



## Cameroonian Counterterrorism Experience SWITCHING CONFRONTATION AND INCLUSION INTO INTEGRATION AND REHABILITATION

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Counterterrorism policy includes military strategies, practices and technologies used by the government, military, intelligence, law enforcement agencies and the business sector to combat and eradicate terrorism. To this effect, the government relies on putting into action its strategies through the use of the tools of the national authority to paralyze terrorist groups and affiliated networks, rendering them helpless to practice any violence, terror or fueling and stoking insurgency. The defense and security forces take measures to counter any potential or imminent insurgency by preventing any chaos or sabotage, while confronting the threat of violence that impacts public security. Cameroon has been countering Boko Haram terrorism along its northeastern border with Nigeria since May 2014, when the Paris Security Summit in the Lake Chad Basin took a unanimous decision to fight the said group. Legal provisions have been accordingly amended to legalize the fight against terrorism in Cameroon.

### CONCEPTS AND LEGISLATION

Terrorism has recently been more researched and investigated in the Lake Chad region. The definition of terrorism is also controversial, giving rise to more mixed interpretations. According to Lundberg, the main factors, among others, why an authoritative official definition of terrorism is prevented is that the term is politicized for analytical characteristics of the threat. Others argue that the difficulty in defining terrorism stems from the need to develop a real meaning of the term.

The term 'terrorism' remains vague, although governments and scholars have sought to provide a fitting definition by introducing any manifestation of unconventional violence into its concept. Given the difference in approach, legal interpretation remains the basic and officially recognized definition used by the Cameroonian government. The legislative institution defines terrorism as "the self-association with an individual or

collective institution with the aim of undermining public order, manifested by spreading terror and panic". Terrorism is not limited to the dangerous acts and sabotage operations carried out on the ground; rather, such practices can be a threat or intimidation, hence classified as terrorist, which is the defining position required in the rule of law.

## GOVERNMENTAL REACTIONS

With the terrorist acts ballooning into the far north of Cameroon, the government has taken several measures against this threat. Remarkably enough, although counterterrorism goes in line with the protection of human rights, the government has taken measures that may contradict human rights, including the death penalty. As of December 23 of 2014, Cameroon enacted a law to suppress terrorist acts, stipulating that the suppression of acts of terrorism shall be in accordance with the penal code, the code of criminal procedure and the military judiciary, subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the military courts, punishable by death any person who committed directly or by complicity or connivance any act or threat that causes or may cause death, bodily or material damage, or damage to natural or environmental resources or cultural heritage with the intention of terrorizing people or spreading terror or forcing the victims, the government, or any national or international organization to carry out any action, abstaining from doing any action, adopting or abandoning a position, acting in accordance with certain principles, or preventing the normal performance of public services, or preventing the provision of basic services to people, or creating a crisis among people.

Under the foregoing code is subsumed any support for a person to achieve such goals by providing and using weapons, war materials, microorganisms or other biological agents, especially germs (viruses or bacteria), fungi, toxins, chemical, radioactive or narcotic agents. This also applies to any financial support for acts of terrorism. If these actions, however, target vegetation and animals, the penalty of life imprisonment shall be applied.

The military option was officially announced to confront such disproportionate threat posed by Boko Haram across the region, in addition to adopting other, less coercive methods with the military option. In March 2016, several death sentences were pronounced against people suspected of belonging to Boko Haram.

## CONFRONTATION AND CONTAINMENT

Lake Chad Basin countries, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, have made coordinated efforts to combat Boko Haram with a multinational joint task force. However, such coordination was incomplete and marked with poor planning and financing. On the flip side, extremist fighters regroup, occupy more territory and launch punitive attacks on Cameroonian army positions and borderline locals. The Cameroonian government was not initially quick to respond to the threat of Boko Haram because it is an internal Nigerian problem. However, it soon reached an agreement with the Lake Chad Basin Commission to participate in the military response and coordinate with the multinational joint task force under the auspices of the African Union.

Despite the efforts made in the military issue, a good strategy for fighting the various Boko Haram factions around Lake Chad does not depend on military operations only, but on the ability of the four countries to improve the living conditions of their populations and gain their confidence. This was especially marked following the negative effects of the restrictions imposed after the Marwa attacks in July 2015, such as banning the veil, closing borders, limiting hours for riding motorcycles and taxis and army violations that resulted in increasing social and economic vulnerability, pushing part of the population in general and women in particular to adopt extremism, with many young people joining Boko Haram as was the case of thousands of Cameroonians between 2012 and 2016 out of ideological conviction, opportunistic motives or coercion.

The multinational joint force is now convinced that ideology and doctrine cannot be defeated with missiles and cannons. Therefore, initiatives have been put in place for dialogue between the civilians and the military to seriously develop programs to combat and defuse extremism in tandem with the military action. Under these conditions, and with inspiration gained from David Galula's theory, the Army is now developing a new paradigm for building trust between the civilians and the military.

Accordingly, the military is giving way to soldier doctors, builders and teachers, who help the locals of the areas impacted by the attacks of Boko Haram, looking forward to the return of public services across the country. To further consolidate military gains in fighting Boko Haram and restore lasting peace in the far north, the Cameroonian government has shifted from a security-based approach to one based on social and economic development and fighting religious extremism.

Cameroon launched the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operation. In November 2018, President Paul Biya signed the decree that provides that this program targets Boko Haram fighters in the far north, and the goal thereof is to bring back those who agree to lay down their weapons to civil life. Weapon collection allows ex-combatants to access collection camps and enjoy the support of counter-extremism programs. The constant care of these individuals encourages other members to surrender, enfeebling Boko Haram. The policy of General Bubba revealed great success in pushing many active fighters into voluntary surrender, providing them alternatives while ensuring their protection.

The Vigilance Committees perform essential action in the fight against Boko Haram, such as facilitating the return of Boko Haram members to the state, thankfully, due to the intelligence provided to the defense forces. Returnees were publicly under oath that they would no longer be part of Boko Haram. This procedure is an unconventional and unconvincing pattern of repentance for grieving and bereaved societies that are suddenly required to pardon those who committed violent crimes and greatly harmed people's private and public interests.

## CONCLUSION

Cameroon's counterterrorism policy draws on a set of judicial procedures, and the government's top priority is to defend the integrity and unity of the state's territory. This may explain at first the purely defensive reaction against Boko Haram. By time, the approach of solidarity and coordination between the countries of the Lake Chad Basin has soon come into play with a much stronger edition, relying heavily on the close cooperation with the locals in the civil-military dialogue to limit Boko Haram attacks and reduce human losses, well-aided and supported by the Vigilance Committees.

The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operation whittled away at the terrorist groups along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Islamic teachings calling for tolerance, forgiveness and repentance helped Boko Haram fighters to abandon terrorism. Such new methods of addressing terrorism require a good amount of time to fathom, test and verify their validity even though they lead to tangible results in the short term.

The current positive victories and results enable the reconstruction, education, health and economic development, which are likely to be completed with the return of public services and the Cameroonian state to its neighboring territory to northeastern Nigeria.