

## Media analysis on the Lake Chad Basin By Alexandra Musset

### 1. Summary

Lake Chad is a freshwater source straddling North-Eastern Nigeria, the North of Cameroon, Western Chad and South-East Niger, which 20-30million people are reliant on. Since the 1960s the Lake has shrunk by 90%, devastating the livelihoods of local populations and fuelling displacement and poverty. Since 2009 this unstable region has also given rise to a violent conflict between militant Islamist groups, government forces and civilians, creating mass displacement, gender inequality and food shortages. More than 2million people have been displaced by the conflict. Although this situation is recognized as one of the worst and most complex humanitarian crisis in the world, with underlying issues including environmental factors as well as poor governance and internal conflict, the crisis is known to receive scant media attention. This article seeks to better understand the level and depth of media attention the Crisis receives by English-speaking international media outlets, the shortfalls of reporting, and what coverage can tell us about western public interest and perception of the Crisis.

### 2. Coverage

Online media articles from six major English-speaking international media outlets, the Guardian, the BBC, The Telegraph, The Independent, Al Jazeera and the Washington Post, spanning January 2019 and August 2020, displayed limited coverage of the Lake Chad crisis.

Whilst the media outlets varied in the breadth of coverage, the average exposure was 14 articles. The highest reporting came from Al Jazeera. The publication produced roughly 27 articles which discussed the Lake Chad region. Given Al Jazeera's primary focus on Arab world news this was unsurprising. The least reporting came from The Independent (UK) which published 5 articles over the time span. Articles in the sample were identified by using the search toolbar on media outlet websites, to identify archived articles. Search terms included 'Lake Chad', 'Lake Chad Basin', 'Lake Chad Crisis' and 'Chad Basin.'

Contrastingly, within the sample timeframe, humanitarian reports indicated numerous public concerns, such as the continuation of armed attacks causing the relocation of thousands of people and prolonging the existing displacement of others, with around 2.7million people forcibly displaced from their homes by the crisis by June 2020.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, reports provided that the plight of communities in the region were being exacerbated by extreme weather events related to climate change and environmental degradation.<sup>2</sup> Sources further highlighted that food insecurity and malnutrition remained high during the timeframe due to regional insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic, with 4.4million people seriously food insecure, and 500,000 children at risk from severe acute malnutrition.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as of June 2020 only 14% of the funds needed to respond to the humanitarian situation was received.<sup>4</sup> Other newsworthy events during the timespan included: the Region being named as one of the 10 most under-reported humanitarian crisis of 2019;<sup>5</sup> a two year study exploring climate change and security risks in the Lake Chad region being published by Adelphi, which revealed the region's fragility to the climate crisis;<sup>6</sup> Chad withdrawing troop support from neighbouring countries to combat Boko Haram and ISWAP;<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OCHA, Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 29 June 2020), 29 June 2020, available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/lake-chad-basin-humanitarian-snapshot-29-june-2020> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>2</sup> International Organisation for Migration, Over 360,000 Persons Displaced in Chad's Lake Province, Over Half of Province's Population, 28 August 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/over-360000-persons-displaced-chad-s-lake-province-over-half-province-s-population> [accessed 10 November 2020]; Thomas Reuters Foundation, Climate change pushes farmers to 'tipping point' in Lake Chad crisis, 15 May 2019, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/climate-change-pushes-farmers-tipping-point-lake-chad-crisis> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>3</sup> OCHA, Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 29 June 2020), 29 June 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/lake-chad-basin-humanitarian-snapshot-29-june-2020> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>4</sup> OCHA, Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 29 June 2020), 29 June 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/lake-chad-basin-humanitarian-snapshot-29-june-2020> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>5</sup> Care, Suffering in Silence: The 10 most under-reported humanitarian crises of 2019, 2019, available at: <https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/publications/suffering-in-silence-the-10-most-under-reported-humanitarian-crises-of-2019> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, Lake Chad shrinking? It's a story that masks serious failures of governance, 8 September 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/oct/22/lake-chad-shrinking-story-masks-serious-failures-of-governance> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>7</sup> The Telegraph, War against jihadists in Sahel dealt major blow as Chad says it will withdraw troops, 11 April 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/11/chad-says-will-withdraw-troops-abroad-major-blow-war-against/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

Nigerian security forces closing down aid agencies which supported civilians in the region;<sup>8</sup> COVID-19 harshly impacting food supplies and civilian health in the Basin, as well as negatively impacting the curtail of terrorism;<sup>9</sup> and the chairperson for the African Union Commission calling for continental solidarity to resolve the Crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Given the aforementioned known current affairs and public interest issues outlined by humanitarian reports within the time span, a lack of rigorous reporting on the Lake Chad region by major English-speaking newspapers suggests weak western reader interest in the Lake Chad Crisis, or weak journalistic capacity to cover these regional affairs.

### 3. Scope of coverage

Notably, the majority of articles in the sample had a strong focus on security issues connected to Islamist militant group activity, such as Boko Haram and ISWAP. Indeed, many of the articles were prompted by recent attacks by the groups or counter insurgency efforts by relevant governments.

The security focused articles outlined the immediate aftermath of the incidents, such as killings, abductions and displacement, and highlighted the devastation caused by Islamist militant groups, often citing statistics of deaths and large displacement occurring in the area due to the violence. These reports sometimes also questioned the government's military forces capacity, methodology and structure to tackle violence and displacement. Further, the humanitarian impact of violent clashes was usually noted using statistics or through general statements by NGO spokespersons. However, rarely those directly affected by the internal conflict were quoted and given a voice in articles. This impacted the reader from realising the human impact of conflict and made it difficult to create empathy.

Furthermore, without the perspectives of local civilians, the context surrounding growing jihadi group power and the complexity of the situation on the ground, such as food insecurity, poverty and governance issues, was often amiss. Interestingly, the security focused articles which discussed terrorism but also provided testimonies from locals or displaced civilians were often able to detail one or more of the systemic causes which have led to the growth of insurgencies, and increased recruitment thereof. For example, poor governance, poverty, government corruption, famine, environmental issues and gender inequality.<sup>11</sup>

There were also some security related articles which were focused on linking the rise of Islamist militant groups in Africa and Asia to wider social and political issues, such as poor education and poor governance. However, these articles were broadly examining insurgencies in Africa and Asia and normally only mentioned the Lake Chad Crisis as an example of a wider phenomenon in Western African.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Guardian, Nigeria warned it risks humanitarian disaster by expelling charities, 29 September 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/29/nigeria-warned-it-risks-humanitarian-disaster-by-expelling-charities#:~:text=Nigeria%20warned%20it%20risks%20humanitarian%20disaster%20by%20expelling%20charities,-This%20article%20is&text=Nigeria%20has%20been%20warned%20it,league%20with%20extremist%20Islamic%20groups> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>9</sup> OCHA, Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 29 June 2020), 29 June 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/lake-chad-basin-humanitarian-snapshot-29-june-2020> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>10</sup> AfricaNews, Saving Lake Chad Basin, Sahel: AU chief calls for African solidarity, available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2019/12/12/saving-lake-chad-basin-sahel-au-chief-calls-for-african-solidarity/> [accessed 10 November 2020].

<sup>11</sup> Al Jazeera, 22,000 Nigerians missing since Boko Haram crisis began: Red Cross, 12 September 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/22000-nigerians-missing-boko-haram-crisis-began-red-cross-190912131830103.html> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Guardian, What would make a woman go back to Boko Haram? Despair, 14 Jan 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/14/woman-boko-haram-nigeria-militant-group> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Telegraph, Escape from Boko Haram, 1 June 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/escape-from-boko-haram/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>12</sup> BBC, Third of the world's poorest girls denied access to school, 20 January 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51176678> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Washington Post, How the Jihadists Are Advancing in Western Africa: QuickTake, 14 November 2020, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-jihadists-are-advancing-in-western-africa-quicktake/2019/11/14/722d7542-06ac-11ea-9118-25d6bd37dfb1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-jihadists-are-advancing-in-western-africa-quicktake/2019/11/14/722d7542-06ac-11ea-9118-25d6bd37dfb1_story.html) [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Washington Post, How African Jihadists Took Root in Mali and Beyond, 24 August 2020, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-african-jihadists-took-root-in-mali-and-beyond/2020/08/19/402e09ec-e222-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-african-jihadists-took-root-in-mali-and-beyond/2020/08/19/402e09ec-e222-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca_story.html) [accessed 24 August 2020].

Further, there were a few security related articles which were framed to expose adverse government responses to insurgencies and suspected terrorist affiliations, such as human rights abuses of detainees and children. These articles hinted to readers some of the wider governance issue which contribute to alienation within the region.<sup>13</sup>

Articles were scarcely, concentrated on discussing the climate emergency in the region, and climate related issues such as famine, poverty and poor living conditions. However, the articles which did focus on climate issues in the Basin were often successful in linking environmental issues to internal conflict and humanitarian needs.<sup>14</sup> By examining environmental impacts, articles were able to take a more holistic view of the Lake Chad Crisis as multifaceted. However, around half of the articles were opinion pieces, highlighting a limited day-to-day coverage of the climate emergency in the region from international media outlet official sources. Notably, one article which linked the climate emergency to internal conflict and displacement, spent some time discussing migration from the Western Africa to Europe despite the majority of refugees fleeing to neighbouring Sahel countries.<sup>15</sup> Arguably this discussion catered to the western reader where South to North mass migration is topical.

The media's reporting pattern, of mostly covering the Lake Chad basin in relation to recent terrorist related activity and infrequently providing voices from local civilians, prevents readers from understanding the Lake Chad crisis as a complex humanitarian crisis incorporating historic and ongoing social, eco-political and environmental factors. In which, the advance of non-state armed groups can be viewed as one symptom of the wider political, social and governance landscape. Instead the reporting pattern mainly portrays security issues in the region as a one-dimensional internal conflict between government forces and non-state armed groups based on ideology. Further, the media's preoccupation with groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP, aligns with the concept that western readers are mainly interested in Islamist militant group advances, because it relates to the Northern hemisphere security concerns, and they are less concerned with Western African instability as a matter of its own importance. This theory is supported by the finding that the Telegraph and Independent articles which focused on terrorist security issues in the region normally did so either while incorporating, or prompted by, western-centric events. For example, some articles discussed whether western foreign powers should intervene with the internal conflict, some articles were written after a western political visit or political commitment, some articles outlined how insurgencies are affecting the COVID-19 efforts and others often discussed the famous Chibok kidnapping which initially put Boko Haram in the international purview.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.1. The Guardian (UK)

Within the sample, the Lake Chad crisis was reported approximately 15 times online in the Guardian UK, displaying modest reporting on the region and indicating a lack of reader engagement in the Lake Chad Crisis. Ten of the articles focused on Islamist militant group activities, such as attacks, abductions and displacement caused by Boko Haram and ISWAP. Whilst five of the articles were framed with a heavy focus on one or more of the following issues: poor governance, poverty, food insecurity, the climate emergency and international relations.

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<sup>13</sup> BBC, Chad inquiry finds 44 prisoners died in hot, overcrowded cell, 9 August 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-53712951> [accessed 20 August 2020]; BBC, Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis: Military denies detaining thousands of children, 10 September 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49653414> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>14</sup> The Telegraph, Africa's Great Green Wall, 14 June 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/great-green-wall/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>15</sup> The Telegraph, Africa's Great Green Wall, 14 June 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/great-green-wall/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>16</sup> The Telegraph, Boko Haram adopts 'hearts and minds' strategy in Nigeria – inspired by Isis, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/boko-haram-adopts-hearts-minds-strategy-nigeria-inspired-isis/> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Telegraph, Conflicts displace more than 660,000 people in less than two months, 22 May 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/conflicts-displace-660000-people-less-two-months/> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Telegraph, Ministers should focus on better defining British objectives in the Sahel, 22 July 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/22/ministers-should-focus-better-defining-british-objectives-sahel/> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Independent, I visited Nigeria's camps as an aid worker and saw the devastating potential of a coronavirus outbreak, 25 June 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-africa-nigeria-aid-work-red-cross-a9583076.html> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Independent, Thanks to coronavirus, Boko Haram is making a comeback, 17 April 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/voices/coronavirus-boko-haram-nigeria-niger-cameroon-chad-a9470861.html> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Independent, Nigeria's conflict could turn to genocide if left unchecked, 15 June 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/nigeria-boko-haram-isis-violence-christian-muslim-coronavirus-a9566451.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

The ten articles that focused on Islamist militant group activity and counter insurgency efforts by governments in the region were usually prompted by recent violent events carried out by non-state armed groups. The articles outlined the aftermath of incidents but also were frequently critical and doubtful of governments' from the region capacity to deal with the internal conflict and its subsequent humanitarian impacts, for example the issue that military counter attacks will only escalate violence and displacement was raised in one article,<sup>17</sup> and in another, the Nigerian military's position that they are succeeding in the campaign against Boko Haram was criticised.<sup>18</sup> The articles also often drew out political dynamics occurring regionally and internationally to deal with jihadi violence, such as regional and international commitments.<sup>19</sup> The articles normally mentioned the humanitarian impact from armed conflict, such as mass internal displacement, the creation of refugees, a lack of aid, human rights abuses, and poor education, but they frequently did not provide perspectives from those directly affected by the conflict, but used statistics instead;<sup>20</sup> noticeably in six of the articles, the spokespersons quoted merely included NGO representatives, international organisation representative, or government officials, and not victims of internal conflict. However, one article, an opinion piece, heavily portrayed individual stories of those directly affected by armed conflict by having two internally displaced spokespersons quoted.<sup>21</sup> Compared to other articles, this article was therefore able to discuss in some detail the systemic causes that lead and continue to fuel Islamic militant group power in the Lake Chad region, such as poor governance, poor living conditions, and gender issues, revealing instability in the area as not purely a one-dimensional terrorist ideological issue.

Out of the five articles which were not concentrated on terrorist events, three were independent opinion or comment pieces written by independent contributors, highlighting that the Guardian day-to-day coverage predominately focuses on terrorist related activities in the region, rather than wider socio-economic, environmental, political and humanitarian issues in the area. This coverage pattern aligns with the concept that in the context of the Lake Chad region western readers are preoccupied with Islamist militant group advances, as this relates to the Northern hemisphere security concerns, and readers are less concerned with West African instability as a stand-alone issue. Furthermore, out of the five articles, two of the articles only mentioned the Lake Chad crisis; briefly. Additionally, three of the articles were prompted after an event of Western significance, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and/or an international report or an independent report from a western organisation.<sup>22</sup> This displays that media interest is usually reactionary to Western-centric events.

### 3.2. BBC coverage

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<sup>17</sup> The Guardian, Fears for civilians in Chad after army suffers devastating Boko Haram attack, 1 April 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/fears-for-civilians-in-chad-after-army-suffers-devastating-boko-haram-attack> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>18</sup> The Guardian, Jihadists take hundreds hostage during raid in north-east Nigeria, 19 August 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/19/jihadists-take-hundreds-hostage-during-raid-in-north-east-nigeria> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>19</sup> The Guardian, Fears for civilians in Chad after army suffers devastating Boko Haram attack, 1 April 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/fears-for-civilians-in-chad-after-army-suffers-devastating-boko-haram-attack> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Guardian, More than 70 soldiers feared killed in ambush in Niger, 11 December 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/11/more-than-70-soldiers-feared-killed-in-ambush-in-niger> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>20</sup> The Guardian, Jihadists take hundreds hostage during raid in north-east Nigeria, 19 April 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/19/jihadists-take-hundreds-hostage-during-raid-in-north-east-nigeria> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Guardian, Fears for civilians in Chad after army suffers devastating Boko Haram attack, 1 April 2020, available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/01/fears-for-civilians-in-chad-after-army-suffers-devastating-boko-haram-attack> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Guardian, More than 70 soldiers feared killed in ambush in Niger, 11 December 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/11/more-than-70-soldiers-feared-killed-in-ambush-in-niger> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>21</sup> The Guardian, What would make a woman go back to Boko Haram? Despair, 14 Jan 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/14/woman-boko-haram-nigeria-militant-group> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>22</sup> The Guardian, West Africa facing food crisis as coronavirus spreads, 15 May 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/15/west-africa-facing-food-crisis-as-coronavirus-spreads> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Guardian, Lake Chad shrinking? It's a story that masks serious failures of governance, 8 September 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/oct/22/lake-chad-shrinking-story-masks-serious-failures-of-governance> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Guardian, With total control, President Déby is Chad's greatest threat to stability, 14 August 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/14/president-deby-chad-greatest-threat-to-stability> [accessed 20 August 2020].

Within the sample, Lake Chad crisis was reported roughly 13 times in English language online BBC articles, displaying modest reporting on the region and indicating a lack of reader engagement in the Lake Chad crisis. Eleven articles were largely focused on security issues related to jihadi groups in the region and related government responses. One article discussed the Chad basin in the context of the environment and one article discussed the region in relation to social issues such as education levels and gender inequality.

The articles which were focused on security issues often reported on Islamist armed group and government clashes and their direct consequences. These articles highlighted the devastation caused by groups like Boko Haram, using statistics of killings and displacement,<sup>23</sup> but the articles also provided critical perspectives on governments and militaries part to play in diminishing the internal conflict. For example, one article criticised the Multi-National Joint Task Force capacity,<sup>24</sup> whilst another article provided allegations of corrupt Nigerian soldiers, suggesting that some state forces and soldiers are sabotaging counter insurgency efforts and are cultivating abandoned land instead of returning internally displaced people to their homes.<sup>25</sup> Articles which were not focused on clashes, were concentrated on government actions to tackle terrorism and often suggested adverse behaviour from government forces. One article suggested that the Chad government are committing human rights abuses against detainees, while providing the guise that victims are Boko Haram militants,<sup>26</sup> and another suggests that children with links to Boko Haram are being unlawfully detained.<sup>27</sup> Two other articles reported on the Nigerian government shutting down a local media outlet due to sensitive military information being released, however it was suggested the government action was actually motivated by the newspaper reporting on military losses, highlighting issues of freedom of speech.<sup>28</sup> Whilst articles provided a broad view by examining government actions, thereby highlighting possible sources of civilian alienation, as well as attacks from armed groups, articles were limited in that they did not provide voices of those directly affected by the internal conflict, therefore readers were not led to empathise, and were not exposed to the complexity of the situation, linking the political, social and environmental issues to internal conflict and the humanitarian crisis.

One article discussed the Lake Chad region in the context of refugees globally being at risk from extreme weather.<sup>29</sup> The article highlights that refugee populations, such as those fleeing conflict from the Lake Chad conflict, are at a double vulnerability due to global warming, as they often come from regions which are more sensitive to climate change. Refugee camps are often threatened by extreme weather events like flooding and refugees may therefore be displaced again, further people are often unwilling to return to their homes after displacement if their homes have been affected by extreme weather. This article draws out the tight relationship between climate change, conflict and forced displacement. Noticeably this article is not concentrated on the Lake Chad region but uses the region as an example for a broader pattern in Africa and Asia, therefore environmental issues related to the Lake Chad Basin is covered rarely and non-vigorously. Similarly, one article which discussed broad social issues in the Sub-Sahara such as poor education for girls, which can lead to radicalisation, does not mention Lake Chad directly, but uses Cameroon as an example of the larger phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, social issues in the Lake Chad region were also not covered by BBC articles in depth.

### 3.3. The Telegraph (UK)

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<sup>23</sup> BBC, Lake Chad attack: 'Dozens of fishermen' killed near Cameroon border, 3 January 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-50987123> [accessed 20 August 2020]; BBC, Boko Haram kills troops in 'deadliest' Chad raid, 25 March 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-52038111> [accessed 20 August 2020]; BBC, Fifty bodies found after suspected Boko Haram attack in Cameroon, 2 January 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w172wn364cj5c34> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>24</sup> BBC, Lake Chad attack: 'Dozens of fishermen' killed near Cameroon border, 3 January 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-50987123> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>25</sup> BBC, Nigeria Boko Haram: Governor says battle against militants being sabotaged, 2 August 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-53632643> [accessed 20 August 2020]

<sup>26</sup> BBC, Chad inquiry finds 44 prisoners died in hot, overcrowded cell, 9 August 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-53712951> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>27</sup> BBC, Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis: Military denies detaining thousands of children, 10 September 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49653414> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>28</sup> BBC, Nigeria soldiers raid paper 'over Boko Haram article', 6 January 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-46776850> [accessed 20 August 2020]; BBC, Nigeria's Daily Trust undermined security, army says, 7 January 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-46780701> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>29</sup> BBC, Refugees at 'increase risk' from extreme weather, 10 December 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-50692857> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>30</sup> BBC, Third of the world's poorest girls denied access to school, 20 January 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51176678> [accessed 20 August 2020].

Within the sample, the Lake Chad crisis was reported approximately 13 times online in The Telegraph UK, thereby providing modest coverage. Eight articles mainly focused on reporting and discussing terrorism in the region by Boko Haram and ISWAP. Whilst, two articles had a heavy focus on climate change and related insecurity, and another two articles, in the context of the Lake Chad region, focused on health care, particularly the eradication of polio. One article focused on the global rise of refugees and noted the Lake Chad crisis as a contributor to the phenomenon.

The eight articles that focused on jihadi group activity in the Lake Chad region often also discussed western intervention to the conflict. For example one article discussed the fragility of the Lake Chad region in relation to whether the UK should deploy troops to the West Africa,<sup>31</sup> and another article discussed the opportunist growth of Boko Haram due to the COVID-19 pandemic, questioning whether foreign powers should help African governments with this issue.<sup>32</sup> Two articles reported on the large 2020 loss to the Chadian army due to a Boko Haram attack, and the counter offensive response to this event, interestingly Chad's army is heavily relied on by the US and France, therefore the army's strength is a significant interest to the North, this was noted in one of the articles.<sup>33</sup> Out of all the eight articles only one provided perspectives of those directly affected by the internal conflict,<sup>34</sup> all the other articles merely provided spokespersons who were from NGOs or international organisations, or were experts or government officials. The article that provided a testimony from someone captured by Boko Haram was able to highlight a key issue within the region, gender-based violence.<sup>35</sup> Notably, articles that focused on jihadi group activity were often reactionary to western centric events. For example one article was written shortly after a UK foreign secretary visit to the region,<sup>36</sup> one article was written after a UN announcement for worldwide peace during the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>37</sup> and another article was written following UK political commitments to open embassies in Chad and support peacekeeping in the region.<sup>38</sup>

The two articles which focused on the climate emergency in the region linked climate issues to conflict insecurity and social issues in the region, such as famine, poverty and emigration. The articles were able to draw on the multifaceted nature of the crisis and provide a wider context for displacement and internal conflict compared to the articles which mainly focused on jihadi activity. One article was able to compellingly convey the depth of the crisis by providing several testimonies by those directly affected by climate related issues and terrorism.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly the same article spent some time discussing refugees from the region coming to Europe, however most displaced people from the region seek refuge in neighbouring countries,<sup>40</sup> this reporting focus highlights the western readers preoccupation with large migration flows from the south to the north.

### 3.4. The Independent (UK)

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<sup>31</sup> The Telegraph, Ministers should focus on better defining British objectives in the Sahel, 22 July 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/22/ministers-should-focus-better-defining-british-objectives-sahel/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>32</sup> The Telegraph, A deadly alliance: coronavirus makes Boko Haram more dangerous than ever, 7 June 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/deadly-alliance-coronavirus-makes-boko-haram-dangerous-ever/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>33</sup> The Telegraph, Islamists kill 92 soldiers in Chad in deadliest attack on country's military, 25 March 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/25/islamists-kill-92-soldiers-chad-one-deadliest-attack-five-year/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>34</sup> The Telegraph, Escape from Boko Haram, 1 June 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/escape-from-boko-haram/> [accessed 20 August 2020]

<sup>35</sup> The Telegraph, Escape from Boko Haram, 1 June 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/escape-from-boko-haram/> [accessed 20 August 2020]

<sup>36</sup> The Telegraph, Boko Haram adopts 'hearts and minds' strategy in Nigeria – inspired by Isil, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/boko-haram-adopts-hearts-minds-strategy-nigeria-inspired-isil/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>37</sup> The Telegraph, Conflicts displace more than 660,000 people in less than two months, 22 May 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/conflicts-displace-660000-people-less-two-months/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>38</sup> The Telegraph, Ministers should focus on better defining British objectives in the Sahel, 22 July 2020, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/22/ministers-should-focus-better-defining-british-objectives-sahel/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>39</sup> The Telegraph, Africa's Great Green Wall, 14 June 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/great-green-wall/> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>40</sup> IOM, New Report Outlines Displacement, Human Mobility Figures in Lake Chad Basin, 22 March 2019, available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/new-report-outlines-displacement-human-mobility-figures-lake-chad-basin> [accessed 20 August 2020].

Within the sample, the Lake Chad crisis was reported approximately 5 times online in The Independent UK, highlighting very limited coverage of the region. Three of the articles were opinion or comment pieces written by individual contributors, further emphasising limited reporting of the Lake Chad crisis day-to-day.

The two articles which were not opinion or comment pieces discussed Lake Chad either in the context of terrorist attacks, or the humanitarian impacts of such attacks/conflict, and the government's limited ability to prevent them.<sup>41</sup> This day-to-day reporting pattern from the media outlet indicates that in the context of this region, western readers are mainly interested in Islamist militant groups advances. Notably, both these articles did not provide perspectives from those directly affected by the conflict through a lack of civilian spokespersons, this makes it difficult for readers to understand conflict in the region in its wider multifaceted context, and making it harder to comprehend and empathise with the devastation the crisis is causing local people.

The three articles which were an opinion or comment piece, were written and published prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>42</sup> and/or the anniversary of the Chibok girl kidnapping,<sup>43</sup> which is famous on the international stage, or by the release of a UK report on the region.<sup>44</sup> This displays that writing on the area is usually reactionary to Western-centric events.

### 3.5. Al Jazeera

Within the sample, the Lake Chad crisis was reported approximately 27 times in English language Al Jazeera online publications. Out of all of the international newspapers examined, Al Jazeera had the most extensive media coverage of the crisis, which is unsurprising given its reputation in reporting Arab world news, including issues in Africa.<sup>45</sup> Twenty four articles of these articles were predominately focused on Boko Haram related damage in the region. Two articles discussed international relations linked to the humanitarian crisis. One article which was an independent opinion piece published on the website which focused on climate change and connected socio-economic and political issues in the region. Two articles explored how international organisations and foreign aid can alleviate the crisis.

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<sup>41</sup> The Independent, World News in Brief – Suspected Boko Haram Fighters Kill 81 in Nigeria, 11 June 2020, available at:

<sup>42</sup> The Independent, I visited Nigeria's camps as an aid worker and saw the devastating potential of a coronavirus outbreak, 25 June 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-africa-nigeria-aid-work-red-cross-a9583076.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>43</sup> The Independent, Thanks to coronavirus, Boko Haram is making a comeback, 17 April 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/voices/coronavirus-boko-haram-nigeria-niger-cameroon-chad-a9470861.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>44</sup> The Independent, Nigeria's conflict could turn to genocide if left unchecked, 15 June 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/nigeria-boko-haram-isis-violence-christian-muslim-coronavirus-a9566451.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>45</sup> Al Jazeera, Who we are, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/#:~:text=Al%20jazeera%20is%20an%20independent,part%20by%20the%20Qatari%20government.&text=Launched%20in%201996%2C%20Al%20jazeera,comprehensive%20news%20and%20live%20debate> [accessed 20 August 2020].

The articles preoccupied with jihadi armed group activity were usually prompted by and reported on recent violent events carried out by Boko Haram, and counterinsurgency attacks, although ISWAP attacks are also reported, but less frequently. Some of the articles also mentioned or focused on political announcements, such as the withdrawal of troops, tributes to the deceased or summits with terrorism on the agenda. Spokespersons quoted over the course of the 24 articles, and figures of deaths, were usually provided by government or military officials from the country/area, although some articles provided NGO sources. Moreover, those directly affected by the conflict were infrequently given a voice in the articles therefore could not provide different perspectives to the military and voice the humanitarian impacts of the situation. However, the statistical evidence of the number of those internally displaced was often quoted in articles, and spokespersons from NGOs and international organisations commented on humanitarian issues.<sup>46</sup> An overall lack of voice given to local civilians deters from the Lake Chad crisis being a humanitarian crisis and centralises it more as a purely internal conflict between government forces and non-state armed groups. Furthermore, jihadi group power and the severity of their adverse humanitarian impact was rarely related to other social and environmental issues within the region such as environmental degradation, poverty, and poor governance. Interestingly, an article which did draw on a civilian testimony was able to emphasise human suffering and also demonstrate that human rights issues caused by Boko Haram, such as missing persons, is exacerbated by poor administration.<sup>47</sup>

The one article, an opinion piece, which discussed Lake Chad in the context of the climate emergency, used the Lake Chad crisis as an example of the relationship between climate change and forced migration.<sup>48</sup> The article took a globalised view of the phenomenon highlighting that corporations which benefit from climate change must be addressed in order to tackle some of the root causes of forced migration. The article advocated for better activism to address these companies, thereby providing western-centric solutions to the issues. However, as the article was an opinion piece it does not reflect Al Jazeera's official coverage of the region, thereby displaying daily reporting is less concerned with environmental issues in the Lake Chad region but is most attentive to terrorist activity and related humanitarian impacts and political discourse.

### 3.6. The Washington Post (US)

Within the sample, the Lake Chad crisis was reported approximately 9 times online in the Washington Post, displaying limited coverage on the region. All articles had a heavy focus on security issues in the region related to jihadi group activity.

Most of the articles or segments of articles relating to Lake Chad were prompted by and reported on recent violent events carried out by Boko Haram or ISWAP, and counterinsurgency attacks, and outlined the immediate aftermath of the incidents. Mainly these events were briefly outlined in the World Digest section. However, two articles are more in-depth and explain how jihadi groups have taken hold of areas in Western Africa, although they only mention Boko Haram and the Lake Chad region in passing as an example of such activity.<sup>49</sup> Yet these articles sought to explore the complexity of internal conflict between government forces and armed Islamist groups, relating the growth of non-state armed groups to wider social and political issues such as weak national governance, alienation and corruption. Moreover, one of these articles highlights possible solutions to armed

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<sup>46</sup> Al Jazeera, Niger: 12 soldiers killed in Boko Haram attack on military base, 20 May 2020, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/niger-12-soldiers-killed-boko-haram-attack-military-base-200520065928212.html> [accessed 20 August 2020]; Al Jazeera, Niger says 75 Boko Haram fighters killed in two operations, 13 May 2020, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/niger-75-boko-haram-fighters-killed-operations-200513115236405.html> [accessed 20 August 2020]; Al Jazeera, Suicide bomber kills nine civilians in western Chad, 20 January 2020, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/suicide-bomber-kills-civilians-western-chad-200120164822101.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>47</sup> Al Jazeera, 22,000 Nigerians missing since Boko Haram crisis began: Red Cross, 12 September 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/22000-nigerians-missing-boko-haram-crisis-began-red-cross-190912131830103.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>48</sup> Al Jazeera, Why climate action needs to target the border industrial complex, 1 November 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/climate-action-target-border-industrial-complex-191029104800226.html> [accessed 20 August 2020].

<sup>49</sup> The Washington Post, How the Jihadists Are Advancing in Western Africa: QuickTake, 14 November 2020, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-jihadists-are-advancing-in-western-africa-quicktake/2019/11/14/722d7542-06ac-11ea-9118-25d6bd37dfb1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-the-jihadists-are-advancing-in-western-africa-quicktake/2019/11/14/722d7542-06ac-11ea-9118-25d6bd37dfb1_story.html) [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Washington Post, How African Jihadists Took Root in Mali and Beyond, 24 August 2020, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-african-jihadists-took-root-in-mali-and-beyond/2020/08/19/402e09ec-e222-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-african-jihadists-took-root-in-mali-and-beyond/2020/08/19/402e09ec-e222-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca_story.html) [accessed 24 August 2020].



group violence and is somewhat critical of increased militarisation.<sup>50</sup> Two articles discussed how Islamist militant groups have exploited the COVID-19 pandemic for growth and to create instability, these articles only mention Boko Haram and Lake Chad as examples of the phenomenon.<sup>51</sup> None of the articles provide voices from those directly affected by the internal conflict, thereby deterring from humanitarian impacts of the situation and preventing reader empathy.

This coverage pattern aligns with the concept that in the context of the Lake Chad region western readers are mainly preoccupied with Islamist militant group advances, as this relates to the Northern hemisphere security concerns. Whilst the Lake Chad crisis as a stand-alone humanitarian crisis, underlined with socio-political and environmental issues, is not of reader interest.

#### 4. Conclusion

Overall, the article sample displays on average a low level of reporting regarding the Lake Chad Crisis. Although Al Jazeera notably is an anomaly, reporting frequently on Lake Chad Basin events. What all the media outlets do have in common is their limited scope in coverage, with newspapers mainly preoccupied with attention grabbing terrorist attacks carried out by prolific groups and their short-term consequences. Rather than concentrating on wider systemic issues in the region, such as underlying environmental issues, and poor governance of local and displaced populations, which fuel internal conflict and exacerbate the existing humanitarian issues. This highlights a western-centric position in reporting, as in the North there is a huge public interest in jihadi terrorism, given its threat to the West's security. Further, what seems to link most media outlets is their deficiency in bringing local voices and perspectives to the forefront of articles. This would be helpful in helping readers empathise as well as understand how terrorism and immediate human impacts fit into longer-term underlying problems within the region, revealing a historic legacy of colonialism and ongoing poor governance. Although understandably, accessibility may be contributing to restrictive journalism, given the volatility and tight controls in the region.

Distinctly, what the sample shows is that media outlets like the Guardian, BBC and the Washington Post do well in, compared to Al Jazeera, cast a critical eye on Basin governments, in questioning whether their immediate responses to insurgency attacks best serve local populations, or actually does more harm than good. For example, journalists often query whether army capacity exists to effectively curtail conflict, rather than escalate causalities, and whether army tactics are always legitimate. Further, whilst media outlets official articles may be focused primarily on security related issues, they are valuable in creating a platform for opinions pieces, this can be seen in the Guardian and the Independent.

Journalists and international media outlets have the responsibility to report more vigorously on the Lake Chad Crisis, and give voices to those directly affected, as the crisis is one of the top ten worse humanitarian problems in the world and the region has been suffering silently on the international stage for many years with little improvement. Additionally, there are a lot of lessons to be learned from the Lake Chad regions in understanding how climate and environment related issues like water insecurity and food insecurity can feed into growing internal conflicts, the rise of terrorist groups and gender inequality, and it is important to have these insights in a more climate insecure world. Better reporting regarding the Lake Chad region would equip international readers with the empathy and knowledge to call on governments, international organisations and NGOs to address the crisis and improve the lives of millions of citizens. Better media coverage would also expose poor governance and make the Lake Chad governments more accountable to its citizens and international donors. Ultimately, the power of good journalism is required to create positive change.

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<sup>50</sup> The Washington Post, How African Jihadists Took Root in Mali and Beyond, 24 August 2020, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-african-jihadists-took-root-in-mali-and-beyond/2020/08/19/402e09ec-e222-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-african-jihadists-took-root-in-mali-and-beyond/2020/08/19/402e09ec-e222-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca_story.html) [accessed 24 August 2020].

<sup>51</sup> The Washington Post, The Daily 202: Trump's warning to Iran underscores risk of global instability amid coronavirus pandemic, 2 April 2020, Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2020/04/02/daily-202-trump-s-warning-to-iran-underscores-risk-of-global-instability-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/5e856a6f88e0fa101a758903/> [accessed 20 August 2020]; The Washington Post, Violence imperils coronavirus response in conflict zones around the world, 4 April 2020, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/violence-imperils-coronavirus-response-in-conflict-zones-around-the-world/2020/04/03/7def6c08-72bf-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/violence-imperils-coronavirus-response-in-conflict-zones-around-the-world/2020/04/03/7def6c08-72bf-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc_story.html) [accessed 20 August 2020].

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