

Boko Haram in the Far North Region of Cameroon – What Next?

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Abstract- Eradicating Boko Haram necessitates stopping ideology and the respect of religious order (fatwa) of radical leaders. The death of the brutal and ruthless leader Shekau, appeals for the development of a new grand strategy. A strategy which needs to prone education, provide scholarship for youths to study abroad and come and resonate the dangers of terrorism to their communities. Though the multinational joint task force can exploit the split within the group, but the focus remains combating emerging trends. This paper provides directives, which aim to support governments in the region in their efforts to devise policies. To assess the opportunities and challenges facing the proper implementation of the regional strategy, two perspectives must be considered: national policies and strategies and community experiences. For both, a regional and foreign dimension shapes and influences policies, strategies, and approaches. The paper equally points out the necessity for disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRRR) of former Boko Haram associates.

Keywords- Boko Haram, Terrorism, Jihad, Sokoto Caliphate

Introduction

Jihad is not a new word in the vocabulary of the Nigerian government, neither that of Cameroon. Usman Dan Fodio's Sokoto caliphate, is still studied in African history, as well as his aspirant Modibo Adama in Northern Cameroon. The re-emergence of radical religious movements such as Boko Haram, demands new Grand strategy, not only for Nigeria, but countries along the Lake Chad basin, like Cameroon which has been the second most affected country since 2014. Just as in the 19th century where Dan Fodio exploited Cameroon with his flag bearer

(Modibo Adama), Boko Haram militants mapped Cameroonian territory as a sanctuary, a logistical hub, there by recruiting vulnerable natives, due to lack of socio-economic necessities, and as well exploiting porous borders and cultural links¹. Arms caches discovered in northern Cameroon and presumed to be destined for Boko Haram revealed that Cameroonian territory along the trafficking pipeline from Chad and beyond are hotspot for terrorism. Mapping from N'Djamena to Cameroon, which weapons transited along the Logone and Chari rivers (Kousséri-Goulfey-Bodo) towards Nigeria, through Mayo-Sava (Banki, Amchide, Kerawa, Kolofata) or the Mayo-Tsanaga (Mora, Mémé, Mayo Moskota) departments².

Boko Haram was initially a Nigeria security menace, as per messaging and actions of Shekau, ignoring Cameroon. The dynamics changed with, when Boko Haram conducted her first attacks in Cameroon, which was financially oriented. The group abducted four individuals in 2013-14 and placed ransom at more than US\$20 million in total (Omar S Mahmood and Ndubuisi Christian Ani, 2018). By 2014, the group began recruiting Cameroonian youths, to join and follow the global jihad ideology³. Indoctrination, financial and material incentives, are major causes which facilitates aspirants to join, while in most cases men, women and children, at times whole villages, were abducted and taken to group hideouts and forced to become crusaders by creating a climate of fear. This correlates the assession of a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross, there are more than 300 empty villages along the Nigerian border, from Darak to Bourha, because villagers deserted their community for fear of being forcibly enlisted, a situation which persists till date⁴.

Terrorism spot in Cameroon under militant influence include, but not limited to the Mandara Mountains and the southern approaches to Lake Chad – encompassing the Mayo-Tsanaga, Mayo-Sava, and Logone-et-Chari departments of the Far North region. Militants surprise usually perpetrate attacks on motorbikes in northern Cameroon, speed of execution enables the militants to hindered medical assistance to victims, as they equally place mining of certain roads. The group has diversified her targets; citizens, markets, bus stations, and places of worship with shootings, suicide bombings, and abductions (Ekwueme & Obayi, 2012).

¹ Omar S Mahmood and Ndubuisi Christian Ani, Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram. ISS Research report, July 2018

² Ibid 1

³ Boko Haram plans more attacks, recruits many young people, AFP, 8 August 2014, www.vanguardngr.com/2014/08/bokoharam-plans-attacks-recruits-many-young-people/.

⁴ Ibid1

Landscape of terrorism in Far North Region

The genesis of Boko Haram in Cameroon goes back to 2012, when it engaged in jihadist tendencies in many localities, with focus theft of cattle, small ruminants, food stuffs and destruction of heavy equipment difficult to transport (PAM Cameroun, 2014, p. 2). From 2013, the group engaged in asymmetric warfare with countries of the Lake Chad Basin, through abductions, assaults, drugs and vehicle trafficking. Following the historical scope of Far North Region of Cameroon to jihad in the 19th century, the area was submerged with jihadist tendencies of the bystander. The year 2014 was one of the most catastrophic years, with almost a hundred attacks which resulted several casualties and enormous material damage (PAM Cameroun, 2014, p. 2). In early January of 2015, more than 80 people were abducted (IRIN News, 2015), leading to migration and population density in urban areas, following the declaration of war on Boko Haram by the President of Cameroon at the security summit in France, in 2014.

Human survival has ruptured in Northern Cameroon, with increase in frequency and unpredictable jihadist tendencies, such as suicide bombing on soft targets like markets, churches, mosques and schools further degenerated the situation. This has not only impacted on cross-border trade between boarding villages, but also the menace of insurgent infiltration. According to Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), the economic implications of cross-board trade is strategic in a region that derives more than 60% of its income from trans-border trade with Nigeria and Chad (IRIN News, 2015). More so, about 70% of farmers in the Far North's three most affected divisions, Mayo-Sava, Mayo-Tsanaga, and Logone and Chari deserted their farms, due to the security menace pose by Boko Haram (IRIN News, 2015).

Moreover, prices of basic necessities, such as corn, sorghum and petrol, rose by 20 to 80 percent from March 2014, according to MINADER. Education equally dropped, as most families flee, most youth find it difficult to go back to school because of the menace on their lives and teachers, which the illiterate are easily recruited in to the group. Though tens of thousands of Nigerian refugees taking refuge in the Minawao refugee camp within the Far North Region of Cameroon fleeing from Boko Haram's operations, youths are the most affected group, due to poverty, unemployment, limited educational infrastructure and the search for better livelihood opportunities (Schrieder & Knerr, 2000).

Boko Haram activities in the Far North Region of Cameroon

The 19th century jihad of Usman Dan Fodio, which established the Sokoto Caliphate, is an inspiration to Boko Haram (though his flag bearer, Modibo Adama failed in his conquest in Northern Cameroon). The resurgence of jihadist

tendencies in Far North Region of Cameroon in 2019, by BH, ISIS-WA, is mostly attributed to socio-economic aspects. Amnesty International report of December 11, 2019 stated that, BH and ISIS-WA assassinated 275, twice the number in 2018. Civilian casualties were recorded in villages on the western border with Nigeria and in the northern tip of the Far North Region, within the Lake Chad Basin. They carried out ambushes, abductions, targeted killings of vigilance committee members and not exempting soldiers and military posts.

In 2019, ISIS-WA perpetrated attack villages and security forces in the northern tip of the Far North Region, June attack on Darak Island near Lake Chad that resulted in at least 24 deaths, 16 of which were security forces. ISIS-WA fighters hoisted their black flag in localities within the region. By May 2019, the cross-border of Nigeria at Amchide, Far North Region, was re-opened, since its closure in 2014⁵. However, President Paul Biya provided financial and logistical support to vigilante committees engaged in the fight against BH and ISIS-WA and as well reconfigured the rehabilitation and reintegration center for BH recruits in Far North Region, ex-combatants abandoned BH and surrendered to security forces.

Cameroon reconfigured its CT cooperation with the international community. Over the course of the year, Cameroon contributed to Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) operations, in domain of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance flights by two U.S.-donated C 208 Cessnas. Cameroon also maintained her membership with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). Countering terrorist menace demurs top security priority on the table of Cameroon military machine's boss, who since 2019, cooperate with the United States and its Department of Justice and the Global Center for Cooperative Security.

Jihadist tendencies in Far North Region of Cameroon, is recurrent because of inadequate surveillance, inadequate cooperation and provision of governmental services to traditional authorities, religious leaders and native, and porous borders. In collaboration with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), established in 2012 to enhance military cooperation to combat the threat posed by Boko Haram, community grievances and development challenges need to be addressed.

Militarization of northern Cameroon

In 1994, the General Assembly's Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, out pin in its resolution 49/60, stated that terrorism is but not limited to "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in

⁵ Read, Cameroon-United States Department of States report on Cameroon. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1322836/download>

the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes” and that such acts “are in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the motives, be it political, ideological, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.” However, the 1999 International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004) describes “criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages⁶, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act”.

Linking a religious narrative to political motivation is disastrous for a country engulfed with several security menace in different poles (like Cameroon) in North West and South West regions, secessionists, in the East Region linking Central African Republic are Séléka rebel group, and in Far North of region is Boko Haram. Reflecting on political divergences in-country and attributing jihadist tendencies in the Far North Region of Cameroonians to northern Muslim compatriots as a menace to the 38-year presidency of Paul Biya, undermining national stability. Most civil society actors and citizens welcome Cameroon’s robust military response.

Authorities in Yaoundé, Cameroon’s capital some 800km to the south, reconfigure her security protocol, and grand strategy in the Far North. At the beginning, about 2,000 troops of the expanding Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR, an elite force of US- and Israeli-trained commandos) were deployed alongside regular units of the army to protect the region’s territorial boundary. Police and gendarmerie units created across the region, often deployed alongside the BIR or regular army units during search and seize operations against suspected Boko Haram flag bearers.

US affirm her support by assisting in surveillance drones at the set up Cameroon Air Force base at Garoua. Drones help in minimizing military and civilian casualties, though in situation of asymmetric warfare, traditional military tactics are also required. The shift to asymmetric combat is challenging to state machinery to quickly adapt, react and prevent, and the rate of attacks is increasing along the border and small localities are ... The influx of strangers has infused urban anonymity with intense mutual suspicion, a fear of crowds about possible detonations, such as in Mora and Fotokol reminded residents that northern Cameroon remains a battleground.

⁶ Read, UN’s narrative on restoring peace in the world ; <https://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sc8214.doc.htm>

In terms of under-served populations, number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and paucity of infrastructure, the remote districts within Logone et Chari département north of Waza National Park are the most critical; in 2016 for example, the number of displaced rose from 110,000 in June-July to over 150,000 in August. While in January 2017, the Far North Region hosted over 191,000 IDPs, 23,000 unregistered refugees, and 35,000 returning Cameroonians from Nigeria. Survival is based on ethnicity and ecology of the community, that is transhumance patterns adapted to Sahel ecology, grazing and watering areas around Lake Chad, shared by neighbouring countries (Niger-Nigeria-Cameroon-Chad) along the twelfth parallel. Commercially these pastoral movements are distinct from trade practices in the southern half of the Far North Region below Waza National Park, and from the rest of the country and border closures and insecurity have interrupted these routes for herding communities, crowding them into agricultural areas and sparking tension.

Challenges in combating Boko Haram

Civil-military relation is a vital step in terms of humanitarian assistance and eradication of terrorist groups, with asymmetric warfare tactics⁷. Though local and international NGO perceive the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) menace on number of human rights, in particular the rights to life, liberty and physical integrity. The impact of jihadist tendencies equally, undermine civil society, threaten peace and security, and hamper social and economic development. However, the BIR is legit on legal principles, with proper respect of counter terrorism principles, human rights and state prescriptions, as per the General Assembly resolutions concerning terrorism since December 1972, which address measures to eliminate international terrorism as well as the relationship between terrorism and human rights. It further emphasizes that, States must ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism comply with their obligations to international norms.

The complicity of economic desperation evinces the psychosocial trauma of asymmetric war, which many believe exceeds the more direct terror inflicted by Boko Haram. However, the operational shift toward greater synergy, coordination and collaboration between the UN system and its state, as well as military counterparts across the Far North Region, has reconfigured humanitarian assistance, direct access and mobility for relief agencies.

Border closure deprive Boko Haram of supplies, particularly fuel, though leaving youth unemployed and desperate for cash. This create small militant or armed

⁷ Read; CIVIL-MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN COLLABORATION DILEMMAS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN, A UNDP STABILISATION POLICY PAPER, 2021

bandits attacking villages and vehicles for survival. Border closure, coupled with no education and lack of basic necessity is quickly exploited by BH, as youth without work, are engaged as informants and fuel smugglers. An open border with Nigeria, with concise security measures, collaboration with local authorities and restore of basic services in areas of greatest displacement, will eventually create conducive conditions for voluntary return of affected populations.

We know from years of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts in complex emergencies that when they fail to identify and incorporate the environmental and structural origins of the grievances that triggered militarization, reintegration programs will yield negative impact, from mass recidivism to mercenaries. In the case of northern Cameroon, it is less a threat of ideological hardening against the state than a crisis of responsive institutions. For not only are political vacuums readily filled by negative forces, but they accelerate popular disenfranchisement and breed grievances that can turn ideological and militant. One of the major aspects for proper humanitarian action is civil-military approach to authorities and locals as they return to more secure areas, but secondly it serves as an essential condition for successful community reintegration. Nonetheless, major prerequisite for voluntary return by IDPs is that physical security (safety plus ability to farm and circulate) is the primary concern, followed by the provision of education and health services in areas of origin.

Countering Violent Extremism in the Far North Region

The Security Council on 28 September 2001, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, adopted resolution 1373 (2001), which attest the effective implementation of the universal anti-terrorism instruments as a top priority. It equally poses that, every act of terrorism constitutes a “threat to international peace and security” and that the “acts, methods, and practices of terrorism are contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.” The resolution also requested states to criminalize terrorist acts; to penalize acts of support for or in preparation of terrorist offences; to criminalize terrorist financing; to depoliticize terrorist offences; to freeze funds of persons who commit or attempt to commit terrorist acts; and to strengthen international cooperation in criminal matters.

Cameroon is a major actor in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism along the border of West and Central Africa, respecting resolutions of the UN security council. With strict focus on UN security council prescriptions, which is kin on disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRRR) and screening, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (SPRR) approaches, Cameroon continues to defend her sovereignty against Boko Haram.

The government have wasted no time to implement resolution 2349, which appeals for the “to development and implementation of a regional and coordinated strategy that encompasses transparent, inclusive, human rights-compliant disarmament, demobilization, de-radicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, in accordance with prosecution strategies, where appropriate, for Boko Haram and ISIL allies.”⁸ Meanwhile, resolution 2396 appeal for the development of prosecution strategies, rehabilitation, and reintegration procedure for suspected terrorists⁹. The program which is part implementation of the regional strategy of the African Union, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

Moreover, it’s worth acknowledging that, the regional strategy was adopted in Abuja on 30 August 2018. Recognizing the interrelated experiences of communities surrounding the Lake Chad Basin, with nine core pillars for action to generate applicable policies and programs geared toward the short- and long-term stabilization and development of the Lake Chad Basin region¹⁰. The third pillar is dedicated to the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRRR) of persons associated with Boko Haram, the strategic objectives for which are elaborated in an annex that provides additional context and definitions of terms. Contrary to the title of the pillar, the annex puts forward an approach consisting of screening, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (SPRR) and explains that disarmament and demobilization efforts do not formally apply to Boko Haram because the group is listed as a terrorist organization by the UN Security Council and nuance over collective agreement has been made with any government to surrender arms voluntarily.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) is a priority in the Far North region, where a number of former terrorists have abandoned Boko Haram and surrendered to security forces. In July, national DDR coordinator Francis Fai Yengo instructed former fighters at a MNJTF camp in Mora, Far North Region, that the government would assist them and support entrepreneurial projects¹¹.

(1) Disarmament: The state, constitute military, accompanied by human rights activists and non-governmental organizations assist in receiving disarm ex-fighters of Boko Haram and armed groups in the Far North Region, collect weapons and munitions voluntarily handed over, assist in the destruction of the

⁸ UN Security Council, S/RES/2349, 31 March 2017, para. 29.

⁹ UN Security Council, S/RES/2396, 21 December 2017, paras. 29–41.

¹⁰ Read, W. Andy Knight, Linking DDR and SSR in post conflict peace-building in Africa: An overview. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228635286_Linking_DDR_and_SSR_in_post_conflict_peace-building_in_Africa_An_overview

¹¹ “Decree No. 2018/719 of 30 November 2018 to Establish the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee,” n.d., <https://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/6765-decree-no-2018-719-of-30-11-2018-nddrc>.

said weapons, munitions and explosives, in conjunction with other relevant government services. Disarmament process will also require, capacity building for municipal and traditional authorities to deliver community-led governance, including in the identification and management of local priorities and needs for conflict prevention and resolution.

(2) Demobilization: The state establishes a program to manage cantonment sites for ex-fighters, providing multifaceted assistance (psychologically), to prepare them for a n eventual return to community livelihood. Demobilization will equally require the involvement of non-governmental actors, civil society and academics in the development and implementation of reintegration strategies.

(3) Reintegration: Taking the necessary steps to de-radicalize ex-fighters; sensitizing and providing multifaceted assistance to home communities to facilitate their reintegration by organizing, training and providing them with tools and means of production and assistance for the creation of income-generating activities. For example, the government launched a “Youth and Stabilization for Peace and Security” project within the Far North Region. The project was geared at promoting tolerance and coexistence, and to finance studies, entrepreneurship for 30,000 youths ages 12 to 25 from six of the municipalities most affected by the security crisis in the Far North Region. A legal framework will be necessary to elaborate specific mechanisms, rule, and procedural management of Ex Boko Haram fighters, providing the responsibilities of various stakeholders and helping ensure proper division of labor in their activities.

Cameroon’s Council of Imams and Muslim Dignitaries organized a three-day seminar in July aimed at building the capacity of 300 imams and preachers on the ills of “religious extremism.” The program was geared at promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence irrespective of religion and educating Muslims that BH’s extremist ideology does not represent Islamic principles. Another strategic tool which can be used to deter religious extremism is information and communication technology, development of alert app and appeal to exploitation of new security trends to track location and identify individuals along Cameroon's border with Nigeria and Chad.

Conclusion

Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) obliges Member States to take a number of measures to prevent terrorist activities and criminalize various forms of jihadi actions, as well as measures that assist and promote collective security, and adhering to international counter-terrorism instruments¹². The resolution also

¹² See, Fact Sheet No. 32 OF Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, ON Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism

examines issues related to immigration and refugee status. For example, States are required to prevent the movement of terrorists by implementing effective border controls and to secure the integrity of identity papers and travel documents (para. 2 (g))¹³. Major counter terrorism operations such as; Operation Thunder 4, Operation Emergence and Operation Boma, recent events in the Far North Region of Cameroon appeal for the expertise of former Chadian president, Idriss Deby. According to conflict resolution specialist Joseph Vincent Ntouda Ebode of the University of Yaounde 2, though Chad's military and tactical contribution, due to their mastery of the Sahel zone, in combating Boko Haram, Cameroon and Nigeria need to remobilize their troops because Boko Haram will intensify attacks since they are aware that Chad has other priorities. The Transitional Military Council in Chad is still to develop new counter terrorism strategy, in order to assist the multinational joint task force fighting Boko Haram.

The death of Abubakar Shekau is a step-in combating Boko Haram, but the major issue is stopping their ideology and respect of radical religious order (Fatwa). Far from solving a problem in the Far North Region, his death is likely to create new wave of attacks. Combatting terrorism in the Far North Region of Cameroon will require the use of technological innovation, collaboration with non-governmental organizations and provision of formal education and uplifting the ban on cross border trade.

From a human rights perspective, the president Paul Biya, disbursed financial assistant to support victims in the context of terrorism, civil-military relationship has also been restructured, as some security officials help in educating community members and also train them on how to secure the community and provide intelligence. Despite a number of human rights challenges in countering terrorism, all Members of the United Nations are obliged to engage joint and separate action in cooperation to achieve the purpose of the organization as per Article 55 of its Charter, which focuses on human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

Though many NGOs have been against 'targeted killing,' shoot-to-kill, which they consider illegitimate and against the law in the face of terrorism. Human rights law already permits the use of lethal force when deemed necessary to save human life. However, shoot-to-kill fuse is still on the table, though it might lead to several debates on legal standards with a vaguely defined license to kill, risking confusion among security officers, belligerents, and civilians, mitigating emerging challenges of terrorism.

¹³ Globalization era has change security dynamics in Cameroon, with the implementation of biometric system of identification (identity cards and passport) to avoid criminal patterns, such as ; cybercrime, identity theft and terrorist activities.

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See, for example, the Charter of the United Nations, Art. 55 (c), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 2, and the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action.

See, in particular, Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1377 (2001); General Assembly resolutions 48/122, 49/185, 50/186, 52/133, 56/160 and 58/174, as well as its Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism (resolution 49/60); Commission on Human Rights resolutions 2001/37 and 2004/44, Human Rights Council resolution 6/28 and its recent resolution on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (28 March 2008).

See Manfred Nowak, U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: CCPR Commentary, 2nd rev. ed. (N.P. Engel, 2005), p. 121

Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 51 (2), and Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, art. 13 (2).

Christopher Greenwood, “International Law and the ‘War against Terrorism’”, *International Affairs*, vol. 78, N° 2 (April 2002), p. 301. In 2001, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights described the terrorist attacks which occurred in the United States on 11 September 2001 as a crime against humanity.

See A/58/40 (vol. I), para. 85 (15).

See “Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions: Report of the Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston” (E/CN.4/2006/53, paras. 44–54) and “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Martin Scheinin” (A/HRC/4/26, paras. 74–78).

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E/CN.4/2006/53, paras. 45 and 51.

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