

Monthly intelligence briefing on remote warfare against Boko Haram

April 2017

International developments

1. On 21 March, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced that since the start of the year more than 2,600 Nigerian refugees have been forcefully returned from Cameroon to northern Nigeria. The announcement came three weeks after the UNHCR, Nigeria and Cameroon signed a Tripartite Agreement for the Voluntary Repatriation of Nigerian refugees living in Cameroon, paving the way for the voluntary return of 65-85,000 refugees. Cameroon is currently struggling to manage the refugee camps and provide basic human security for Nigerians as well as the 200,000 internally-displaced Cameroonians that have left the border region over fears of attacks by Boko Haram.
2. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) advised on 29 March that it believes that 75% of water infrastructure in conflict-affected areas of northeast Nigeria has been damaged or destroyed, leaving 3.8 million people with no access to safe water. UNICEF also said that one-third of the 700 health facilities in Borno State have been destroyed.
3. In a show of international cooperation, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2349 (2017) on 31 March condemning the atrocities committed by Boko Haram. The resolution encourages Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon to collectively deliver a combined military, humanitarian and economic response to the militant group. Importantly, the Security Council advocated increased logistical and communications support and intelligence sharing and training for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).
4. At the UN Security Council meeting on 31 March, the United Kingdom and Senegal called for the quick distribution of the humanitarian aid funds that were pledged at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region held in February. This call was supported by other Security Council members and has since been echoed by other countries, such as Japan. The Nigerian government had pledged \$1 billion and other donors had pledged \$458 million. These pledges are in addition to a \$200 million line of credit extended by the World Bank to Nigeria on 20 March to provide humanitarian relief. The credit will have a 25-year maturity period, with a five-year grace period. The World Bank funds are ring-fenced for financial support to farmers to improve food security in the region, supply and infrastructure improvements and to support more than 150,000 forcefully-displaced people.
5. A UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) team arrived in Sambisa Forest in Borno State on 4 April. The team will assess the situation before the Nigerian government takes the lead in mobilising international support and funding for demining activities. Sambisa Forest was a Boko Haram refuge before a 2015 military campaign largely expelled the group from the area. Landmine clearing operations will reduce the potential for Boko Haram to return to the forest, as government security forces will be able to operate in the area more easily. If successful, the region's civilian population will be able to return, alleviating some of the pressure on refugee camps elsewhere in Nigeria and neighbouring countries.

US and European partners

6. On 25 March, Nigeria's domestic intelligence agency, the Department of State Services (DSS), disrupted plans by six suspected Boko Haram militants to attack the British and US embassies in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. The agency made arrests in three separate states: Yobe, Benue and the Federal Capital Territory. The suspects were most likely part of the Boko Haram faction led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi, as DSS described them as IS-linked Boko Haram members. Boko Haram has not attacked Abuja since 2005. The suspects' motives for targeting the British and US embassies specifically are currently unknown.
7. The Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, has acknowledged the role of UK military support in combating Boko Haram in a condolence letter sent to the British prime minister, Theresa May, on 25 March in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Westminster, London.
8. The involvement of US, French or British assets in the two significant MNJTF and Cameroonian counter-insurgency operations during March is unclear; however, the use of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets may indicate mission support from one or more Western allies.
9. The US president, Donald Trump, approved plans for the sale of up to 12 A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft to the Nigerian government on 10 April 2017. The aircraft are well-suited to US partner countries that need close air support for their counter-insurgency operations. The robust, turboprop aircraft have been used by the Colombian government against FARC and the Afghan government against the Taliban, and are expected to provide a significant tactical advantage to the Nigerian government. The \$600 million deal requires US congressional approval. Congress is likely to approve the sale, though some lawmakers want it to be accompanied by a strong message on human rights or human right guarantees.

Local governments and coalitions

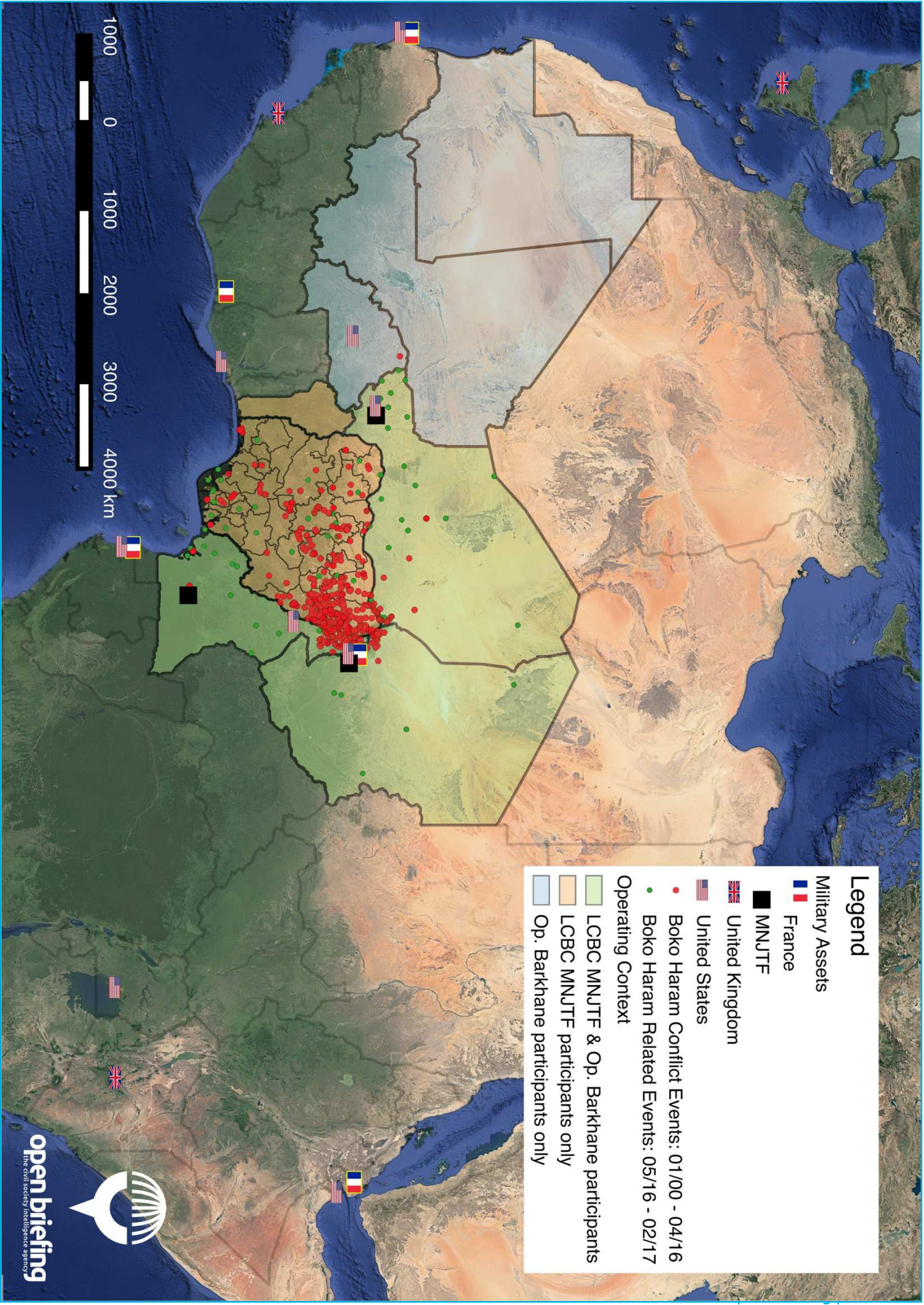
10. The Cameroonian minister for communication, Issa Tchiroma Bakary, claimed that Cameroonian troops acting as part of its Operation Thunder 2 freed an estimated 5,000 hostages during a rescue operation along the Cameroon-Nigeria border between 27 February and 7 March. Soldiers also killed 60 Boko Haram militants and arrested 21 suspects.
11. The Nigerian Army carried out numerous operations against Boko Haram over March and April in Borno State as part of its Operation Lafiya Dole. On 11 March, Nigerian soldiers and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) personnel rescued over 200 people held by Boko Haram in Cingal Murye. On 14 March, Nigerian soldiers swept multiple Boko Haram hideouts and a logistics base in Kala Balge. They released an estimated 455 Boko Haram hostages and moved them to an IDP camp for processing. On 23 March, Nigerian soldiers and Civilian Joint Task Force personnel discovered and destroyed an IED factory in a village near Gombole.
12. On 24 March, the Department of State Services and the Nigerian Army in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, arrested a suspected Boko Haram operative, Adenoyi Abdulsalam, who was allegedly in the final stages of planning the kidnappings of high-value targets to both raise funds and create fear within local communities.

13. On 10 April in Arege, Borno State, the Nigerian Army called in MNJTF soldiers after identifying Boko Haram fighters from an airborne ISR asset (most likely a fixed-wing UAV). The militants are thought to have been fleeing Niger military forces after conducting attacks in villages near the border in neighbouring Niger. Media reports suggest that an estimated 57 militants were killed and small arms and ammunition recovered in the ensuing operation. The lack of airstrikes and reliance instead on MNJTF ground forces possibly indicates the absence of air support from Western partners, though the Nigerian Army has suggested that weather conditions were a constraining factor.
14. Inquiries into intelligence sharing following attacks in Magumeri (see 17 below) suggest that Nigerian intelligence assets are focused on the Boko Haram leadership and decapitation strikes rather than preventing raids on villages. The Civilian Joint Task Force expressed concern that intelligence on impending attacks by Boko Haram was being mishandled, limiting local efforts to combat retaliatory raids by the militant group.
15. Niger has put more than 1,000 people on trial for fighting for Boko Haram. The process is expected to take several months to complete. The accused face up to 10 years in prison. Boko Haram has directly targeted Niger, but not to the same extent as Nigeria and Cameroon. With regional combat operations against Boko Haram seemingly progressing successfully, Niger's move shows a willingness to also use non-military means, such as the legal system, where possible. This will help undermine any Boko Haram resurgence, as the local populations are less likely to be radicalised by the violent actions of their own government if military operations are minimalised where possible.

Boko Haram

16. While Boko Haram carried out a series of raids in March and April, including major attacks on Magumeri in Borno State, attacks by the group were both geographically and operationally restricted compared to historical conflict trends.
17. Boko Haram killed seven civilians in an attack in Magumeri, Borno State, on 15 March. The next day, four Nigerian Army personnel were killed during an attack on Magumeri. An estimated 300 Boko Haram fighters attacked from motor vehicles in military formation and targeted the military and a local police station.
18. Boko Haram carried out multiple small-scale attacks across Borno State during March and April. On 24 March, militants raided Kaye village in Gumsiri and allegedly killed three people and abducted scores of civilians, including young boys and women. On 25 March, militants kidnapped 18 girls and four women from Pulka village in Gwoza. On 5 April, militants killed seven men in a farming community outside Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, and stole an estimated 360 head of livestock. On 12 April, militants killed a Nigerian soldier during a suicide and gun attack on a military checkpoint on the outskirts of Maiduguri. The militants also captured additional small arms and set fire to makeshift sheds at the checkpoint.
19. Boko Haram released a video showing the execution of three people who were allegedly members of Nigeria's Directorate of Military Intelligence. The video, which was widely covered by media outlets on 14 March, also appears to show that Boko Haram are in possession of significant military weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles.


20. The Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, appeared in a second propaganda video, obtained by media outlets on 17 March, in which he mocked Cameroon and contradicted the country's claims that 60 militants had been killed in recent operations (see 10 above). His appearance in the footage has forced Nigerian government ministers to acknowledge that Shekau is still alive despite previous claims that he had been killed. In the video, Boko Haram also revealed equipment that the group had supposedly seized during clashes with the Nigerian Army and MNJTF.
21. A third video, which Boko Haram released on 3 April, featured a commander threatening to behead the Cameroonian president, Paul Biya, and attack civilians in northern Cameroon. While highly unlikely, the threat may indicate a wish to carry out a more asymmetric campaign in Cameroon based on further terrorist attacks and assassination attempts. Cameroon is a strong member of the coalition against Boko Haram, and the militant group's efforts to undermine Cameroon would have a disastrous effect on regional counter-insurgency efforts if they were successful.




Legend

Military Assets




-  France
-  United Kingdom
-  United States

 MNJTF

 Boko Haram Conflict Events: 01/00 - 04/16

 Boko Haram Related Events: 05/16 - 02/17

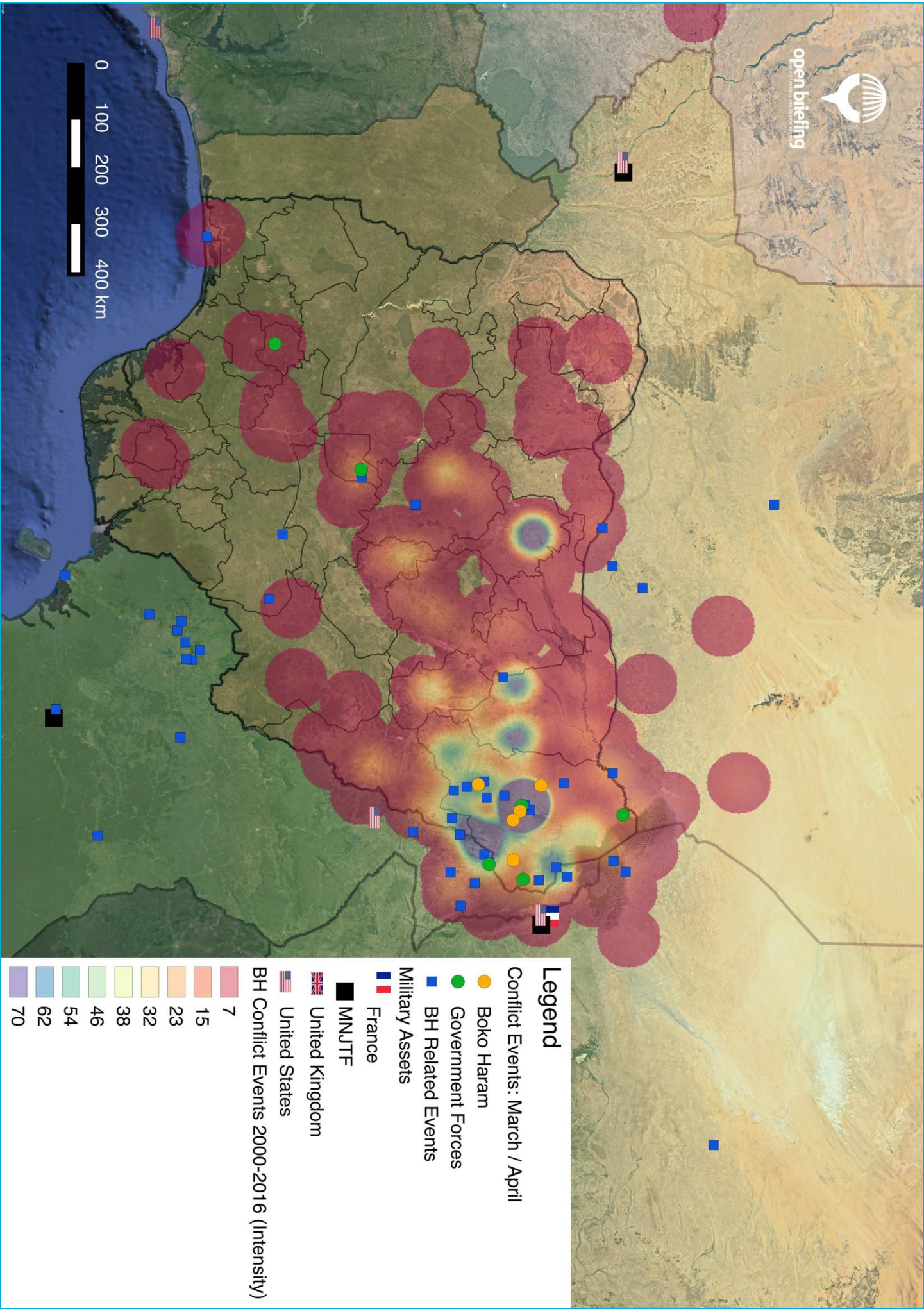
Operating Context

-  LCBC MNJTF & Op. Barkhane participants
-  LCBC MNJTF participants only
-  Op. Barkhane participants only





open briefing



Legend

Conflict Events: March / April

● Boko Haram

● Government Forces

■ BH Related Events

Military Assets

■ France

■ MNJTF

■ United Kingdom

■ United States

BH Conflict Events 2000-2016 (Intensity)

- 7
- 15
- 23
- 32
- 38
- 46
- 54
- 62
- 70