (2024, October 1st). MNJTF Operation Aims to Restore 'Sanity' to Lake Chad Basin. Africa Defense Forum. <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/10/mnjtf-operation-aims-to-restore-sanity-to-lake-chad-basin/>
- Amani Africa. (2025, June 9th). Update on the activities of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and consideration of the Regional Strategy for Stabilisation, Recovery, and Resilience (RS-SRR). Amani Africa. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/update-on-the-activities-of-the-mnjtf-and-consideration-of-the-rs-srr/>
- Andersen-Rodgers, D., & Crawford, K. (2023). *Human Security. Theory and Action* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Angyal, A. (2025, May 19th). *The presence of the French Military in the Sahel: A lasting commitment or a distant fantasy?* Global Affairs - Universidad de Navarra. <https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/the-presence-of-the-french-military-in-the-sahel-lasting-commitment-or-distant-fantasy>
- Aniekwe, C. C., & Brooks, K. (2023, December 21). Multinational Joint Task Force: Lessons for Comprehensive Regional Approaches to Cross-Border Conflict in Africa. *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 26 (4), 330-349. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-26040004>
- Australian National Security. (2024, September 22). *Islamic State West Africa Province*. Australian Government. <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations/islamic-state-west-africa-province>

- Ayandele, O., & Aniekwe, C.C. (2024, April 16th). *A Decade After Chibok: Assessing Nigeria's Regional Response to Boko Haram*. ACLED.
<https://acleddata.com/report/decade-after-chibok-assessing-nigerias-regional-response-boko-haram>
- Babos, T. & Sinkó, G. (2020). Can Boko Haram Constitute a Threat to European Security? *AARMS – Academic and Applied Research in Military and Public Management Science*, 19(3), 53–70. <https://doi.org/10.32565/aarms.2020.3.4>
- Bandyopadhyay, S. & Sandler, T. (2023). The Trade-Offs of Counterterrorism Policies. *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review*, 105(3). 177-97.
<https://doi.org/10.20955/r.105.177-97>
- BBC. (2021, June 7). *Abubakar Shekau: Nigeria's Boko Haram leader is dead, say rival militants*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57378493>
- Bello, O. (2012, April 2nd). *Nigeria's Boko Haram Threat: How the EU should act*. FRIDE – A European Think Tank for Global Action. Policy Brief No. 123. ISSN: 1989-2667 <https://www.eurasiareview.com/02042012-nigerias-boko-haram-threat-how-the-eu-should-act-analysis/>
- Bergmann, J. (2025, 11th November). *Assessing 25 Years of Partnership between the AU and EU: Closer Cooperation in Peace and Security*. SWP – German Institute for International and Security Affairs. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/partnership-between-the-au-and-eu-closer-cooperation-in-peace-and-security>
- Best Documentary. (2024, March 13). *Boko Haram: Black Terror in Africa* [Video]. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/MnGCQMv0HQ4?si=55eDuO1daIUS6Bhh>
- Bøås, M. (2021). EU migration management in the Sahel: unintended consequences on the ground in Niger? *Third World Quarterly*, 42(1), 52–67.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1784002>
- Callaway, R., & Harrelson-Stephens, J. (2006). Toward a Theory of Terrorism: Human Security as a Determinant of Terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29(7), 679–702. <https://doi-org.lama.univ-amu.fr/10.1080/10576100600701974>

Choi, S. W., & Piazza, J. A. (2016). Ethnic groups, political exclusion and domestic terrorism. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 27(1), 37–63.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2014.987579>

Committee of Ministers Council of Europe. (2023, February 8th). [1456/10.1b] *Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) - b. Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2023-2027)*. Committee of Ministers Council of Europe.

[https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:\[%220900001680a9ad67%22\],%22sort%22:\[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22\]}](https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%220900001680a9ad67%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22]})

Crisis Group. (2020, 7th July). *What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram?* International Crisis Group.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/africa/west-africa/291-what-role-multinational-joint-task-force-fighting-boko-haram>

Crisis Group. (2024, March 28th). *JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters*. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/brf/africa/west-africa/nigeria/b196-jas-vs-iswap-war-boko-haram-splinters>

EASO. (October 2021). 1.3.1. Boko Haram, including JAS, ISWAP and Ansaru. *European Union Agency for Asylum*. <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-nigeria-2021/131-boko-haram-including-jas-iswap-and-ansaru#fn9>

EEAS. (2017, 15th September). *EU Statement on MNJTF*. European Union External Action – The Diplomatic Service of the European Union.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/32228_en

EEAS. (2019, 8th January). *RESILAC – Lake Chad Inclusive Economic and Social Recovery Project*. European Union External Action – The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/56288_en

EEAS. (2026, February 19th). *The European Union and Nigeria launch first Peace, Security and Defence Dialogue and agree to enhance collaboration*. European Union External Action – The Diplomatic Service of the European Union.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-and-nigeria-launch-first-peace-security-and-defence-dialogue-and-agree-enhance_en

- EEAS Press Team. (2023, November 20th). *The EEAS Crisis Response Centre*. European Union External Action – The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eeas-crisis-response-centre_en
- EEAS Press Team. (2026, March 23rd). *Nigeria: Joint press conference following the 8th Nigeria-EU Ministerial Dialogue by High Representative Kallas and Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister Tuggar*. European Union External Action – The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/nigeria-joint-press-conference-following-8th-nigeria-eu-ministerial-dialogue-high-representative_en
- Enders, W. and Sandler, T. (2012) *The Political Economy of Terrorism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Erunke, J. (10th April 2025). *EU, AFD launch N70bn project to boost economic, social recovery of Lake Chad*. Vanguard Media. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/04/eu-afd-launch-n70bn-project-to-boost-economic-social-recovery-of-lake-chad/>
- European Court of Auditors. (2024). *Special Report: The EU trust fund for Africa. Despite new approaches, support remained unfocused*. European Court of Auditors. https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2024-17/SR-2024-17_EN.pdf
- Expertise France. (2025, January 13th). *Programa de apoyo de la Unión Europea a la Fuerza Conjunta del G5 Sahel*. Expertise France – Groupe AFD. <https://www.expertisefrance.fr/es/proyectos/programa-de-apoyo-de-la-union-europea-la-fuerza-conjunta-del-g5-sahel>
- Fahd, A. (2024) *The Distorted Ideology of Boko Haram: Jihad or Terrorism?* Journal of Analytic Divinity, 8(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.46595/jad.1409244>
- Fondation pour l'innovation politique. (2024). *Islamist terrorist attacks in the world 1979-2024* (New edition, data collected through 12 April 2024). <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/islamist-terrorist-attacks-in-the-world-1979-2024/>

- Foucher, V. (2024, 16th September). *Boko Haram: Mapping an Evolving Armed Constellation*. UNIDIR. <https://unidir.org/publication/boko-haram-mapping-an-evolving-armed-constellation/>
- Fondapol. (2024). *Islamist terrorist attacks in the world 1979-2024*. [Graph]. Fondation pour l'innovation politique. <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/islamist-terrorist-attacks-in-the-world-1979-2024/#chap-1%20>.
- FRONTEX. (2022, July 15th). *Frontex signs Working Arrangement with EUCAP Sahel Niger*. FRONTEX News <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-signs-working-arrangement-with-eucap-sahel-niger-R8bj2Z>
- Hauck, V. & Shiferaw, L.T. (2021, 13th April). *Continuity and Change in European Union-Africa Relations on Peace and Security*. European Think Tanks Group. <https://ettg.eu/continuity-and-change-in-european-union-africa-relations-on-peace-and-security/>
- Howard, N. (2024, 30th August). *Amidst complex threats, how can the EU fight terrorism more effectively?* Centre for European Reform. <https://www.cer.eu/insights/amidst-complex-threats-how-can-eu-fight-terrorism-more-effectively>
- Hogendoorn, E.J. (2018). *To Help Defeat Boko Haram, the EU Should Push for Good Governance and Accountability*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep19609>
- Hoinathy, R., & Delanga, C. (2024, September 16th). *Capitalising on Operation Lake Sanity's success against Boko Haram*. Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/capitalising-on-operation-lake-sanity-s-success-against-boko-haram>
- ICC's Office of the Prosecutor. (2020, December 11th). *Statement of the Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, on the conclusion of the preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria*. Cour Pénale Internationale – International Criminal Court. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-prosecutor-fatou-bensouda-conclusion-preliminary-examination-situation-nigeria>
- Institute for Economics & Peace. (2015). *Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism*. Institute for Economics & Peace.

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>

Institute for Economics & Peace. (2025). *Global Terrorism Index 2025: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. Institute for Economics & Peace.

<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf>

Institute for Economics & Peace. (2026). *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. Institute for Economics & Peace.

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf>

International Crisis Group. (2024, March 28th). *JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters*. International Crisis Group.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/brf/africa/west-africa/nigeria/b196-jas-vs-iswap-war-boko-haram-splinters>

Kangdim, D. M., Yorgancıoğlu, C., Bulus, K.I. (2022). The Strategic Security Engagement between the African Union and the European Union in Conflict Management in Africa: The Challenges. *Savunma Bilimleri Dergisi - The Journal of Defense Sciences*, (41), 227-259. <https://doi.org/10.17134/khosbd.1101701>

Kangdim, D. M., Bulus, K.I., Yorgancıoğlu, C., Idris, A., & Pali, C. (2024). Regional security cooperation and the changing dynamics of insecurity in West Africa: An analysis of the Boko Haram conflict. *NEU Journal of Social Sciences*, 17(2), 118-151.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385698842_REGIONAL_SECURITY_COOPERATION_AND_THE_CHANGING_DYNAMICS_OF_INSECURITY_IN_WEST_AFRICA_AN_ANALYSIS_OF_THE_BOKO_HARAM_CONFLICT

Kruglanski, A.W., Gelfand, M.J., Bélanger, J. J., Hetiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2015). Significance Quest theory as the driver of radicalization towards terrorism. In J. Jerard & M. N. Salim (Eds.), *Resilience and resolve: Communities against terrorism* (pp. 17-30). World Scientific Publishing.

https://doi.org/10.1142/9781783267743_0002

- Lynch, J. P. (2011). Implications of opportunity theory for combating terrorism. In B. Forst, J. R. Greene, & J. P. Lynch (Eds.), *Criminologists on terrorism and homeland security* (Ch. 8). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511976384>
- Mamman, E.B. (2020). *Public Policy Response to Violence: Case Study of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria*. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.
<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10671&context=dissertations>
- Massay-Kosubek, K. (2025). *The Treaty of Lisbon*. Fact Sheets on the European Union, European Parliament. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/5/el-tratado-de-lisboa>
- Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación. (2026). *The European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy*. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación.
<https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/PoliticaExterior/Paginas/PoliticaExteriorSeguridadComunUE.aspx>
- Nalbandov, R. (2013). Irrational Rationality of Terrorism. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 6(4), 92-102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.6.4.5>
- Newman, P. (2013). *The etymology of Hausa boko*. Mega-Chad Research Network/Réseau Méga-Tchad.
<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/iusrrest/api/core/bitstreams/fb5ff9f3-3f36-44e0-9d3d-f5b1de4517f1/content>
- Niño Pérez, J. (7th November 2025). *AU-EU Partnership: 25 years delivering*. The European Files – Effective Work Tool for European deciders.
<https://www.europeanfiles.eu/energy/delegation-of-the-european-union-to-the-african-union>
- Nnam, M. U., Ugwuoke, C. O., Njemanze, V. C., & Akwara, F. A. (2020). Boko Haram terrorism and human security in Nigeria: Matters arising. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 29(10), 1257–1278.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2019.1710637>

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2008). *Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism. Fact Sheet No. 32*. OHCHR.
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf>
- European Union. (2012, 26th October). *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*. Official Journal of the European Union, C 326, 13-45. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bfl40bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF
- Ogbozor, E. (2026). Operation Lafiya Dole and the paradox of peace by force: rethinking counterinsurgency and human security in Northeast Nigeria. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2026.2652435>
- Okoro, E. (2015). Terrorism and governance crisis: The Boko Haram experience in Nigeria. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 14(2), 103–127.
<https://doi.org/10.4314/ajcr.v14i2>.
- Onu, U. D., Idike, A. N., Eme, O. I., & Obioji, J. N. (2017). Boko Haram and human security challenges in Nigeria: The way forward. *Specialty Journal of Politics and Law*, 2(1), 12–28.
- Osoba, O. (2025, January 8th). *MNJTf Celebrates The Success Of Operation Lake Sanity 2, Presents Operational Medals To Troops*. Force Multinational Mixte - Multinational Joint Task Force. <https://mnjtffmm.org/mnjtf-celebrates-the-success-of-operation-lake-sanity-2-presents-operational-medals-to-troops/>
- Paradela-López, M., & Jima-González, A. (2024). The 2012 Tuareg Uprising in Mali. An Analysis of AQIM's, MUJAO's, and Ansar Dine's Access to Moral and Socio-Organizational Resources Under the Resource Mobilization Theory. *Sage Open*, 14(3).
- Pichon, E. (2024, 15th December). The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel In "A Stronger Europe in the World". European Parliament - Legislative Train Schedule. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-stronger-europe-in-the-world/file-eu-strategy-in-the-sahel>
- Sandler, T. (2015). Terrorism and Counterterrorism: An Overview. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 67(1), 1–20.

- Schanzer, D. H. (2017). 3. Terrorism as Tactic. In M. Stohl, R. Burchill & S. Englund (Ed.), *Constructions of Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Research and Policy* (pp. 38-52). Berkeley: University of California Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520967397-005>
- Sempijja, N. & Eyita-Okon, E. (2022) Examining the effectiveness of the EU security-development strategy in tackling instability in the Sahel: The case for an alternative strategy? *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 29(2), 139-160,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2089727>
- Service for Foreign Policy Instruments. (n.d.). *Common foreign and security policy*. European Commission. https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy_en
- Serwat, L., & Birru, J.G. (2025, January 14th). Africa Overview: January 2025. ACLED. <https://acleddata.com/update/africa-overview-january-2025>
- Sohn, L. B. (1995). *The Human Rights Movement: From Roosevelt's Four Freedoms to the Interdependence of Peace, Development and Human Rights*. Harvard Law School Human Rights Program. https://hrp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/1995/06/The-Human-Rights-Movement-From-Roosevelts-Four-Freedoms-to-the-Interdependence-of-peace.-Development-and-Human-Rights_Louis-B.-Sohn_1995.pdf
- Statista Research Department. (2025). *Number of deaths due to terrorism worldwide from 2006 to 2023* [Graph]. Statista.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/202871/number-of-fatalities-by-terrorist-attacks-worldwide/>
- The Soufan Center. (21 May 2025). *The Islamic State West Africa Province's Tactical Evolution Fuels Worsening Conflict in Nigeria's Northeast*. The Soufan Center.
<https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-may-21/>
- Thurston, A. (2018). *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc779gc>
- Ukwandu, D. C. (2016). The relationship between indirect rule and Quranic education: Considerations for the emergence of Boko Haram terrorism in Northern Nigeria. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 9(4), 174-192. <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/59015>

- United Nations Development Programme (1994). Human Development Report 1994. Oxford University Press, New York. <https://doi.org/10.18356/87e94501-en>
- United Nations (2023, June 10th). *Trafficking in the Sahel: Muzzling the illicit arms trade*. UN News, Global Perspective Human Stories. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137542>
- United Nations. (2026, February 27th). *ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List*. United Nations – Security Council. https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list
- United Nations. (2026). United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>
- UN Security Council Mission to the Lake Chad Basin. (2017). *Report of the Security Council Mission to the Lake Chad Basin region (Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria), 1-7 March 2017*. UN Digital Library. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1298602?v=pdf#files>
- U.S. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (n.d.). *Glossary - Terrorism*. U.S. Department of State Archive. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/info/c16718.htm>
- Zenn, J. (2024, May 30th). *Brief: Three Years After Death of Shekau, Boko Haram Appears to Gain on ISWAP Under Leadership of Bakura*. Jamestown. <https://jamestown.org/brief-three-years-after-death-of-shekau-boko-haram-appears-to-gain-on-iswap-under-leadership-of-bakura/>