

Boko Haram Insurgency as a Threat to Peace building and Economic Emergence in Cameroon: Does the Popular Defense a Solution?

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Abstract: - The starting point of this study is the idea that, geopolitical and geo-strategic regional compulsions around the Lake Chad have made the revision and redefinition of the popular defense, which is army and nation working in synergy to defend a country's territory and sovereignty, a necessity. More broadly, the conceptual and empirical puzzles of this piece can be simply and directly formulated in two research questions. Does popular defense, which is the operational concept in the strategy of defense in Cameroon, a genuine solution to Boko Haram insurgency regarding factors driving this phenomenon? Can the mobilization of the population really impact peacebuilding as a prerequisite of economic emergence of Cameroon, that is, "a country that creates and distributes wealth fairly; a country that offers equal development opportunities to all; a country with strong and sustainable growth; a country with enhanced food security, in a word, a country that ensures happiness for all"? The principal hypothesis driving this study is that, although Cameroon's resilience to Boko Haram can be associated to the materialization of popular defense or the symbiosis between army and nation, there is an urgent need to develop the economy as a sustainable solution which can counter insurgency. Built principally on individual methodology and constructivism as theoretical framework or 'how we know what we know', the study finds that the mobilization of local people who formed vigilante groups or vigilance committees to volunteer in intelligence, on the condition that the confidentiality is guaranteed, and support to the Defense and security forces at the war front, if combined with robust democratic governance and inclusive public policies, can be an appropriate solution to Boko Haram insurgency as the main obstacle to peace and development.

I. INTRODUCTION

The starting point of this study is the fact that, geopolitical and geo-strategic regional compulsions around the Lake Chad have made the revision and redefinition of the popular defense, which is army and nation working in synergy to defend a country's territory and sovereignty, a necessity. The Boko Haram insurgency, which gained national attention in 2014 with bombing attacks and killings which led to the death of several policemen, soldiers and civilians, remains the most devastating security challenge that the post 1970s Cameroon has faced before the crisis in the North West and South West regions which started in 2016. This terrorist group, which claims to have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in West Africa, has brought death and desolation in the affected region. In fact, the absence of peace or its fragility, as the result of Boko Haram insurgency – 296 attacks with more than 28 suicide bombings so far – is one of the barriers preventing citizens from seizing opportunities that can be generated by the dynamics of economic emergence in Cameroon. It deprives the population of the chance to develop its potential which can boost the country's entire economy. In his review of the UNESCO Yearbook on Peace and Conflict Studies, Michael Eftimiades (1986) observes that, "since his existence, man has always desired and strived for peace, yet has always fallen short of reaching such a worthwhile goal. This is due to man's failure to communicate and his attempts to promote his own self-interests at the expense of the goals of society. The only way to obtain such a goal is for mankind to establish and implement a unified proposal which slowly leads to the establishment of peace". In other words, the only way to prevent violence or conflict is to build a genuine lasting peace. In 1945, US secretary of state Edward R. Stettinius (as cited in Kumali, 2014: 4) acknowledges that "the battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social front where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace". In the same perspective, J. Galtung (1973 as cited in Zamir) argues that "there are two different

concepts of peace: one is the negative peace definition. That is to say, peace is defined in terms of absence of war, ceasefire and disarmament. The other concept is the positive peace that means cooperation, human rights, justice, anti-racism, and conservation of the environment". In fact, peace also implies the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, equality between women and men, democratic participation, tolerance, the free flow of information and disarmament. As the UN Secretary General said, while presenting his Annual Report in July 2009, "building peace is about much more than ending war. It is about putting in place the institutions and trust that will carry people forward into a peaceful future". According to the UN Peacebuilding Commission (as cited in Kumali, 2014), "peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict in countries emerging from conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels, address key causes of conflict and lay down the foundations for sustainable peace and development. These measures include, for example, security sector reform, elections and human rights monitoring and institutional capacity development". Although military and security forces are crucial for keeping peace, civilian agencies are just as important for constructing, preserving and maintaining it. It is therefore essential to welcome and promote the talents and contributions of vigilance committees / vigilante groups, in the perspective of popular defense, to ensure peace and development. The Boko Haram insurgency has taken an untold damage on development initiatives in Cameroon, bringing virtually to naught or zero all initiatives to improve on livelihoods of local populations by the destruction of all that stands for development: schools, hospitals, roads and communication networks. Although statistical records are not yet available, their negative impact on development initiatives are devastating. The arm inflicted has not only been in Nigeria, where the epicenter of their activity is found, and where there are regular attacks leading to bloodletting. Cameroon took a rather unusual share of the devastation as if it is a direct part of the conflict, whereas it is mere collateral despite the hypothesis of internal complicities. The conspiracy theory cannot be used seriously as a way to avoid a sincere reflection on the social and political causes of violence in the region (Pommerple, 2015). Failing to include the population in the fight is the equivalent of walking with one leg and one cannot do it or cannot move forward. Besides the concern for national security, the challenge to off-root Boko Haram is demonstrated by associations, traditional and religious authorities, individual citizens and institutions of learning. Those who could contribute to the war effort in cash or kind prayed that the Almighty Creator of mankind should alter the tendency. Vigilance committees' contributions backing up defense and security forces ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to contribute to their nation's security. The damages and disorder that the militants have set off in markets, places of worship and other public gatherings could not be compared to any other violence experience in Cameroon. The cross-border character, as well as the dialectic between conventional and asymmetric tactics used by the members of this terrorist group, is such that the Defense and security forces need the support of the population to achieve concrete results. In this perspective, local people formed vigilance committees to volunteer in intelligence and support to the Defense and security forces at the war front. In fact, the first step in dealing with terrorism is to overcome fear, to stand up and say 'enough is enough'. All administrative and defense officials in the affected localities and across the country have been supportive of the need for the population to actively take part in the fight in view to restore peace and stability in the Far North Region and ensure that no part of Cameroon is ceded to Boko Haram projected "state". Some observers even sounded skeptical about the effectiveness of such synergy. According to them, the Cameroonian success story, however, has its downsides, such as placing top officers under surveillance, assigning domestic intelligence to civilian agency, and creating civilian – controlled paramilitary forces to handle internal security and counterinsurgency. In addition, intelligence from vigilante groups is determining and useful, but if poorly used, it may become dangerous and lead to witch hunting. Yet the results produced on the field do testify that the collective of a people can never be subjugated by any negative force, no matter how strong it is. The determination of a suicide bomber profile is crucial for any victory. Therefore, the intelligent participation of vigilante groups in the fight against terrorism, and other forces of destruction, calls for more research in this field. It therefore goes without saying that peace; human rights and economic emergence are indivisible and concern everyone. Although no one can justify the existence of terrorism or extremism, no matter the reason, there is an urgent need to understand and explain the origins, affiliation, source of strength or factors irrigating Boko Haram insurgency, and the dynamics of popular defense, and other initiatives as responses. The main objective of this paper is to generate innovative knowledge that can inform policy debates on the socio-economic causes of violence and options relating to conflicts or violence management and avoidance. It is subdivided into four sections: - statement of the research problem and hypothesis - theoretical framework and methodology - Factors facilitating Boko Haram incursions in the Far North region - Popular defense: from a simple concept to a defense strategy in action.

Statement of the research problem and hypothesis

Recent repeated terrorists' attacks have turned the entire World into one trembling village, in which every citizen and those responsible for public order are all looking for ways to protecting affected areas. For

quite a long time, terrorism was a vice never really associated directly with Africa. However of late, its ugly face has found a fertile ground in several parts of Africa, with Cameroon, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and Uganda as new entrants into the rather embarrassing club of terrorists-affected countries south of the Sahara. Cameroon, a country which knows what price it takes to pay for peace – after fighting a ruthless war of liberation to obtain its independence in 1960 and which has been able to keep conflict situations at bay since its independence – is facing the Jihadist movement, Boko Haram whose real motives still remain relatively unknown, except for the fact that it wants to install Islam as a formal and institutional religion. On July 15, 2015, two suicide attacks was perpetuated in Fotokol, a locality of the Far North region situated at the border with Nigeria leaving behind thirteen deaths including the two suicide bombers and ten injured. One week later, precisely on July 22, 2015, two other suicide attacks occurred at the entrance of the Maroua Central market leaving behind 13 deaths including the suicide bombers and 32 injured. Three days later, on July 25, 2015, another suicide attack occurred at the Pont Vert neighborhood, still in Maroua town the head quarter of the Far North region, leaving behind 21 deaths and 85 injured. Following these successive tragedies of an unprecedented cruelty, which created stir and shock within the population, the President of the Republic of Cameroon instructed that strong measures in view to hunt, track down and boot out such “criminals”. It is thanks to the understanding and synergy of the defense and security forces, vigilance committees, the administration and the civil society that Boko Haram finds itself in a difficult position. Giving the important role vigilance committees have been playing in the whole fight against the terrorist group, they have been equipped with materials that enhance their effort in identifying suspected members of Boko Haram. Defense and Security Forces defeat Boko Haram only through intelligence which implies the collaboration of the population and the culture of vigilance. More broadly, the conceptual and empirical puzzles of this piece can be simply and directly formulated in two research questions. Does popular defense, which is the operational concept in the strategy of defense in Cameroon, a genuine solution to Boko Haram insurgency regarding factors driving this phenomenon? Can the mobilization of the population really impact peacebuilding as a prerequisite of economic emergence of Cameroon, that is, "a country that creates and distributes wealth fairly; a country that offers equal development opportunities to all; a country with strong and sustainable growth; a country with enhanced food security, in a word, a country that ensures happiness for all"? The principal hypothesis driving this study is that, although Cameroon’s resilience to Boko Haram can be associated to the materialization of popular defense or the symbiosis between army and nation, there is an urgent need to develop the economy as a sustainable solution which can counter insurgency. In other words, while Boko Haram terrorists continue to create damages in what it called “war in the population” by the late brigadier general Jacob Kodji, their activities can mostly be eradicated if the government also gives a humane face to its decisions, and distributes resources such that all segments of society are taking into consideration. This may reinforce people’s capacity to resist and to cope with day-to-day challenges imposed by the “criminal gang”. Furthermore, peace is a vector of sustainable development, essential and timely in the country’s specific context where every citizen is called upon to contribute for an emergent Cameroon.

Theoretical framework and methodology

This study is built principally on individual methodology and constructivism as theoretical framework or ‘how we know what we know’. Drawing inspiration from Raymond Boudon scholarship, Hyunsun Choi (2010) argues that individualism emphasizes the important role of an individual in society. An individual may be the State, a group, an association or a human being. It claims that society exists for the benefit of the individual, and the individual must not be constrained by government interventions or made subordinate to collective interests as peace. Ayn Rand (as cited in Choi 2010), wrote that humans are ultimate ends in themselves, not means to the ends of others. The pursuit of one's own self-interest and happiness is the highest moral purpose of life. Hyunsun Choi (2010) concludes that social systems are collections of individuals and individualism focuses on protecting natural freedoms and rights, pursuing the development of society for the benefit of the individual in a peaceful environment. It fails, however to recognize the causes of social problems and the importance of government intervention. On the other hand, constructivism helps us to point out that peace is a social construction. The idea of the socially constructed nature of peace is also rooted in symbolic interactionism as pioneered by Margaret Mead (as cited in Friedrich, 2012)). Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann also defend the idea of the social construction of peace. They argued that social order is a human product or an ongoing human production (1967). Boko Haram can be considered as a social construction that can also be socially deconstructed. Regarding the research methodology, we will use an exploratory research model. This qualitative methodology has enabled us to deduce and refine our hypothesis continually during the research process. From our preliminary investigations, we suspect that there is very little research or data to assist us in understanding the scope of the problem in Cameroon. We hope to identify specific actors, their patterns, opinions and motivations in participating in the fight against Boko Haram. The study uses case histories to evaluate the implication of some groups as vigilance committees in the war. In-depth interviews

based on thematically grouped open-ended questions to study individual group experiences, was administered in a way to allow for free dialogue and for trust to be built. Participant observation helps to address the reality of inequalities and poverty in the affected region.

Factors facilitating Boko Haram incursions in the Far North region

According to statistics collected in 2011, nearly 7 out of 10 people aged 10 or over (that is 71.2%) have been to school in Cameroon. In contrast, less than 3 out of 10 people are going to school in the Far North region¹. The school attendance rate in Cameroon is 80.9%. The Far North, with 48.3% rate, is the lowest school attendance region². The school wastage rate is 2.2% in Cameroon in general. It is higher in the Far North, with 5.4%³. The distribution of the population by level of education shows that the out-of-school population represents 33.7%. This rate is very high in the Far North, with 63.3%. According to the survey on employment and the informal sector in Cameroon, the proportion of people with vocational training is higher in the cities of Yaoundé (47.2%) and Douala (47.8%). Moreover, the populations of Adamaoua (14.2%), North (9.9%) and Far North (4.9%) have the least professional training⁴ compared to those of the others regions⁵.

Furthermore, one former minister of Territorial Administration⁶ also blames suicide bombings on lack of women emancipation. In a strongly worded open letter, he condemned the use of small girls and young women in the war tactics by Boko Haram. He argued that “the Defense and Security Forces might, coupled with the international assistance, could help Cameroon and other nations being ravaged by Boko Haram win the war”. But adds that “for peace to be long lasting, and to stem the temptation of young people, especially young girls from being recruited by extremists groups, the Cameroonian government needs to implement social measures that bring hope and guarantee better standards of living to all Cameroonians in general, and especially those living in the Far North region of the country”. According to him, the war to extricate the most vulnerable members of the society from the temptation of terrorism will take much longer time. The first target group for emancipation are women and young people because they are hungry for knowledge, have dreams to work and ambition to becoming independent as well as build a family. Practices like female genital mutilations or circumcision and the ironing of breasts of young girls in the attempt to delay their puberty should be stopped.

“Al-Shebbab” means “Youths” and that is the reason why Islamic extremists target this segment of every population to recruit their members. Abandoning young people into the hands of extremist ideologists is a crime that the Cameroonian government should not commit. There is a need for compulsory and free education for all Cameroonians up to the age of sixteen and the introduction of two-month compulsory national youth service so as to reduce the number of potential recruits available for exploitation by terrorists groups like Boko Haram. In fact, the northern part of Cameroon stands in greater need of this type of initiative so that it can play its key as a barricade against extremists. Primary school enrolment in northern regions of Cameroon is still as low as 40% as against the average of 70% in the southern regions of the country.

In the other hand, Bernard Muna once observe that: “We waited long to take precautions. When Boko Haram was rampant in Nigeria, we did not think that sharing the same borders with that country, Boko Haram was to come home. Many people also speak of this war by saying that they are Cameroonians who are part of this terrorist movement. But I can tell you one thing, these are people who have the Cameroonian national identity card. They got such identity cards because we had to cheat during elections. In this border area, there are some authorities in our country who have gone to Nigeria to look for people in order to vote in their favor. Today, these people are poor and when Boko Haram gives them 1000Fcf, they are forced to go and fight alongside them. We say anything about Boko Haram but the ground was prepared by us. The President of the Republic must involve all opposition parties in the fight against this war”.

Information collected from the field also indicates that one of the causes of the radicalization is the lack of family affection experienced by some young people, most of whom are from polygamous families. Such emotional harm pushes them to take it out on society. Boko Haram has exploited these vulnerabilities to make the Far North a logistics base, a safe haven or refuge and a source of recruitment. The group has particularly gathered support among disaffected youth in districts adjacent to Nigeria through the use of ideological indoctrination, socio-economic incentives and coercion. Cameroonian security forces, starting in 2013,

¹ *Deuxième enquête sur l'emploi et le secteur informel au Cameroun (EESI2)*, National Institute of Statistics, Yaounde, 2011, p. 20.

² *Ibid.* p. 21.

³ *Ibid.* p. 25.

⁴ Vocational training is the set of activities of adaptation of the man to his work. It aims at acquiring knowledge (knowledge), know-how (skills), knowledge being (attitudes necessary to the exercise of a job or profession) and allows access to employment (See *Deuxième enquête* , *op. cit.*, p.27)

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 27.

⁶ For more details, see *The Guardian Post* N° 0776 of August 3, 2015, p. 8.

dismantled hidden weapon stockpiles and arrested Boko Haram leaders, pushing the group to threaten and eventually attack Cameroon directly.

Studies have shown that the biggest risk factor for violent extremism, in addition to being female or marginalized, is having a connection to someone in a radical group. In the 1980s, researchers in Italy found that 69 percent of Italian left-wing militants in one underground organization were friends before joining. Similarly, about two thirds of al-Qaida fighters in Afghanistan post-2001 were tied to the network by friends or family.

Ambassador Samantha Power, following a meeting with Cameroonian President Paul Biya, on April 19, 2016, has this to say: “We discussed the monstrous threat posed by Boko Haram, and we agreed – and he was very forceful on this point – that the military response alone could not succeed in defeating Boko Haram in the long-term. We need, together in partnership and across the region, to make sure that we are investing appropriately in economic development, that the security agencies who are responsible for fighting Boko Haram are respecting human rights of the local population; that, politically, the people living in these areas – some of which have been quite marginal over the years – feel that their government and their security services and the civil administration are looking out for them.”

Finally, the charm offensive, which consist to rally young people around agricultural and livestock farming activities, by the Cameroonian government towards the Extreme-North youth, meant to promote income-generating activities, could help in preventing the expansion of the Nigerian terrorist sect Boko Haram. Indeed, the latter takes advantage of the general poverty in this part of Cameroon, to recruit members who will later commit attacks on these populations. In fact, it is a classic formula for radicalization, with a network of individuals bonded by shared values, developing a willingness to defend each other or their beliefs, regardless of the cost. But there is also strong evidence that the opposite is also true regarding the fact that the same elements that give rise to violent extremism, if seriously addressed, can help reverse the process.

Popular defense: from a simple concept to a defense strategy in action

Cameroon also created a system of Vigilance Committees (VC) / Vigilante Groups, which have successfully thwarted or limited the damage caused by suicide attacks. This defense strategy in action implies a sincere collaboration between army and the nation (populations). Members of the vigilante groups or committees are considered as the volunteers of the Nation⁷. Regarding the modalities of the selection of the members of vigilance committees, there are selected by administrative authorities and traditional rulers⁸, who are well placed to evaluate the morality of individuals that can be part of such committees. Intelligence from vigilante groups is determinant and useful, but if poorly used, it may become dangerous. There is also a need to reassure the population that the defense and security forces are on the field to protect them and that they should not be afraid of the threats of Boko Haram fighters.

The impact of the action of these Committees on the field is real. In fact, nine dead and 24 injured were recorded on September 13, 2015 in the locality of Kolofata in the Far North region after two suicide male teenage bombers exploded their devices at a thirty minute interval. Reports say the casualty would have been ever greater if Dogo Ngonda, a member of the local vigilante group or committee had not approach the first bomber whose face was unfamiliar in the locality and asked the later to identify himself. It was upon insisting that the bomber reportedly of foreign nationality activated the device he was wearing under his “boubou”,

⁷ See “Comités de vigilance – Boko Haram: une guerre à mort”, article in *L’Oeil du Sahel*, N° 762, December 2015, p. 2.

⁸ According to Paul NCHOJI NKWI, before the modern State came into existence on the African Continent, peoples were governed with political systems invented by themselves. The Indirect Rule policy implemented by the British Administration in the former West Cameroon virtually recognized the usefulness and the virtual role traditional institutions played in keeping people together in harmony. Many people today still reify the culture and the values embedded on them. The fact that the Cameroon State has provide a clear framework within which they can be consulted, through the July 1977 decree, indicates the vital role they have to play. However, administrators, politicians and modern elite usually command more respect and can make decisions far more than traditional rulers. No doubt, they have understood the game and some of them have sought and obtained greater political leverage by engaging in partisan politics; thus exposing themselves sometimes to raillery and insults from their populations. However, some traditional rulers, such as the Lamidos in the Northern part of the country still command respect and participate actively in decision-making. It was the Fulani Islamic scholar and teacher, Usman Dan Fodio, who conquered the area and imposed his leaders. History recounts that most of the Lamidos in Northern Cameroon were put in place by this spiritual leader. The Lamidos, who in effect are temporary and spiritual leaders, often exercising more power than Islamic clergy, the Imams. This has been further helped by the setup of societies that demand nearly absolute allegiance to traditional rulers and the elderly (See *Cameroon Tribune* N° 10722 / 6921 of November 21, 2014, pp. 8-9).

killing both. The second bomber who sneaked into a group commenting on the suicide bombing activated his device killing six on the spot and a seventh who died on his way to the hospital⁹.

On November 9, 2015, a young girl of about 14 years, blew herself up near the mosque in the village of Fotokol, in the Logone and Chari Division, in the Far North Region, killing five people including the suicide bomber and about twenty injured. The attack occurred when a young woman, member a vigilance committee, who after spotting the suicide bomber owing to her suspicious attitude, moved towards that direction to arrest her. Feeling unmasked, the suicide bomber went on to trigger her bomb, leading to the death of the vigilance committee member and three other people. This young woman, with such a heroic courage, has, in sacrificing her own life, helped to save the lives of many other innocent people located around and inside the mosque of Fotokol¹⁰.

On November 21, 2015, four Boko Haram suicide bombers perpetrated an attack in Nigué, a locality situated some three kilometers from the town of Fotokol in the Logone and Chari Division of the Far North Region. According to the officials, the four young female suicide bombers had arrived in the locality that fateful day to cause havoc. One headed for temporary residence of third class traditional ruler of Lemani who had fled his village due to insecurity. The assailant found her way into the house and exploded her vest, killing herself and the traditional ruler's five family members. This attack is certainly part of new strategy used by Boko Haram which consists in targeting vigilante groups and traditional rulers who constitute an important arm in the new intelligence and surveillance mechanism mounted against the terrorist group. Vigilante groups and traditional rulers received regularly adopted equipment from government to ensure their protection¹¹.

Twin suicide attacks from two young girls suspected to be agents of Boko Haram led to the death of seven people in the village of Dabanga on November 28, 2015. The incident occurred when members of vigilante group (volunteers of the Nation) identified the suspects who had just crossed from Nigeria and informed the defense forces. Aware of the presence of the suspects, two soldiers reacted promptly by taking control of them; unfortunately one of the girls reactivated the bomb on her, killing herself and wounding the two soldiers. The second girl who had escaped into a family home found a group of women who were taking their dinner, sat beside them and equally activated her own bomb killing four members of the family and herself. In total, seven people, including one wounded soldier who dies after sustaining serious wounds and the two suicide bombers also lost their lives in the attacks. It is thanks to the understanding and synergy of the defense and security forces, vigilante groups, the administration and the civil society that Boko Haram finds itself in a difficult position. Giving the important role vigilante groups have been playing in the whole fight against the terrorist group, they have been equipped with material that enhance their effort in identified suspected members of Boko Haram¹².

The self-defense groups have helped the military by patrolling villages and hard to reach border areas, but they say this is hard, dangerous work and they need more training. A member of a self-defense group in Kolofata, says men in his group have been kidnapped and killed. He says they need special training to be able to work from 9 PM to 4 AM every day. Cameroon believes the terrorists' ability to organize large-scale attacks has been greatly reduced, and that they are trying to replenish their ranks by recruiting vulnerable youths in Cameroon. Necessary measures were taken in view to remove the bad grains from the good and to stop infiltration of local self-defense militia by Boko Haram that may destroy all the good works that the self-defense groups have been doing. The administrative authorities organize self-defense groups or vigilance committees to henceforth work in synergy with security forces and denounce suspects as soon as they get any information. The government also gave the self-defense groups food and material to boost their morale. This move really improves their working conditions and spur them to work as the government expects. Sources from the ministry of Defense indicate that the call for collaboration from the population is bearing fruits because besides the spontaneity of the vigilante group members, people are now aware that they have to draw the attention of their traditional rulers and Defense and security forces to any strange face or suspicious activity in their localities. Administrative authority always urged the population not to give in to fear.

Information about the liberation of more than 900 hostages by the Cameroon's National Defense Forces of the Emergence 4 and Alpha Units in collaboration with the Sector Number One of the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin Commission (MJTF) based in Mora (Cameroon) and Nigerian forces sounded like the beginning of the end of Boko Haram with the transfer of more than 1 800 Nigerians back to their country. The officials also indicate that the swift operations from 26-28 November, 2015 helped in

⁹ See the article of *Cameroon Tribune* N° 10926/7125 of September 14, 2015, p. 5.

¹⁰ See the Statement issue by the Minister of Communication extending the condolences of the Head State to the families of the victims in *Cameroon Tribune* N° 10967/ 7166 of November 10, 2015, p. 3.).

¹¹ See *Cameroon Tribune* N° 10976/7175 of November 23, 2015, p.14.

¹² Minister of Communication, cited in *Cameroon Tribune* N°10981/7180 of November 30, 2015, p. 11

chasing away the obnoxious militants from Cameroonian towns on border with Nigeria, forcing them to abandon their propaganda material. It is a real testimony of the determination of the Defense and Security Forces to face the macabre acts of the extremists group that has been sowing desolation and chaos in the Far North Region. The carnage and disorder that the militants have set off in markets, places of worship and other public gatherings could not be compared to any other violence experience in Cameroon.

The resolve being demonstrated by the National Defense forces in Cameroon can certainly produce better results if the much needed support the soldiers want is given and on time. The sheer proliferation of arms and the presence of such dangerous weapons in the hands of dubious persons is sufficiently disturbing. While terrorists continue to create havoc, their activities can mostly be curtailed if world leaders also give a humane face to their decisions and distribute resources such that all segments of society are taking into consideration. Although no one can justify the existence of terrorism or extremism, no matter the reason, but achievements of defense and security forces in the fight against terrorism and other forces of destruction, require sustained political will, so that the populations for whom the defense forces battle to ensure their safety can effectively enjoy peace and stability¹³.

On January 28, 2016 during a sensitization meeting and evaluation of the activities of the Vigilance Committees in the Mayo-Sava division, the governor of the Far North region, Midjiyawa Bakari, would have asked these committees to “use nothing less than the practice of witchcraft”¹⁴. According to governor, “the Head of State recommended to integrate witchcraft in the fight against Boko Haram. We expect each village’s brilliant actions in this direction. We want to hear that this or that village destroyed or limited the damage of the sect through witchcraft. Fight for your country. Get involved actively. This is what the head of State expected of you. And we are waiting for the results”. After government’s call to employ witchcraft against Boko Haram, hundreds of militia fighters rushed to sorcerers, commonly called “marabouts,” to obtain lucky charms and talismans to protect them in the battle field. At night, some people believed they would leave their bodies and take the shape of animals, such as butterflies and cats, in order to fight witches that threatened their communities.

To local populations, there are two types of witchcraft: fetishism, which employs charms to harm or do good, and vampirism, in which incantations replace the physical objects. A marabout based in Maroua claimed that “some members of the vigilance committees now have the ability to mystically eat the hearts of enemies or make them slaves by pronouncing incantations”. A member of the vigilante group fighter said he possessed an amulet that allowed him to turn invisible and sneak up on Boko Haram terrorists in Kérawa. He explained to a local reporter that: “I was recently alerted that two women were in possession of a bomb. I wanted to surprise them. I pronounced the magic phrases and I appeared before them. The bomb was defused”. Nevertheless, without empirical evidence, citizens and officials don’t know if the wizardry has been working or not.

Ironically, witchcraft is illegal in Cameroon due to its perceived pernicious effects in tribal communities, where believers frequently cast spells in hopes of hurting their enemies. Section 251 of the Law N° 2016 / 007 of July 12, 2016 relating to the Penal Code states that: “Whoever commits any act of witchcraft, magic or divination liable to disturb public order or tranquility, or to harm another in his person, property or substance, whether by the taking of a reward or otherwise, shall be punished with imprisonment for from 2 (two) to 10 (ten) years, and with fine from CFAF 5000 (five thousand) to CFAF 100 000 (one hundred)”. Many people have been thrown into prison on the grounds that they are accused and convicted of practicing black magic in the villages. A legal mind will tell us that ‘necessity makes law’ to justify the use of witchcraft in the fight against Boko Haram. However, “it is well known that occult ceremonies are practiced in the political circles of Cameroon at a very high level,” argues Henriette Ekwe, a Cameroonian political analyst and good governance advocate. In Africa in general, witchcraft is sometimes considered as traditional barrier to development and acquisition of new forms of wealth (Fisiy & Geschiere, 1993: 99).

While addressing the Diplomatic corps based in Yaounde on January 8, 2015, President Paul Biya put emphasis on the global dimension of terrorism: “It is a global threat that calls for a global response”. He further mentioned that: “The threat posed by Jihadists Boko Haram and Shebabs may be defeated only by global mobilization”. As a matter of fact, the photos below highlight the reality of the popular defense as doctrine and defense strategy in action:

¹³ See *Cameroon Tribune*, N°10988/7187 of December 9, 2015, p.5.

¹⁴ See *L’Oeil du Sahel*, No. 778 of February 1st, 2016.

Photo 1 & 2: Soldiers of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) hereby counseling the populations about the fight against terrorism and the importance of collaboration in the fight against Boko Haram



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1103278696362538&set=pcb.1103279129695828&type=3&theater> consulted on January 7, 2016.

This counseling is timely, giving the fact that there is a possibility of misinformation or abuse in counterinsurgency operations. For example, on February 14, 2020, Human Rights Watch found that government forces, including members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), the elite unit of the Cameroonian army,

and armed ethnic Fulani killed 21 civilians in Ngarbuh (a locality situated in the North West region), burned homes, and beat residents. The armed Fulani is the “local vigilante group” referred to in the government news release. On April 16, 2020, the Commission of inquiry set up by Cameroon’s government found that security forces and members of “local vigilante group” went on a reconnaissance operation in Ngarbuh, where they confronted armed ambazonians separatists, killing 5 of them. In the exchange 13 civilians were killed. The military then attempted to cover up their acts by burning homes and filing a false report on the incident. The commission identified a sergeant, a gendarme, and a soldier as responsible for the killings and named a battalion commander who failed to supervise the operation.

Photo 3: A member of a civilian vigilante group carries a bow and arrow while running on patrol with the Cameroonian military in Kerawa, Cameroon:



Source: Associated Press, Photo: Reuters, March 16, 2016.

Authorities in northern Cameroon argue that local self-defense group used a poisoned arrow to kill a woman with explosives strapped to her body.

II. CONCLUSION

For many years Cameroon has confronted the insurgents of the Nigeria-born insurgent group Boko Haram. Although the first attacks occurred in March 2014, the jihadist group’s presence in Cameroon’s Far North region dates back to at least 2011. It has benefited from a network of local collaborators and has exploited vulnerabilities that the region shares with North-Eastern Nigeria. While the first eighteen months of conflict were characterized by conventional warfare, the group later switched to an asymmetric mode of attack. The Cameroonian government’s focus on a military and popular defense response has been partly successful, but the structural problems that allowed this threat to arise have not been addressed completely. Therefore the fight against Boko Haram requires adapting and improving security structures, and long-term crisis resolution policies that will prevent a revival of this threat in a different form, and stop insecurity in the region. In other words and in order to consolidate military gains against Boko Haram and bring back lasting peace in the Far North, Cameroon’s government must shift from a security-based approach to focus on socio-economic development and countering religious radicalism. For instance, during their detention, members of Boko Haram should be exposed to a range of educational, vocational, recreational, spiritual and psychosocial activities from

job training to sport. This suggests that by providing alternate means of attaining personal significance and enabling access to peaceful social networks, people can be taught to turn away from extremist ideology. In addition, the delegitimizing of a corrupt ruling elite¹⁵ in the eyes of the people is partly responsible for the emergence of terrorist groups or sects like Boko Haram. Combined with high youth unemployment and very low development indicators, the incidence of absolute poverty in the Far North has made many poor and vulnerable young people ripe or mature for recruitment by extremist groups, sometimes simply in their bid to survive. For example, the robbery-related activities often attributed to the group attest to the desperation of some of its members to survive the vagaries of daily life in Cameroon. Information gathered from the field indicate that by initially joining the activities of Boko Haram, people intended to denounce the arrogance of a government disconnected from reality, because they do not measure enough the misery of the people. The context of post-modernity in which the action of the rulers unfolds is characterized by the valorization of the money than anything else, the control of the thought and the instrumentalization of the fear. Another question that can be addressed is whether behind the Boko Haram insurgency and other crises in Cameroon, particularly the Anglophone crisis, are not hidden the succession maneuvers that conspiracy theory might suggest. Silence breeds anger, depression and even violence. Where there is social justice, there is peace; where there is peace, there is harmony and inclusion; where there is harmony, there is development which is the new name of peace. Our thesis is that the mobilization of local people who formed vigilante groups to volunteer in intelligence, on the condition that the confidentiality is guaranteed, and support to the Defense and security forces at the war front, if combined with robust democratic governance and inclusive public policies, can be an appropriate solution to Boko Haram insurgency as the main obstacle to peace and development.

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¹⁵ In a post mortem interview on CRTV, broadcasted on July 19, 2016, the Cameroonian musician icon, Anne Marie NDZIE, affirmed that "highway robbers are not only in the forest, but are also in the offices of the public administration". Cameroon's 2013 Anti-corruption Status Report of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) disclosed different modes the cankerworm is manifesting its ugly face in the public administration with code-names given to the practice of corruption in the system. The practice at the Ministry of Finance, especially at the National Information Technology Development Centre (CENADI) where fake payment vouchers, bribery to obtain pay slips, illegal swelling of salaries amongst other vices are known as "mboma". At the General Directorate of Taxation, the phenomenon where fake business licenses, creation and use of fake tax discs and stamps is known as "Al Qaeda" transforming the public administration as a playground of "corruption terrorists". Other appellations used by promoters and users of public administration to signify ways of exploitation are: "gombo", "tchoko", "kola", "thanks" (See *Cameroon Tribune* N° 10985/7184 of December 4, 2015, p. 16).

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