



Terrorism in North Region of Cameroon The Challenging Integrated Management

Othman Adma

Lecturer at the University of Maroua, Cameroon

Violent extremism in the North Region of Cameroon has been a reality in Northern Nigeria. Colonial borders between the two states never impeded ethnic, religious, or environmental solidarity between the two peoples. Neighboring Nigeria, the North Region of Cameroon is privileged with significant trade, economic, and social benefits; it also suffers from the same crises: the proliferation of violent extremism and terrorism. Nigerian Boko Haram has reached the North Region, carrying out and financing operations there, recruiting new members, and disseminating radical views.

Boko Haram

The North Regions of Cameroon and North-East Nigeria are torn apart. Their religious and ethnic formulation is constantly changing. Religion in the North Region, Cameroon, has a significant impact on social harmony. However, it is used sometimes as an incentive for violence in Northern Nigeria. The rise of religious fundamentalism and violent extremism in North-East Nigeria had a grave impact on the North Region of Cameroon given how it has been a center for propagating Islam throughout history and a trade route between the two states. The Far North Region of Cameroon is part and parcel of the Sahel Region, which has been affected by fluctuating climate change, desertification, social turmoil, poverty and destitution. This contributed to the infiltration and spread of Boko Haram across the North Region .

Several factors have contributed to further implementation of Boko Haram's terrorist schemes in the region, such as local collaborative networking, social turmoil, security vulnerabilities, poverty, marginalization, and mismanagement. Perhaps this would invite a pressing question: why did the North Region of Cameroon become a target to Boko Haram? The answer entails several aspects highlighted as follows:

Political and Social Factors

Politically, Cameroon regards the insurgence of Boko Haram as a purely Nigerian domestic affair. Accordingly, military retaliation was merely defensive, even though neighboring countries are constantly taking measures to fight Boko Haram's expanding terrorist activity. Cameroonian authorities only started to fight Boko Haram in 2014, even though 2011 marked the onset of the group's terrorist attacks in the Far North Region.

It is necessary to highlight the social aspect of Boko Haram. The group is not keen on recruiting religious scholars, lawmen, pedagogical figures, or public morality officials. Rather, it recruits the poorest strata, particularly young people and students who graduated from traditional religious schools rather than public schools. Boko Haram does not only resort to sentimental religious discourse that uses social grievances to allure angry youths, but also pays off its young members while the government is unable to provide job opportunities and a decent life for thousands of unemployed, frustrated, resentful young people .

Along with the amounts paid by the terrorist group, promises are made of being rewarded in the Hereafter for fighting in its alleged sacred battle. This is one of the reasons behind the religious fundamentalist tendencies of the group.

Economic Factors

The economic situation has been a major factor in the increased violence of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria; it has also led to the deterioration of social services and infrastructure, educational backwardness, increased unemployment, and the decline in agricultural production. Boko Haram has been a direct cause of economic deterioration in the North Region of Cameroon and the region as a whole over the last seven years, given the massacres, assassinations, abductions, slavery, violence, and terrorism perpetrated, as well as other crimes that crippled daily life. The Cameroonian government states that more than half a million people in the Far North Region of Cameroon are in need of urgent food aid following Boko Haram attacks that forced farmers to leave their lands, shut down local markets, and impeded the movement of goods and individuals .

Food insecurity has considerably deteriorated, specifically along the borders, due to the constant flow of Nigerian immigrants who rely on host communities in Cameroon. Midjiyawa Bakari, Governor of the Far North Region, stated that unless farmers are

provided with aids and local markets are restocked with the essential products, the region shall face an impending famine.

Besides, poverty is one major problem confronting Cameroon, especially in the North region. As per Cameroon's Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (DSCE) of 2009, 41% of Cameroonian people live in absolute poverty and the Region faces constant drought, leading to the displacement of herders who lost a huge part of their livestock. Had they found any job opportunities, their income would be completely insufficient. Consequently, those people find themselves compelled to believe in Boko Haram's ideology and in the solutions it provides to end poverty .

Religious Factors

Many analysts suggest that violence mainly results from religious causes. However, it is rooted in deprivation and inequality. Social and economic aspects have contributed to the proliferation of extremism, the emergence of criminal networks, increased panic among citizens, and displacement of thousands of people. Ethnic harmony of such groups, however, resulted in criminal solidarity that led to gang formations .

Boko Haram's ideology promises stability and eradication of social and economic injustices. Thus, violent extremism is adopted by the group as an ideology that employs religion to serve its political agenda, until it sounds rational and acceptable to the public. Given that this has seemingly become the rationale for a reform project, Nigerians looked for a fairer community ruled religiously. They believe that a community is held by a strong people's bond, which maintains its cohesion, regulates its flow, and makes it more just and equitable.

Boko Haram has utilized this desire to recruit a large number of fighters. Between 2002 and 2009, Mohammed Yusuf, former leader of Boko Haram, managed to recruit a large number of youths aged between 17 and 30. Accordingly, many poor families in Northern Nigeria and neighboring countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, sent their children to Yusuf's religious complex, which includes a mosque and a school to disseminate the group's ideology .

Armed Groups

Among the factors behind the upsurge of terrorism in the North Region of Cameroon is the immigration of armed and militant groups near Lake Chad and Nigeria. These

groups chose to redeploy individually and collectively along the Cameroonian borders with mercenaries who receive military ethnic solidarity for adopting the same culture .

For example, a Kano immigrant moving from Bama, Nigeria to Kolofata, Cameroon, or an Arab from Chad moving to Cameroon will have no trouble blending in with new communities thanks to their ethnic solidarity. In light of the fact that regional and religious identities significantly identify one's allegiance compared to national loyalty and citizenship, this indicates how environmental, religious, and ethnic solidarity contributed to boosting popular support for Boko Haram in Cameroon's North Region. The organisations uses these allegiances to acquire popular support in the Region.

Boko Haram is particularly active in Mayo-Tsanaga located on the Nigerian border, Logone-Et-Chari on Lake Chad, as well as in Mayo-Sava. It takes advantage of the existing vulnerabilities to utilize the Far North Region as a base for launching terrorist operations and as a convenient place for recruitment, mobilization, preparations, and training. The group also takes care of its supporters in border provinces through dictating ideologies, creating social and economic incentives, and coercion. Furthermore, Boko Haram uses the North Region of Cameroon as a route for arms trafficking. Arms caches were found containing Kalashnikovs, machine pistols, missile launchers, bombs, and exploding wires. Many firearms found in countries suffering from severe crises, such as the Central African Republic, were confiscated.

Tourism and Infrastructure

The Far North Region of Cameroon used to be a popular attraction for western tourists. Lately, however, travelling there is considered high risk given the terrorist attacks perpetrated in the Region. Since 2013, no one has dared to visit it, especially following Boko Haram's doubled rate of abductions and ransom demands, which had a catastrophic impact on the economy since tourism represented a real income source to thousands of working families in the field .

As for education, the government shut down many schools, specifically Qur'anic ones, out of fear of indoctrination. Some were moved to other places. This weakened the pedagogical and educational process, and adversely affected children over the compulsory school age.

Boko Haram seeks to surmount any obstacles to the implementation of its plans. It therefore targets the defensive infrastructure, police stations and gendarmerie along Nigerian borders, and forces policemen to abandon their positions. It demolished

several police stations and gendarmerie in Amchide, Fotokol, Garoua, Kirawa, Homaka, Afade, and Hilé Alifa, resulting in substantial losses and economic recession, depriving people of their fundamental rights.

Shutting down police stations resulted in increased robberies, conflicts, and disputes among citizens, given how they were the only state structure that would face such scourges in the region. Health-wise, there was a huge shortage in doctors and medications due to burglarized pharmacies of border health centers, abductions of medical teams, and demolition of infrastructure.

Conclusion

Despite faith in the importance of military confrontations and combatting Boko Haram's terrorism, we believe in the dire need for taking further measures to address the causes of terrorism, most importantly: the rule of law, curbing corruption, providing goods and public services, creating maximum transparency, reducing economic, political and social gaps, and opening professional training centers in order to elevate the functional capacities of youths and to provide suitable job opportunities to decrease unemployment and prevent their recruitment by extremist groups.

These are measures encouraged by governments after realizing that military actions alone had failed to yield the desired results. Efforts should also be directed to economic, social, religious, and cultural reconstruction, aimed at a goodwill-oriented cooperation between the government and the people, in order to develop a stable society that confronts extremist groups and prevents their emergence.