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## **THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT IN CAMEROON**

### **Why is peace so elusive?**



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**M. Friedrich Kramme-Stermose**

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## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

**ACF:** Action against hunger

**ACLED:** Armed conflict location & event data project

**AFD:** French Development Agency

**ANIF:** National financial investigation agency

**AU:** African Union

**BH:** Boko Haram

**BIR:** Rapid Intervention Unit

**BUCRES:** Central Bureau of Census and Population Studies

**COPAX:** Central African Peace and Security Council

**CSO:** Civil society organizations

**DTM:** Displacement tracking matrix

**ECCAS:** Economic Community of Central African States

**ELECAM:** Elections Cameroon

**FAO:** United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization

**FES:** Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

**GABAC:** Task Force on Money Laundering in Central Africa

**GIZ:** German international development cooperation Agency

**GRIP:** Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security

**UNHCR:** United Nations High Commission for Refugees

**ICG:** International crisis group

**IED:** Improvised Explosive Devices

**IGA:** Income Generating Activities

**INS:** National Statistics Institute

**ISS:** Institute for Security Studies

**JMTF:** Multinational Joint Task Force

**LCBC:** Lake Chad Basin Commission

**MINEPIA:** Ministry of Livestock Fisheries and Animal Industries

**MSF:** Doctors without borders

**OCHA:** Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**NGO:** Non Governmental organization

**PAIC:** Community initiatives support program

**SME:** Small and Medium Sized Enterprise

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children Emergency Fund

**USAID:** United States Agency for International Development

**WB:** World Bank

**WDYP:** World Dynamics of Young People

**WFP:** World Food Program

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Far North Region of Cameroon is the theatre of horrendous violence by the terrorist sect Boko Haram. This part of the country, with its exotic landscape, is suffering from what is arguably one of the worst catastrophes of the Lake Chad Basin; a tragedy that has forcefully displaced persons and led to the death of thousands. In spite of mobilization by the international community and considerable efforts by the Cameroonian government and its partners of the Lake Chad Basin, the terrorist threat has not subsided; rather it has persisted and is evolving constantly. The crisis is now bogged down, and recent events on the ground have given the lie to declarations by some government officials that Boko Haram is on its last legs. Even the research community has been unable to properly circumscribe this complex phenomenon using traditional analytical tools.

A lot has been written about the Boko Haram conflict in Cameroon. However, till date, this literature has focused more on the general and specific descriptions of the conflict than on detailed and innovative analyses. The approaches adopted in the studies so far can be grouped into three categories: a multi-causal approach that examines the social, economic, political, security, cultural and religious environment, that fostered the growth of Boko Haram's violent extremism and terrorism in the Far North Region (Gwoda and Wassouni, vol. 1&2, 2017 ; International Crisis Group, 2016); and their socioeconomic and humanitarian impacts (Saibou Issa, 2014); a psychosocial approach that examines the experiences of former recruits as well as testimonies by

local populations to understand how individuals and groups of individuals become radicalized (UNDP, 2017); and an instrumental approach that seeks to understand the rationale behind Boko Haram attacks as well as their military and communication strategies and tactics in Cameroon (Christian Seignobos, 2015 ; Elodie Aparad, 2015).

This study has adopted a new and different approach: it identifies the various actors involved, examines their political, economic, social and symbolic interests, and analyses the correlation between the attainment of these objectives and the prolongation of the conflict. A close look at the interests as well as the political and economic alliances among the parties involved, can shed new light on the dynamics of this complex conflict.

To achieve its objective, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation organized a series of security workshops between 2016 and 2017 that brought together experts from academic, military, media, political and civil society institutions as well as from international organizations. This publication is the outcome of discussions, semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders, relevant documentary research and analyses of empirical data by members of the working group.

The study, which is based on an analytical, empirical and prospective approach, examines the genesis of the conflict and the context that led to the emergence and expansion of the Boko Haram threat in Cameroon. It takes a look at the myriad actors involved and the web of interests that are keeping the threat alive. It examines the modalities, changing interests and the different reactions to the constantly shifting threat in order to identify ways to effectively

end the conflict. It equally examines the complex actors-interests-context relationships that are compounding and perpetuating the conflict. It finally makes concrete recommendations that could be implemented to boost current efforts to bring peace and security to the Far North Region, as well as to the south of Lake Chad.

## **Chapter I – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE BOKO HARAM PHENOMENON IN CAMEROON**

The activities of Boko Haram first came to the attention of the media and the public in 2014, though the sect had already been operating in the country for a number of years. It had taken advantage of the fragile socioeconomic environment in the Far North Region, to gain a foothold and build powerful support networks in the region.

### **A. Background to the crisis in the Far North**

The first signs of the presence of Boko Haram in Cameroon can be traced as far back as 2009, when members of the sect fleeing Nigerian security forces passed through, or settled in the border areas between Cameroon and Nigeria, particularly in Fotokol, Mora, Maroua, Kousseri, Amchidé, Kerawa, Djibrilli, Bornori, Tolkomari, Kolofata, etc. Taking advantage of the local network of imams, itinerant preachers, young Cameroonian Islamic

scholars who had been recruited either in Nigeria or Sudan, Boko Haram started actively radicalizing and recruiting people in the Mayo Sava, Mayo Tsanaga, Logone and Chari divisions as early as 2001. According to consolidated data from the International Crisis Group (ICG) report of November 2016, between 3500 and 4000 Cameroonians, mostly men, joined Boko Haram for various reasons: opportunism, fanaticism, vengeance, adventure, etc. Others, who had been abducted (more than 1000 in 2014, according to the ICG), were enlisted by force. The Mayo-Sava Division has supplied Boko Haram with the highest number of militants, though the other border divisions (Mayo Tsanaga, Logone and Chari) and towns like Maroua and Kousseri are not far behind.

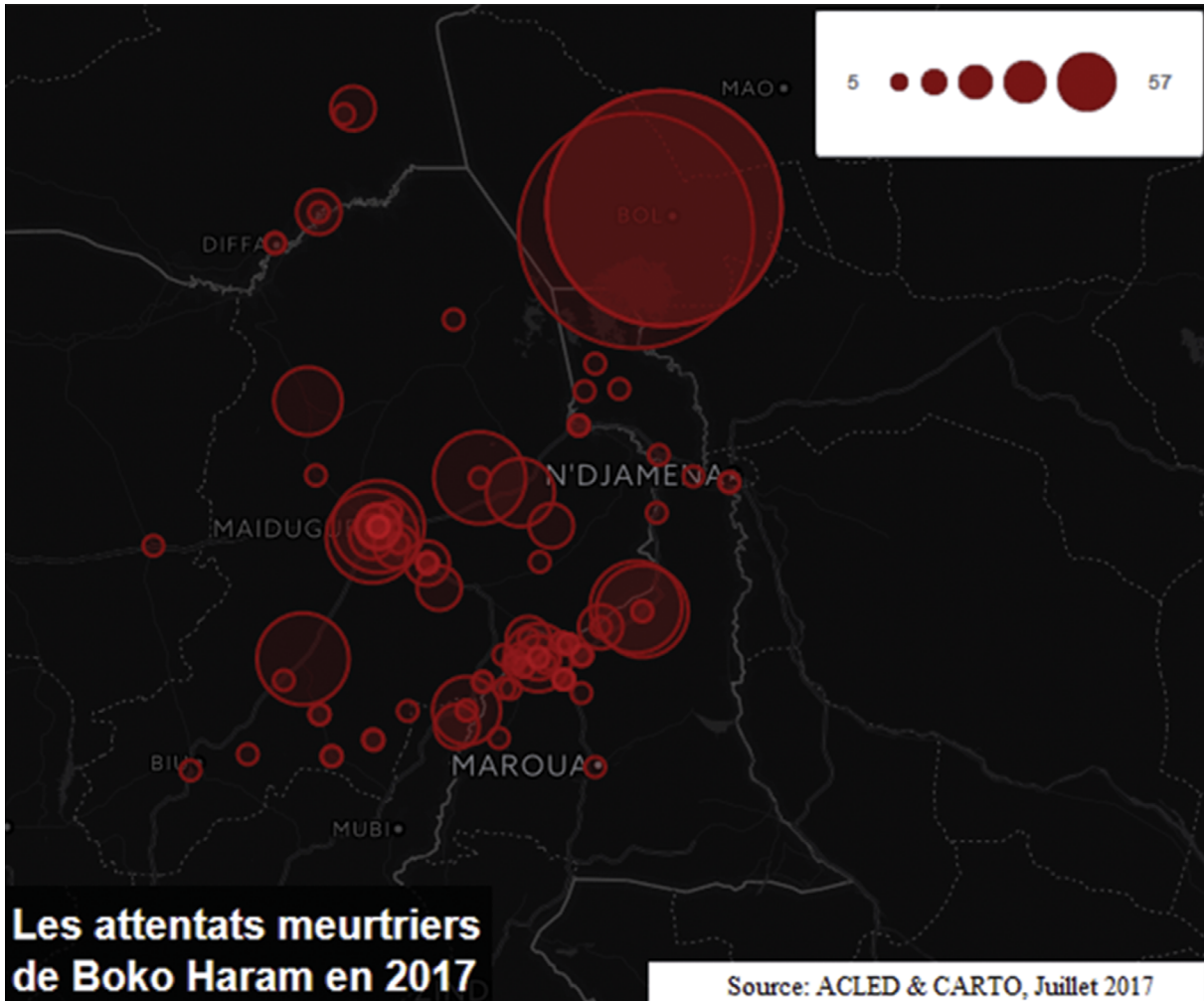
Taking advantage of the wave of refugees that flowed into Cameroon from 2012, some members of the sect from Nigeria infiltrated the group to recruit new members and to set up cells in the Far North. Isolated and localized attacks were recorded that same year along the border in Dabanga, Fotokol, Makari, and Kousseri. This was followed between 2013 and 2014 by a series of abductions of Western expatriates and local elites. The Cameroonian government, hesitant at first, since it initially considered this new threat as a Nigerian problem, finally decided to take the threat seriously by officially declaring war on Boko Haram on May 14<sup>th</sup> 2014.

Since then, the region has been the theatre of a hybrid war that has alternated between conventional attacks (from 2014) and guerilla or asymmetrical warfare (from the summer of 2015) depending on the operational capacities



of the sect in response to military force (Mbarkoutou, 2016). Estimates from data provided by ACLED and ICG through its platform Crisis Watch and the journal *l'Œil du Sahel* - three open sources known for their rigor in monitoring this crisis since 2003- show that about 556 attacks and 77

suicide bombings by Boko Haram occurred in the Far North Region between January 2013 and June 2017. Since 2014, more than 150 soldiers and about 1,670 civilians have been killed in the conflict. According to *l'Œil du Sahel* more than 2000 civilians have been killed since 2012.



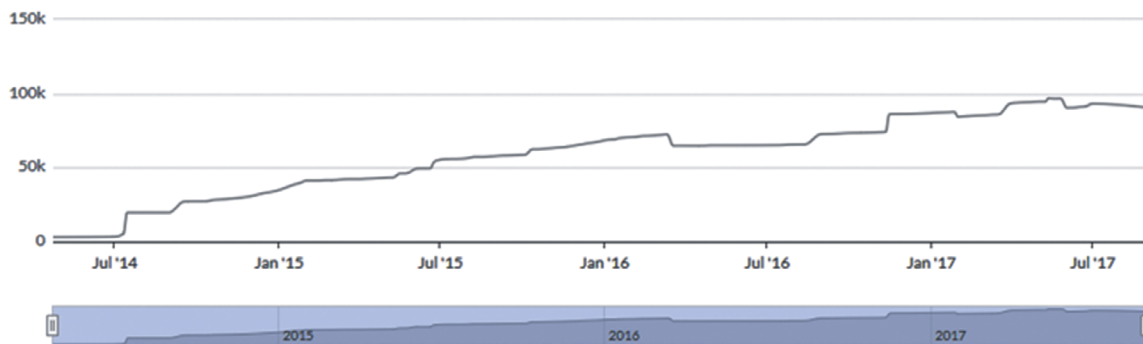
This conflict has produced a wave of refugees from Nigeria to Cameroon. The UNHCR has registered more than 90,000 who entered the country through Kewara, Amchidé, Fotokol, Tourou, Mogodé and many of them have been settled in the Minawao camp (since July 2013 it has had a population of 59,000 refugees in spite of the fact that it has

a capacity of only 39,000) and in neighboring villages which today have close to 33,000 refugees. There are also many internally displaced persons in the villages of the region (Mémé, Makary, Kousseri, Afadé), a situation that is creating enormous humanitarian challenges. As of September 2017, the region has 325,589 displaced persons, 235,913 of them internally displaced

persons, 30,278 refugees and 59,398 returnees. 91% of these persons have been displaced as a result of the Boko Haram conflict (DTM, 9 July 2017). About 60% of the internally displaced persons are living with local families, which themselves are already vulnerable. Other displaced persons

and refugees are settled in makeshift camps along the major highway (Maroua-Kousseri, Kolofata-Mora). These alarming figures show the magnitude and gravity of the problem caused by a menace that has taken advantage of a favorable environment to flourish.

**Nigeria refugees in Cameroon**



Source: Data Unhcr, August 2017

### ***B. Context that led to the emergence of the Boko Haram conflict***

The Islamist violence in the Far North region of Cameroon today is the historical outcome of the cultural, sociopolitical and economic dynamics of the region. Because of its geographical location, the region finds itself at the crossroads of many chronic conflicts, a situation that, when coupled with the poor socioeconomic environment, has enabled Boko Haram to thrive.

The Far North Region is far removed from the policymaking center of the country and is located to the north east of Nigeria - the epicenter of the Islamist insurrection – with which it shares boundaries as well as historical, socio-cultural, linguistic and religious bonds. It is also in the proximity of the Lake

Chad Basin, an area that is home to many trans-border ethnic groups like the Kanuri ethnic group which extends from Borno State in Nigeria to the Mayo Sava and Mayo-Tsanaga divisions in Cameroon.

In spite of its small surface area, the Region has a large population, making it one of the most densely populated regions of the country with an estimated population of 3.5 million inhabitants (BUCREP, 2010). Unfortunately government policy makers have not paid it the attention such a demographic weight deserves. Indeed, there has been a systematic socioeconomic and institutional disengagement by the State, as can be seen in the alarming socioeconomic indicators provided by the National Statistics Institute and the World Bank. More than 70% of the

population of this region lives below the poverty line and 50 to 70% of children there are suffering from chronic malnutrition. Apart from Maroua, the headquarter of the Far North Region which hosts most public institutions and which has infrastructure that is comparable to that in the southern part of the country, the rest of the region is very underdeveloped with little or no road, energy or education infrastructure and practically no industrial facilities. There is a gaping development chasm between urban areas and rural areas and between the entire region and the regions to the south of the country. This fracture is the source of anger and feeling of marginalization that is being nursed by the population of this region.

Ignorance has also played a major role in the growth of extremism in the region. At the level of education, the region is lagging far behind. The literacy rate of those 15 and above stands at 40.1% in the Far North Region as against a national average of 74.3%; the school enrolment rate of children between 6 to 11 years is 63.0% compared to the national average of 85.1%; electricity use stands at 21.4% compared to a national average of 62.1%. This can be explained not only by the reluctance of parents to send their children to western schools but also by the preference for local madrasa or itinerant schools. In the absence of a standard education or practical training, young people from such schools are not only uncompetitive on the job market, they also lack the skills to develop income generating activities and as such, become easy targets for radicalization and exploitation.

The Far North Region has always been regarded by the government as a difficult area

where it has had problems imposing its authority. For decades, it has been considered as a hotbed for organized trans-border crime, which has evolved continually in response to coercive actions by the State. Such criminal activities include abductions, hijacking of public transport vehicles and camp raids (Saibou Issa, 2006; 2010). The region is also a hub for drug trafficking, smuggling of fuel, medications and auto spare parts, as well as small arms and light weapons from Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic.

This criminal activity is also bolstered by the climatic instability of the region, which suffers from a harsh Sudano-Sahelian climate characterized by recurrent floods (due to the short, sudden and torrential rainfall in the months of August and November), low rainfall and severe droughts that dry up water points, damage pasturelands and destroy crops.

Climate change has impacted negatively on the life of the community: increase in food insecurity (35% of the population was exposed even before the emergence of the conflict according to the WFP) and an acceleration of criminal activity by nomadic cattle breeders who want to make up for losses caused by the destruction of pastureland. Their predatory activities often result in inter- and intra-community conflicts in the Logone and Chari, Mayo-Danay, Mayo-Sava and Diamaré divisions. Climate change has also exacerbated conflicts among local fishermen, farmers and animal breeders, especially in the flood prone plains of the Logone, along the Logone and Chari rivers and also on the banks of Lake Chad.

This structural problem played a role in the growth of religious fundamentalism that attracted many young people. The introduction of Wahabism and Salafism disrupted the religious order in the far North and created new fractures along denominational lines. Traditional mosques suddenly had new rivals in small, more active and more dynamic mosques known as *juulirde* which popped up in almost every neighborhood, attracting mostly the youth. Their preaching was virulently against the Sufi religious order, and their admiration for Boko Haram ideology was often denounced by religious and traditional authorities. All of this was playing out against the backdrop of a latent generational conflict in an environment where political representation had been confiscated by a senile political elite. The old guard that had a firm and unyielding control of both the traditional Sufi establishment and the modern political order suddenly found itself challenged by an ideological movement spearheaded mostly by youth from border regions, who had come in contact with gurus and preachers from Nigeria. Under the combined effects of a difficult geographical environment, outdated methods of production and trade ill-adapted to a modern economy, a religious and socioeconomic landscape vulnerable to extremism and a strong and dynamic trans-border ethnic solidarity, the Boko Haram sect took root and flourished in the northern part of the country, with support from criminal entrepreneurs, religious and political leaders and ethnic sympathizers.

## **Chapter II – ACTORS – CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR PEACE**

### **A. Stakeholders and challenges of the Boko Haram conflict**

A close look at the actors involved highlights the complex nature of the relationships between the local, national and international stakeholders. Each of these has their own specific objectives and enjoys economic, political, symbolic and emotional benefits from the conflict.

#### **1. The Boko Haram faction in Cameroon and its support network**

The sect causing such havoc in the Far North of the country is made up of a diverse mix of actors from religious, political and economic backgrounds.

At the centre of this complex web are leaders and combatants of the terrorist sect who are inspired by Salafist Jihad. Boko Haram or "*association of the people of the Sunnah for preaching and Jihad*" (as they refer to themselves) turned to armed insurrection in the north-eastern part of Nigeria in 2009 with members from diverse backgrounds, including fanatics, opportunists and abductees. The *modus operandi* of the group has evolved constantly in response to the military responses of the States of the Lake Chad Basin. The group which had first adopted a traditional and frontal approach to the fight gradually changed its strategy and resorted to asymmetric and hybrid techniques such as

suicide bombing, improvised explosive devices, stealing cattle and abducting villagers for ransom. At first limited to the Nigerian territory, Boko Haram slowly increased its activities in Cameroon which it considered as a base for its combatants fleeing the Nigerian army and as a means to secure a supply route for human, logistical, material, information and food resources. The declaration of war against Boko Haram by Cameroon in May 2014, followed by the highly publicized oath of allegiance to Daesh in March 2015, led Boko Haram to consider the Cameroonian territory as a legitimate front for Jihad. To build a strong base and protect its supply lines, the Islamist sect enlisted the services of criminal networks in Cameroon and Chad that controlled real estate and land transactions and the main roads used in smuggling goods like the Kousseri – Ndjamena, Mora – Maiduguri roads, and even those crossing Kolofata and Banki (village where smuggled fuel from Nigeria is stored). Indeed, Boko Haram combatants often used the same roads as smugglers, cementing an operational alliance of great tactical importance to the terrorist group since it enabled them to master the roads and shortcuts, and helped them to circumvent check points and sensitive security areas in the Cameroonian territory.

In addition to these crime entrepreneurs, Boko Haram also receives support from private individuals, financial intermediaries, clandestine transporters and smugglers. These supporters and intermediaries, who form a complex and highly integrated underground network, have enabled Boko Haram to take control of a large part of the local informal economy of the region which revolves around the trans-border sale of

cattle, fish, red pepper, cigarettes, pharmaceutical drugs, motor bike spare parts, etc.

The methods used for support are well developed: financial intermediaries create shell companies or open bank accounts to raise funds from terrorist organizations abroad or to launder money from drug trafficking. According to the National Financial Investigation Agency (ANIF), more than 38,789 billion FCFA (about 59,500,000 Euros) is alleged to have been raised by a single individual between 2012 and 2015. The report by the Action Group against Money Laundering and funding for terrorism in Central Africa describes a number of endogenous methods used in financing the activities of Boko Haram. These include ransom payments, illegal operation of border exchange bureaus, hijacking of public transport vehicles, theft, enlistment of microfinance institutions, trans-border cattle theft and cattle trade, and supply of products used for terrorist acts (GABAC, 2017). Also, clandestine transporters smuggle arms on motorcycles, sometimes hiding such contraband in sacs of cereals piled on their bikes; traffickers hide currency in goods and traders help to sell in local markets, products stolen from cattle farmers by the terrorist group.

The terrorist group attracted not only traffickers and informal sector actors, it also attracted small bands of people specialized in mercenary work who had been living in the region for decades. These included former Chadian, Sudanese and Central Africa rebels experienced in guerilla warfare, who had formed criminal gangs to exploit the poor security situation of the region. These war professionals joined the ranks of Boko Haram, providing them with valuable warfare experience at a very high price.

The numerous attacks by Boko Haram combatants and suicide bombers, that are today able to successfully evade detection by Cameroonian security services show just how well the sect knows the terrain, that is, if it is not already on the terrain. This knowledge is provided by the extensive network of local informants who support the Boko Haram ideology.

Many Islamist preachers had paved the way by propagating the teachings of Mohammed Yussuf (founder of the Boko Haram) in towns and villages of the region. Marginalized and sidelined by local political and traditional religious leaders, itinerant preachers and young scholars controlling small mosques also contributed by preaching against the governing elite and Sufi religious leaders. Their objective was to create a new society based on Islamic law in which they would no longer be marginalized. Their actions were complemented by those of bodies promoting Jihadist propaganda, mostly international Islamic NGOs with links to terrorist networks in Africa and in the Middle East. According to ANIF, these organizations have been collecting and channeling funds to Boko Haram under the guise of charity work. ANIF also alleges that Boko Haram has been using fictitious associations to transfer money from its supporters abroad. On the whole, non lucrative organizations in central African countries are vulnerable to the risk of funding terrorism (GABAC, 2015).

Exploitation of the cleavages within the ethnically and religiously heterogeneous local population has been part of the strategy adopted by Boko Haram. Although in Nigeria the group is supported strongly by the Kanuri ethnic group which is made up in large part

by the Mobeur and Boudouma (Bakary Sambe, 2016), the situation in Cameroon is different where the ethnic factor plays a rather minor role (Christian Ségnobos, 2014; ICG, 2016). However, outside Kanuri, the Islamist sect has a strong ideological influence on some mainly Moslem ethnic groups like the Choa Arabs, Mandara, Kotoko and Haussa. In a region where Islam cohabits with other religious groups (a religious population divided between 2/5 Moslem, 2/5 Christian and 1/5 animists), Boko Haram also relies on supporters from other mostly animist or non Moslem ethnic groups like the Mafa, Mada and Kapsiki.

This shows that though the conflict has all the appearances of a religious war, it is fostered more by economic and symbolic interests, as well as exploitation of the bonds of ethnic solidarity that exist among the people living along the borders with Nigeria than by religious beliefs.

The unemployed and under educated youth of the Far North have been victims of indifference and marginalization for years. Unemployed or under employed, many young people in the affected areas accepted to join Boko Haram. Recruiters generally propose a motor bike and a recruitment bonus (between 300 to 2000 dollars), promise of a salary between 100 and 400 dollars per month, and a wife for the most deserving. Such offers are tempting to vulnerable young people with no prospects who often end up accepting them. It should also be pointed out that some young people from well to do families have joined the ranks of Boko Haram. These young men who are sons of religious, political and traditional authorities join for reasons other than economic. Growing up under a social and political environment that

sidelines the youth and concentrates all political, traditional and religious power in the hands of old and senile people, these young people see the imaginary Caliphate as the only viable path to social upward mobility and political participation. The ease with which these young people have been lured is also indicative of the push and pull factors prevalent in the region: many children from large families come in contact at a very young age with militants of the sect when attending a madrasa or when they are out begging, smuggling, working in call boxes, fishing or hawking on the streets. Such children are easy targets for radicalization and manipulation (transportation of timed bombs, collection of information, etc.)

Many traditional rulers, local government and elected officials are also suspected of collaborating with the sect in Cameroon. Such collusion is often determined by economic interests and ethnic solidarity. In this region, trafficking is one of the most lucrative economic activities, and traditional rulers have often benefited from the income generated by it. It is this source of income that makes it possible for the rulers to maintain a certain standard of living, buy political positions of power and fund the social responsibilities associated with their leadership positions. This longstanding association between criminal enterprises and local traditional and political institutions simply found new expression in the security context created by the Islamist insurrection. More than thirteen third class chiefs, known as Lawans, in the Mayo-Moskota in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division were arrested and remanded in custody in December 2014 for alleged collusion with Boko Haram. Others from the Logone and Chari, as well

as Mayo-Sava Divisions were also arrested between January 2015 and January 2016. It is alleged that they had acted as informants, suppliers and hosts to Boko Haram militants. However, not all traditional rulers acted for money. Some collaborated out of fear of reprisals. Many traditional chiefs in villages like Leymarie, Fagme and Foueram have been assassinated for allegedly providing information to the authorities. In the absence of State security structures, other rulers who are involved in licit or illicit trans-border trade are forced to collaborate with Boko Haram militants to protect their trading activities on routes controlled by the sect.

Government officials are not left out. In the Logone and Chari Division, the commercial hub for trans-border trade with Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad (affectionately referred to as "honey" by some customs officials), traffickers and even some militants of the sect, have paid large sums of money to government officials who then turn a blind eye to their activities. Rama Moussa, former mayor of Fotokol and former government contract officer with the Customs administration who was arrested in 2015, is alleged to have colluded in the abduction of the wife of the Vice Prime Minister, Amadou Ali and to have helped to sell cars in Cameroon stolen from Nigeria by Boko Haram for a fee. Even politically vulnerable persons have seen the crisis as a means to make a political comeback as can be observed in the opportunistic involvement of municipal councilors, business persons, etc. with the sect. Many persons that government asked to help negotiate the release of hostages have been arrested and locked up. These include Abdoulaye (son of the

parliamentarian Abba Malla), Abdallah Adamou, Baba Talba, Waziri Isma, Aissami Ousman, etc.

This insecurity has led to an extensive security and humanitarian response from actors on the other side of the fight. This riposte is being conducted by State actors as well as local, regional and international organizations. However, all these parties are not necessarily pursuing the same objectives.

## **2. The political and military offensive by the Cameroonian Government**

Even before Cameroon officially declared war on Boko Haram in 2014, it was already grappling with many security threats in the eastern part of the country, caused by the crisis in the Central African Republic, and in the coastal regions from pirates and highway robbery by former rebels from Chad and CAR in the north of the country.

Following the uptick in the number of terrorist attacks and the swell of refugees from Nigeria into the Far North, the Cameroonian government decided to go into action. However, apart from the avowed objective to stop terrorist attacks and stem the flow of refugees, the move by Yaounde was also determined by a number of political and diplomatic calculations. The declaration of war on the sect by the Cameroonian government led to an improvement of diplomatic relations with Paris. These relations which previously had been cool, with both leaders keeping away from each other, grew warmer following the release of the French nationals who had been abducted by the Islamist group. They later improved considerably during the

fight against the common enemy. Inside the country also, the fight against Boko Haram has given the regime not only the opportunity to affirm its political legitimacy but also to neutralize the opposition. The rhetoric about the indivisibility of the Union, the anti-terrorism law and the political exploitation of the victories of the military against the sect have all been used to great political advantage by the regime.

As for Cameroonian defense forces, they have fought hard to stop the progression of the terrorist movement. Pivoting from the defensive stance observed at the beginning of the conflict, it adopted a more offensive strategy in February 2015 with operations Emergence 4 and Alpha. These operations, that are also being carried out at bilateral (Chad-Cameroon; Nigeria-Cameroon, etc.) and multilateral (with the Multinational Joint Task Force) levels, have dislodged the terrorists from many of their strongholds, destroyed training camps and warehouses in which explosive devices were being manufactured, and blocked many of the supply routes used by the Jihadists. These vigorous actions have considerably reduced their operational capabilities and forced the sect to adopt asymmetrical tactics which Cameroonian soldiers are having trouble countering.

## **3. Response by regional organizations and international partners**

World powers as well as regional and international organizations have joined forces to combat the Islamist terrorist group at the military, humanitarian and socioeconomic levels. The fight against Boko Haram has been a boon to some floundering organizations. One of these is the Lake Chad Basin



Commission whose influence and mandate suddenly increased as a result of the conflict. Its Executive Secretariat is now piloting the political activity of the Joint Multinational Joint Task Force that officially has 10,000 soldiers divided into 4 sectors in Cameroon (sector 1 in Mora), Chad (sector 2 in Baga-Sola), Nigeria (sector 3 in Baga) and Niger (sector 4 in Diffa).

The African Union (AU) has also participated in the strengthening of security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin. Its Peace and Security Council provided the legal backing by granting a formal authorization to the Multinational Joint Task Force. Since the signing of a protocol agreement on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2015 on the role of the AU Commission and of the Secretariat of the LCBC in the operation, the AU has been responsible for the strategic piloting of the MNJTF through the Strategic Support Cell. The Cell supervises the activities of the MNJTF and mobilizes funding from donors

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) is also involved. It activated the Mutual Assistance Pact between member States and granted urgent financial assistance to the tune of 50 billion FCFA to Cameroon and Chad. A favor to two countries that play a vital role in COPAX (the Central African Peace and Security Council) France and the United States are also playing a crucial role. Their logistic support is highly appreciated by many observers, though it is not enough to meet the needs of the States in the region. Unfortunately, they have not been very active on the diplomatic front, to provide a legal framework and political legitimacy for the MNJTF through a UN Security Council vote. It was only in March this year that the Council unanimously adopted

Resolution 2,349 (2017), the first on the conflict, though without making any financial commitment on behalf of the MNJTF.

The logistic support provided by world powers has specific security and economic objectives. Through the liaison and contact military detachment established by France in Maroua, and the deployment of some 100 American soldiers "to conduct airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations in the region" (Obama, 2015), international partners have clearly shown their determination to eradicate Boko Haram from Cameroon. This commitment is not altogether altruistic; it can also be explained by the desire to maintain security in a region whose destabilization would harm their economic and strategic interests. It is also part of the effort to destroy terrorist networks in the Sahel region and prevent Daesh from developing a base in West Africa. In addition, this military cooperation has a commercial objective for countries that today have been overtaken by China, Spain and Russia in supplying military equipment to Cameroon. Windfalls from this security cooperation today include arms sales, training of Special Forces and sale of communication equipment and surveillance drones.

In spite of all these robust countermeasures, the terrorist group is still carrying out deadly attacks and claiming lives. To lessen the suffering of the population, UN agencies (UNHCR, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA) and humanitarian NGOs (MSF, ACF, Red Cross, Public Concern, Secours Catholique, Caritas, etc.) have been providing refugees and displaced persons and other Boko Haram victims with much needed humanitarian assistance. Development agencies (AFP, GIZ, USAID and UNDP) have provided funding

for projects run by local and international civil society organizations to strengthen the resilience of local communities, prevent violence and revive sustainable development in the Far North Region. More than 42 organizations running about 156 projects (OCHA, Feb. 2017) are working with government structures, to meet the humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges in the Far North and East regions of Cameroon.

The Boko Haram conflict has greatly boosted “charity business”, humanitarian personnel and local populations: funding for projects, appropriation of new mandates, publicity for humanitarian organizations, creation of local jobs, enhancement of professional careers, etc. Indeed, the crisis in the Far North has helped to revive the entire humanitarian and development industry.

#### **4. Mobilization of vigilante committees**

The sheer number of terrorist attacks in the country is indicative of the extent of local accomplices working with the sect. To reduce this local support and gather intelligence, the Cameroonian government revived the self defense concept in Cameroon which is based on the idea that “armies on their own cannot save a nation, but a nation defended by its people is invincible” (Speech by Ahidjo, 15 August 1970). Using the inter-ministerial Instruction of 1962 to set up self defense groups, the Governor of the Far North Region, Augustin Awa Fonka, signed an order to reactivate the units under the appellation “local vigilante committees”. This led to the proliferation of vigilantes who are estimated today at 16,000 in almost all the towns and villages of the Far North (ICG. Feb. 2017). Officially, their role

is to improve the efficiency of government authorities and security services by providing them with information and intelligence and by reporting suspects.

On the ground, these vigilante groups have played a major role not only in providing information but also in helping to prevent suicide attacks and reduce casualties sometimes at great risk to their own lives. The fact that they live in the said communities and master the local geography, history, languages and cultures makes them a powerful asset to Cameroonian security services in the fight against the insurgents. Their contributions have earned them accolades from government authorities as well as great attention and support from the media. Unfortunately, some of the members have tarnished the image of these community based groups by falsely reporting people, extorting money and even collaborating with the Islamist group.

The various contributions by the parties involved in fighting the sect have considerably weakened the Jihadist group in Cameroonian territory and relieved the suffering of its many victims. However, in spite of military reversals, its ability to cause havoc has remained intact, and the consequences of the war on the local economic, political and socio-cultural environment are immense.

#### **B. The socioeconomic and political impact of the Boko Haram conflict**

The poor security climate in the Far North has exacerbated the already difficult socioeconomic conditions in the region. The key sectors of the local economy (animal breeding, agriculture, trans-border trade and tourism) have been devastated by the Boko Haram conflict. Farming has stopped

in areas where the sect is sowing terror. Cattle farming has slowed down because of the disruption of the seasonal transhumance, and the constant cattle raids on farmers who venture into high risk areas. Most border transits have been closed (Djanabou, 2014) and only internal markets like those in Kousseri, Maroua and Mora are still open, though with serious shortages and skyrocketing prices. This has worsened the living conditions of the inhabitants of this area. The tourism sector has witnessed a sharp decline as the national parks, natural reserves, beautiful landscapes and spectacular mountains that used to attract visitors to places like Waza and Rhumsiki have all been abandoned. The sharp drop in the number of tourists has harmed the tourism industry and led to the disappearance of hundreds of local jobs: trackers, craftsmen, art dealers, etc. (Gonne, 2014).

The social sector has also been affected as children have abandoned school, and civil servants have deserted health centers. Even villagers have been forced to abandon their homes, cattle and farms as they flee from violence. According to WFP (2017) one out of every three families is suffering from food insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin. All these disruptions have created a social malaise that is not conducive for peaceful cohabitation in a region that has witnessed an influx of refugees and displaced persons since 2013. The invasion of habitable spaces, the occupation of farmlands, crops destruction by the cattle of displaced persons and the stigmatization of some refugees have all created intercommunity and social conflicts (Mbarkoutou, 2017). The arrival of displaced persons in towns closest to the conflict zones like Kousseri, Mora and Mokolo has

led to agro-pastoral conflicts about the use of water points, pastureland and firewood (UNDP, 2015)

The political landscape has also been drastically affected by the conflict. Many second and third class chiefs lost influence and power because their subjects had fled the villages. Weakened by the loss of influence and impoverished by the loss of subjects who used to pay them dues and taxes, many of these chiefs themselves have been forced to become refugees and displaced in towns like Kolofata, Mora, etc. The war has also increased the clout of administrative and military officials in the region to the detriment of traditional rulers who before the security crisis had complete power over their subjects.

In addition to the economic, social and political consequences of the conflict, there are new local and national factors that may impact negatively on security in the region.

### ***C. Prospects for security in the Far North***

The changes caused by the conflict and the dynamics of the sub-regional economy do not bode well for a quick end to the Boko Haram conflict.

The difficulties faced by Nigerian refugees in Cameroon are a factor that can prolong the conflict. Those in the Minawao camp are living in extremely difficult psychological conditions, in spite of the efforts by the State and its partners (HCR) to improve the level of humanitarian assistance. Discouraged and poorly informed about the situation in their country, some refugees (about 13,091) tried in April and June 2017 to return to Banki and Pulka, areas which themselves are

facing serious security threats. In the past months, the sharp increase in the number of terrorist attacks in Mayo-Sava has created suspicion about Nigerian refugees, some of who are considered sympathizers of the terrorist sect. Between January and June 2017, about 4,317 new refugees living outside refugee camps were rounded up and forcefully sent back to the border by Cameroonian security forces (CHCR communiqué of 14 July 2017). In addition to the difficult conditions they will face once back in Nigeria, they are also likely to be mistreated by the Nigerian army which will suspect some of them of complicity with Boko Haram. Such ill-treatment can lead to resentment and cause them to fall prey to extremist propaganda. It is alleged that Islamist militants have already infiltrated these communities and are actively recruiting members from them. Indeed, according to Ahmed Satomi, Director of the agency responsible for managing emergencies in Borno State, about nine suspected Boko Haram fighters and 100 accomplices who had infiltrated the group of refugees from Cameroon were arrested in July. This situation is similar to that of internally displaced persons whose socioeconomic vulnerability and social stigmatization can lead to intercommunity conflict. This risk is likely to increase with the approach of local elections and the inevitable rhetoric by political candidates about ethnic identity, indigenes, foreigners, etc. as they try to mobilize support within the community.

The packed prison in Maroua in which many suspected Boko Haram militants awaiting trial have been detained should also be a cause for concern. More than 1,000 people arrested as part of the fight against the sect

are incarcerated there (Amnesty International, 2016), a number that is three times the capacity of the prison infrastructure. This is even more troublesome because as experience in the West and in the Middle East has shown, prisons are the most common places where people are radicalized and where Islamist networks are formed. The risk that this prison will become a future Jihad academy should not be underestimated, even though it should also be pointed out that the majority of the extremists detained in Maroua and Yaounde are opportunists who secretly collaborated with the terrorist group for economic gain rather than for ideological reasons.

Even though vigilante committees are appreciated for their enormous sacrifices, there are concerns about the security risks that these groups may pose in the future. Are they going to become the new security threat post-Boko Haram? Will they increase security risks when the Jihadist group is eliminated? Increasingly, vigilante committees are becoming a problem rather than a solution. This is the fear being expressed by those who worry that vigilante groups will evolve into criminal organizations or militias to prey on, or sponsor violence in their communities. Even the composition of these groups is cause for concern: some of the members are former convicts, brigands, smugglers and traffickers who, as soon as their sources of income will dry up with the end of the war, may revert to their former criminal careers. Many heads or members of these committees who had collaborated with Boko Haram or who have received part of the booty from the fight against insecurity are dishonest and unpredictable persons capable of turning on their communities. As

a matter of fact, some heads and members of these vigilante committees have been arrested for collaboration or complicity with Boko Haram. These include the heads of the vigilante committees of Mozogo and Kolofata and members of the vigilanted groups in Moskota, Wallasa, Tolkomari, Djakana, etc. There are also fears that these groups may be politicized and used by local and national politicians in their efforts to hang on to power, especially in a context of uncertainty as to what will happen to the country after Biya or during heated political campaigns.

The possibility that Boko Haram will adopt the methods used by Daesh and its approach to war are for now remote because of the lack of operational support from the Islamic State to this sect, but it should not be overlooked. As we know, the military defeats and loss of territory suffered in Iraq and Syria have forced Daesh to adopt a more decentralized and individualized Jihad, which is being exported to Europe. Their new approach calls for the use of vehicular attacks, knives, gas bottles, etc. to avoid detection by intelligence services. This type of Jihad, which is inspired by Abu Musab al-Suri in his book *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, is intended to irreversibly polarize the Western society, and in the long run create a civil war between the majority population and the Moslem minority. Collaboration between the Islamic State and Boko Haram can pave the way for the importation of this theory which has already been adopted by many extremists in the West, especially as the loss of Boko Haram strongholds can cause the sect to radicalize, and encourage supporters to carry out attacks in major urban areas with no military operational commands.

The call by Shekau in the propaganda video published on 1 April 2017 inviting supporters to attack towns in Cameroon and even the country's political capital is an indication of the possible shift in strategy by the sect.

The countries involved in the war against Boko Haram have been facing many economic challenges as a result of the drop in oil prices since 2014. Despite the slight uptick in prices recently, Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria are still having trouble recovering. They are also facing challenges which not only include financing for infrastructure projects and social programmes, but also funding for security and military operations and for the MNJTF. A double challenge that Cameroon will have difficulty meeting if the sect changes its offensive strategy. Worse still, the MNJTF, which was initially formed to halt the expansion of Boko Haram and push it out of territories it controls is still not fully operational. The commitment by member countries seems to have waned because of the high costs involved and the economic difficulties they are facing. It will not be easy for this force to fully counter attacks by Boko Haram if the sect were to again revert to frontal attacks. The Nigerian and Niger armies are already paying a high price for the withdrawal of the Chadian army from bilateral operations. It is alleged that Boko Haram has already recaptured parts of its former strongholds in the north east of Nigeria and around Lake Chad that had previously been captured by Nigerian and Chadian troops. Some hold that the poor economic prospects of member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission will also have a negative impact on the conflict. All these are reasons for concern about the prospects for security in the northern part of

the country. However, there are areas which decision makers can focus on to ensure a more positive security outcome. One of these should be to analyze the reasons for the perpetuation of the Boko Haram conflict in Cameroon.

### **Chapter III – WHY IS PEACE SO ELUSIVE?**

The delay in destroying the sect and the sudden increase in terrorist attacks in the past months shows that the conflict is far from over. In the months of June, July and August 2017, some thirty suicide attacks and numerous kidnappings took place in the Mayo-Sava and Logone and Chari divisions. There were also violent confrontations between the army and the insurgents in the Logon and Chari Division some of which left many Cameroonian soldiers dead. These heavy losses show the resilience of the enemy. The failure to quickly destroy the sect can be explained by poor operational and security choices, personal gains for some in the prolongation of the conflict and poor governance that is hampering the efficient prosecution of the war.

#### ***A. An inadequate security response***

The Cameroonian response to the Boko Haram crisis is, for now, still heavily compartmentalized, military-centered, patchy and national. The attacks, incursions and infiltrations by Boko Haram from 2014 caused the Cameroonian government to

opt for a mainly military response; but this choice now seems inadequate in the face of the ever changing strategies of the enemy. Between May and August 2014, some thirty attacks occurred along the borders in the three divisions most affected by the crisis. The setting up of the 4<sup>th</sup> military region, reorganization of operational war zones into operations Alpha and Emergence 4, deployment of new military units in the far North and the intervention of the Chadian army are some of the measures that were implemented between 2014 and 2016. These military responses, with all their attendant human, geographic and strategic limitations, show a tendency to rely heavily on the military. Civil society organizations on the field have consistently decried the lack of a collaboration mechanism that can help prioritize actions to be carried out. They have also complained that because of the heavy reliance on the military, the other types of responses being proposed by humanitarian and development organizations are often ignored.

The indiscriminate militarization of the areas affected by the security crisis in the far North has crippled the resilience of these communities. Mora, Waza, Kolofata, Ashigachia and Bargaram have been the main targets of Boko Haram attacks because of the military bases there. Faced with the increasingly asymmetric nature of the conflict, and still smarting from being unjustly suspected of involvement in highway robbery (most of them were instead taken for the enemy by some undiscerning security forces when they denounced highway robbers), the population has been reluctant to cooperate. The indiscipline of some soldiers who take pleasure in tormenting villagers,

extorting money from passengers and confiscating cattle recovered from Boko Haram militants as well as the recurrent fatal accidents involving military vehicles has slowly whittled confidence and trust in the soldiers sent to fight the Islamist sect.

Travel restrictions have also impacted negatively on the economy of the region and helped to prepare the ground for radicalization. The closing of markets, including cattle and border markets, has disrupted trans-border trade which the population of the region relies heavily on. Other restrictive measures (ban on some agricultural products and on the movement of motor bikes) that were implemented without providing alternatives have forced hundreds of young men into unemployment, and caused many “teachers, nurses, agricultural monitors and animal breeding technicians who travel to remote areas to provide expertise and assistance”, (Saibou Issa, 2014) to stay home for lack of means of transportation. All these measures have fuelled resentment and dislike for government authorities and turned the region into a fertile ground for Boko Haram recruiters.

Some of the measures taken by administrative authorities have violated fundamental human rights. Many of the violations of human rights (well documented by NGOs) by Cameroonian security services during security operations were against civilians, a situation that has impacted negatively on the population’s confidence in, and readiness to cooperate with the army. This has contrasted with the avowed strategy to fight the insurgency by winning the hearts and minds of the population which would then be willing to provide the army with

intelligence and denounce sympathizers of the sect hiding in the communities. The continuation of attacks and abductions is proof positive that this strategy has not worked and that Boko Haram still has a powerful network of supporters within these communities.

The response by public authorities also has a number of shortcomings: funding for local public development initiatives which falls far short of actual needs does not help to enhance the resilience of the community; confining support and assistance organizations to early recovery programs instead of enabling them to focus on sustainable development; the chaotic management and unregulated access to the resources of Lake Chad (silty soil and basin rich in fish resources exposed by drought) are not addressed in development plans, a situation that can lead to conflicts. Exploitation by Boko Haram of the fight among the Buduma, Hausa and Pheul communities over access to and control over the resources of the Nigerian side of Lake Chad should be a serious cause for concern for Cameroonian authorities.

It should be pointed out that most of the responses from public authorities are limited to the Cameroonian territory whereas the threat is trans-border in nature. Apart from the MNJTF which is the fruit of sub-regional security cooperation, all humanitarian and development measures are national. This is likely because during strategic planning, the issue of Boko Haram in the Far North is always perceived as a secondary preoccupation, reason why there is no major regional emergency investment plan that can sustainably reduce poverty.

## **B. Development of crime entrepreneurship**

In a region where crime and trafficking are seen as a means to earn a living and make money in a tough socioeconomic environment, the economic crime rate has grown with the decline of the formal economy. The development of a local criminal entrepreneurship took place as follows:

### **Development of the smuggling sector.**

The insecurity caused by Boko Haram revived trafficking and contraband activities which many thought had been stamped out for good. Boosted by demand from Islamic militants, traffickers increased and diversified their activities, especially with the entry of former smugglers whose main objective was to fill their pockets (Funteh, 2014). Regardless of whether it was goods smuggled from Nigeria, merchandise from Cameroon or distribution networks in the Central African Republic and Chad with connections as far as Sudan, the war environment provided an ideal framework for the development of criminal entrepreneurship and organized crime.

**Appropriation of terror at the local level.** The first step in the domestication of terror is the formation of groups made up of members from the same village. Many people in areas like Kolofata, Moskota and Fotokol, for instance, joined their children, parents or relatives in Boko Haram. Whether by force or voluntarily, this method of joining Boko Haram was observed with the departure of entire villages. Data collected shows the extent to which these communities were able to become part of the Islamic network. The voluntary participation of villagers from Bornori and Karawa or the forceful enlistment of people from Gousdat-Vreket,

Moudogoa, Kimdjidji, Hourbetch, Ldaoutsaf in 2014, later resulted in the massive return of some 400 men, women and children in April 2017. Others, for opportunistic reasons and also because they could no longer tolerate the humiliation and stigmatization suffered by their community, decided to join their relatives in the Islamic group.

- The second form of domestication of terror has been the formation of local criminal gangs. These criminal groups made up of assorted members roam border villages to steal cattle, foodstuff or to hijack transport vehicles. These gangs also target defense forces, security services and vigilante committees. Their use of explosive devices on these targets has resulted in serious casualties in operational units of the Cameroon army and in Section One of the Multinational Task Force. Whether they are fighters of, or merely working for Boko Haram, the number of Cameroonians in the sect is one of the reasons why the conflict is likely to last for long, if an amnesty program is not put in place.

**Relapsed former criminals.** These are former criminals who join vigilante groups and who are considered risk factors because of the possibility of them reverting to criminal activity. The opening up of the borders and the resultant mobility of persons and cattle stolen from cattle farmers and abandoned by Boko Haram thieves, have encouraged complicity between the population and Boko Haram as well as criminal activity by members of the vigilante groups. A case in point is the arrest of the notorious head of the Mozogo canton, Kolofata and Djakana vigilante group in 2016 (*L'Œil du Sahel*, No. 869, December



2016), which exposed the criminal methods used by gangs. A look at the data collected from 2013 and published in June 2016 by the decentralized services of the Ministry of Livestock Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA) shows that more than 31,101 cattle, 19,306 small ruminants and 4,003 chickens, have been stolen since the outbreak of the Boko Haram crisis in Cameroon. The financial losses are estimated at 8,553,414,500FCFA (about 13,000,000 Euros). This represents about 15% of total losses incurred as a result of the fight against Boko Haram (according to some MINEPIA estimates).

### **Control of production and resources.**

The forming of autonomous groups to sow terror at local level was observed in islands in Lake Chad. Indeed, some islands in Nigeria and the Hile-Alpha commune in Cameroon developed their own ability to produce violence, even overshadowing Boko Haram - the real terrorists. Some even formed strategic alliances with the group. Fishermen in these villages, tired of playing second fiddle to, or of acting as intermediaries and subcontracting fishermen for big traders living in cities of Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria saw in the advent of the Boko Haram conflict in Lake Chad, an opportunity to take back control of the abundant resources of the lake. Using terror tactics, they successfully wrestled control of these resources from, and severed all bonds of dependence on, and subordination to the major traders (Seignobos, 2015). As we can see therefore, the Boko Haram conflict has created ambition in some communities and spawned new forms of local violence and crime. There is great risk of exportation of such models to other islands, particularly

to Kofia and Darak in Cameroon, or to islands in Kinassarom and the neighboring regions of Guité and Mitériné in Chad.

### ***C. Absence of a deradicalization strategy***

Contrary to what obtained in Nigeria, Chad and Niger which are implementing a peace building program that grants amnesty to former militants, Cameroon seems to believe that the military option is the only solution. While it is true that the amnesty initiative has not always yielded the expected results, it must be admitted that it is the only policy that can sustainably build peace by reintegrating the thousands of combatants, who have no other option but to return to their communities of origin. Political and military authorities as well as community leaders know that some of the attacks in the villages of the far North region, were the handiwork of their own children and community members who now have no place to turn to. It would be a good idea to come out of this impasse, which leaves Boko Haram members with only a choice between a slow death in prison, or a quick death in battle, and give them the opportunity to repent. However, we know that this solution is not some magic wand. The amnesty program and the permission to return must be based on a number of conditions some of which must be consent by the community receiving the former militants and the ability of the State to set up and implement a deradicalization program. We would be fooling ourselves if we believe that there can be sustainable peace in the affected areas, if some of these young men are left to roam in no man's land with no hope of return.

A de-radicalization initiative in Cameroon must be implemented as part of a broader counter-radicalization policy. Understood as a mechanism for the prevention of radicalization, counter-radicalization is still not well understood in Cameroon, especially in policymaking circles. A number of some concrete actions have been implemented, notably in the Far North Region by United Nations agencies (UNDP, UNFPA), civil society organizations, international NGOs (PAIC, Plan International...) and the State. These actions, which include labor intensive projects, income generating activities, and training for the youth in affected areas vulnerable to radicalization, are intended to address the socioeconomic and socio-cultural factors that lead to radicalization through: strengthening of intercommunity and interreligious cohesion; setting up of regional platforms for social cohesion and dialogue; building the capacities of civil society in peace building; training of mayors and traditional rulers on living together mechanisms; improving the capacity of communities to manage new and old conflicts; and addressing ideological factors by involving religious leaders and inter-religious associations in the implementation of awareness programs in churches and madrassas. Unfortunately, these initiatives, which are implemented mainly by organizations that provide support for early recovery, do not fall under an organized national counter-radicalization framework. This structural deficit highlights the absence of de-radicalization whose effectiveness would depend on the cognitive deconstruction of radical convictions. The lack of a counter-radicalization and de-radicalization framework shows that, Cameroon has

still not recognized the importance of this strategy in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism at the level of the mind. The lack of an organized response to the return of some 400 Boko Haram fighters, who have been confined to a section of the Mozogo council area in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division since April 2017, clearly shows that there is a deficit in long term solutions to the Boko Haram crisis at the national level.

#### ***D. Impact of poor governance***

Many governance problems have aggravated the security crisis in the far North. An example of this is the phenomenon referred to as "petit couteaux" that is, people whose participation in the Boko Haram enterprise is driven by opportunistic considerations. Many public officials have found in Boko Haram an opportunity to line their pockets. Some security officials like heads of police identification posts, commanders of brigades along the borders and heads of military units at the front, are actively participating in contraband activities (Fotokol), trafficking (Darak) and selling of national identity cards (Bogo). This generalized corruption has no doubt facilitated the infiltration into and fostered the activities of Boko Haram in Cameroon. Near Lake Chad, a Barnawi unit is alleged to have smuggled dry fish into Niger with the full knowledge of Cameroonian soldiers who had received bribes and accepted to turn a blind eye to the activity (Hans de Marie Heungoup, February 2017). This involvement in the corruption chain has either hampered the dismantling of terrorist cells or provided openings for Jihadists to enter Cameroonian territory to commit heinous acts.

## CHAPTER IV – RECOMMENDATIONS

The Boko Haram conflict is like a large veil that conceals the complex web of political, economic, social and symbolic interests that we have identified here. The solutions proposed so far have not taken these interests into consideration and have failed to address the multiple challenges posed by the conflict. The following recommendations are intended to improve the efficiency of the responses that are currently being implemented, so as to accelerate the pacification of the Far North Region.

### **To improve the quality of responses by public authorities, the State should among others :**

Strengthen coordination of activities of the various stakeholders by setting up a permanent platform for consultation between state institutions, CSOs, academics and development partners, and a national bureau for the coordination of humanitarian activities.

Improve local transparency and governance by demilitarizing the management of the crisis and involving elected officials (mayors, parliamentarians and senators), and decentralized services of the relevant ministries. Government should always consult the population before taking major administrative decisions.

Respect human rights and comply with international humanitarian laws by setting up a joint commissions, to follow up and assess the situation of human rights on the ground and report cases of abuse by security forces and vigilante committees to public authorities.

Set up early warning systems against crisis and catastrophes.

Move from early recovery initiatives, to more ambitious sustainable development plans that can reverse the trend of poverty and ignorance.

Draw up and implement a Regional Emergency Plan and include it within the development framework.

### **To render collective actions against Boko Haram more efficient, member States of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the African Union and their international partners could :**

Set up a civilian component within the MNJTF that would handle the socio-economic, religious and political dimensions of the conflict.

Involve traditional rulers of the affected areas in the prevention and fight against the radicalization and enlistment of the youth. They should also strengthen the council of traditional rulers of the Lake Chad Basin.

Set up a special sub-regional fund for socio-economic reintegration which would also finance regional programs to eradicate factors that foster terrorism, such as the Tiwara program that the French Development Agency wants to implement in the Sahel.

Establish trans-border markets to increase trading activities and the movement of persons, while also protecting the civil status registration.

Implement regional development programs in border areas to increase economic opportunities and foster peace and security.

**To make it possible for the various stakeholders, including crime entrepreneurs and all who benefit from the conflict, to enjoy the dividends of peace, extensive reforms must be carried out :**

The State with support from its international partners should draw up and implement an amnesty and socioeconomic reintegration program to encourage militants to leave the Islamic sect.

The Boko Haram network is mostly supported by youths who are forced by the circumstances of unemployment, social insecurity as well as political and social exclusion. Unfortunately, the fight against Boko Haram has rather worsened their plight by destroying the economic fabric of the region. It is therefore necessary for the State, civil society and international donors to urgently implement programs that go beyond the current early recovery projects, to promote strategic initiatives that can foster development through reviving whole sectors and modernizing agricultural, fishing and animal breeding practices. Providing support to micro-projects and encouraging the gradual development of a formal trading sector in the region are also crucial in the efforts to eradicate the clandestine economy that promotes smuggling and terrorism. In this regard, incentives such as free coaching, access to credit facilities and tax waivers can be of great help. Young people, whose livelihood has been affected by the war, especially those in the tourism sector, will need new skills to enable them to take up other activities while waiting for the tourism sector to recover with the return of peace

and security. These skills will also be needed by the other vulnerable groups for whom labor intensive projects, particularly in the development of local resources, should be implemented. Such support should not only go to vulnerable groups, but also to Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) to help them to grow and create jobs.

Authorities should also halt the proliferation of vigilante groups and make it easy for civilians to provide information to security forces. The terms of reference for vigilante committees should be clearly defined and their work limited to specific tasks. The State and its foreign partners should also have a demobilization and socioeconomic reintegration plan for the members of these committees.

Authorities should monitor the activities of NGOs that belong to religious institutions and fundamentalist groups in order to limit their ability to finance terror and Islamist extremism. Their activities as well as the background of their leaders should be verified, and their sources of income and bank accounts identified when they are seeking authorization from public authorities.

Securing the trading route between Maiduguri and the Far North Region and all other border crossings is crucial for reviving trade and reducing inflation caused by the disruption of supply chains. Inflation should be controlled through subsidies and tax waivers for some heavily consumed basic products from Cameroon in the Far North. This will make local goods cheaper than contraband and thus discourage smuggling and trafficking.

The elections planned for 2018 should be an opportunity to correct past political mistakes. Political parties should nominate more young candidates and involve them in campaigns to accustom them to democracy and political participation. The recent communiqué by ELECAM on voter registration in the region is encouraging. The Far North Region, as of July 2017, had the highest number of new registrations in the country with 1,104,270 registered voters. This could be a sign of renewed interest in politics. Civil society organizations should also carry out “community organizing” campaigns to build the collective capacity of the population and help them to develop and internalize a democratic culture, citizen control and responsible governance.

Cameroonian authorities, who have shown exemplary hospitality so far, should continue to treat refugees with compassion and in compliance with international conventions on the rights of refugees. They should, in partnership with the UNHCR, ensure that voluntary departures of refugees are organized under humane and proper security conditions.

Cameroonian and Nigerian authorities should strengthen cooperation by consolidating and enlarging formal and informal relations between the Nigerian and Cameroonian armies on the frontline, to address other threats such as highway robbery, trafficking in wild animals, roaming of criminal gangs along the borders and smuggling that are worsening the security crisis.

## CONCLUSION

The Boko Haram conflict in the Far North of Cameroon with all its appearance of a new threat is in fact just another manifestation of the chronic security problems, which have plagued the region for decades. This crisis is the result of the vulnerabilities of the region and has been sustained by the complex web of evolving interests. It is the pursuit of these interests that has prolonged the conflict. The security situation of the Far North region today is still poor. The renewed violence these past months shows that the sect, which was believed to be in distress, is still not only active but has a strong presence on the Cameroonian territory. The shortcomings of the responses to this threat have rather exacerbated the crisis, created a new generation of sympathizers of the sect and pushed others into extremist violence or organized crime. New security approaches against Boko Haram must take these new actors into consideration. Holistic and inclusive responses that are beneficial to all the parties involved should be envisaged, to convince leaders of organized crime to change. For this reason, the objectives of the fight should be redefined and short term measures implemented to restore the economy of the region, improve the competitiveness of the formal economy, revive democratic participation at local level and pave the way not only for the rehabilitation of victims, but also for the reintegration of returning militants.

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## FES Peace and Security Series No. 21

### About the FES Africa Peace and Security Series

The lack of security is one of the key impediments to development and democracy in Africa. The existence of protracted violent conflicts as well as a lack of accountability of the security sector in many countries are challenging cooperation in the field of security policy. The emerging African Peace and Security Architecture provides the institutional framework to promote peace and security.

### About this publication

Since the terrorist attack of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in the USA, terrorism has become the main threat to peace and security, and a major political challenge in the world today. In Africa, the threat is even more serious in a context where poverty, poor governance and ethnic solidarity are creating fertile grounds for extremism. There are three main terrorist organizations in the continent: AQIM in the Sahel, Al-Shabab in Somalia and Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. Boko Haram was created in 2002 by Imam Mohammed Yusuf in the north east of Nigeria. The sect has three methods of action: suicide attacks on authorities and civilians, deadly armed attacks and abduction of civilians. It has been accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity and classified as a terrorist organization by the Security Council of the United Nations since 22 May 2014.

In Cameroon, Boko Haram took advantage of the compassion shown to displaced persons and refugees.

As a political foundation committed to the values of social democracy, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) aims at strengthening the interface between democracy and security policy. FES therefore facilitates political dialogue on security threats and their national, regional and continental responses. The FES Africa Peace and Security Series aims to contribute to this dialogue by making relevant analysis widely accessible. The series is being published by the FES Africa Security Policy Network.

Fleeing Borno State after the Nigerian offensive, its members settled in the border areas of the Far North Region and started recruiting new members. Poor and feeling abandoned, hundreds of young people joined the group as early as 2009. Since 2013, the events that have unfolded show that the terrorist threat is constantly changing. Costly national, regional and international responses (military, humanitarian, logistics, etc.) are still being deployed with little to show for the effort.

From September 2016 on, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) initiated a series of 4 workshops Yaoundé and Ngaoundere to analyse these problems and recommend **new collective security responses** in order to combat the phenomenon of Boko Haram.

Through this publication, the fruit of discussions among experts from different fields, the FES is contributing, to the search for solutions that can sustainably address the security challenges plaguing the Far North Region.

