

## The “Boko Haramisation” of Cameroon: A prolonged Night mare for a Sustaining Assemblage

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### Abstract

*Many scholars qualify Cameroon as the savviest place to stay and invest in the sub-region owing to its unperturbed peace, and that since the independence of French Cameroon and its reunification with British Southern Cameroons in 1960 and 1961 respectively, only the petty show-offs of the Nigerian forces in the peninsula of Bakassi unrewardedly tried to change the status-quo. But this assumption has been brought to book by recent events and the accounts of more critical scholars on the Cameroon-tranquility thesis. This paper - written on the basis of secondary and primary data (military intelligence data for that matter), and actor and observer's account - falls in line with the latter approach. It argues that the Cameroon military might has never been tested by a serious foreign armed challenge until the rise and the internationalization of the Boko Haram. For it was only then that Cameroonians (civil and the military alike, gripped by the insecurity fever) understood what it meant to be dared in an unremitting and deadly manner by a sturdy and impulsive enemy that cost the entire nation-state huge human and material resources. Cameroon (the northern regions for that matter) was classed as one of the “no-go areas” in the world. This protracted nightmare impelled a sustained domestic and foreign effort against this sect with the sole aim of bringing the sad story to a final end.*

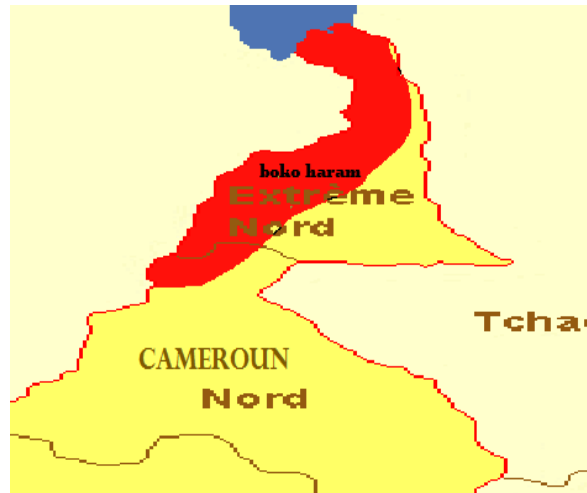
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**Map 1. Boko Haram Operation Zone in Cameroon**



Source: BIR (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua, 2015.

## Introduction

For the past six years the region of the Lake Chad Basin has undergone serious security challenges and break-down perpetrated by extremist Islamic sect, the Boko Haram (BH). Interwoven in a geographical and historical immediacy the countries (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger) in this region could not avoid being targets of this sect that grew out Nigeria's history of instability. All these made up the large African state of the Empire of Kanem-Bornu – from the 9th to the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> In fact, before colonization and the subsequent annexation into the British Empire in 1900 as colonial Nigeria, the Bornu Empire

<sup>3</sup>The political structure of the Kanem Empire had most likely grown out of rival states coming under the control of the Zaghawa. In the 11th century, the Zaghawa clans were driven out by Humai ibn Salamna, who founded the kingdom of Kanem with a capital at Njimi. The Saifwa dynasty was established. Saifwa rulers (known as *mais*) claimed they were descended from a heroic Arabic figure, and the dynasty greatly expanded the influence of Islam, making it the religion of the court. Wealth came largely through trade, especially in slaves, which was facilitated by the empire's position near important North-South trade routes. The empire had a policy of imperial expansion and traded for firearms and horses, wielding huge numbers of cavalry. When a *mai* desecrated a sacred animist religious artifact, conflict occurred between the dynasty and groups like the Bulala. Conflicts from outside forces were also enhanced by the empire's policy of collateral succession of brother succeeding brother which produced short reigns and unstable situations. In the late 14th century the Saifawa were forced to retreat west across Lake Chad and establish a new kingdom called Bornu. This is the origin of the name Kanem-Bornu. Bornu expanded territorially and commercially, but increasing threats from other rival states, drought, trade problems, and rebellious Fulani groups eroded state control. Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, a Muslim cleric, eventually defeated the rebellious Fulani and built a new capitol at Kukawa in 1814. His successors ended the Saifwa dynasty and the Kanem-Bornu Empire when they killed the last *mai* in 1846. Al-Kanemi's Shehu dynasty was short-lived, and succeeded by slaver and warlord Rabih Zubayr, who was defeated by the French in 1900.

ruled the territory from where the BH was born and very active. Ruled in accordance with Medina precepts or constitution, this sovereign sultanate was constituted by Kanuri Muslim population. This Kanuri ethnic composition also made up a portion of what would later become Cameroon Far North region. In 1903, the Sultanate of Borno and the Caliphate of Sokoto came under British rule, during which time Western educational institutions and system was used as a medium of rulership and Christian evangelization in the region. (Burns and Collins, 2007) Nigeria got independence in 1960 only to be challenged by stretched domestic instability prompted - in the main by coup d'états, religious and ethnic violence - from 1966 until the advent of democracy in the 1999 (Walker, 2005). During this period and later, politicians, academics and religious figures from the mainly Islamic north expressed outright opposition to Western education and its multipliers effects. In fact, such expressions formed one of the bases of ethno-religious interest groups and included influential military, political and religious leaders, causing immeasurable damage for the country's stability. Related incidences of sectarian violence here include the Kano crises of 1980 (led by the Yan Tatsine Muslim fundamentalist that spread throughout the northern cities) and *The Ogoni Crisis* (led by Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) since 1990) and recently the domestic and international actions of the BH sect (Bamgbose, 2013:131-133). Most of these incidences were fueled more than less by social inequality, poverty and the increasing radical nature of Islam.

The BH<sup>4</sup> grew out of a group of radical Islamist youths who worshipped at the Al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state, in the 1990s. Its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, began as a preacher and leader in the youth wing, Shababul Islam (Islamic Youth Vanguard), of Ahl-Sunnah, a Salafi group. His erstwhile mentor was Sheikh Jafaar Mahmud Adam, a prominent Islamic scholar and preacher at the mosque. Yusuf, charismatic and popular *Malam* (Quranic scholar) spoke widely throughout the north. His literal interpretation of the Quran led him to advocate that aspects of Western education he considered in contradiction to that holy book, such as evolution, the big bang theory of the universe's development, elements of chemistry and geography should be forbidden (Walker, 2012:3). While critical of the government, Yusuf was involved in official efforts to introduce and implement Sharia in several northern states in the early 2000s. The failure to achieve this fully helps explain Muslim youths' anger with government "deception" and "insincerity" and the call for an authentic Islamist revolution. Most accounts date the beginning of BH – *Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) its formal Arabic – to 2002, when it began to attract official attention (Ibid.).

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<sup>4</sup> *Haram*, from the Arabic, means "forbidden" and *Boko*, from Hausa diction means "fake," and when merged is often translated by many to mean "Western Education is forbidden," or "Western Education is sacrilege."

Falola and Heaton (2008: 206) hold that with the surge of Islamic reform groups in the north that share broadly common stated goals of promoting a purist vision of Islam based on Sharia; eradicating heretical innovations, and for many establishing an Islamic state in the north, generally political debate was legalistic interpretations of religious texts. Although the traditional Sufi orders remain predominant, the *Jama'at Izalat al-Bida wa Iqamat al-Sunnah* (Society for the Eradication of Evil Innovations and the Reestablishment of the Sunna), better known as the Izala Movement, in particular contributed to a general religious revival and a much greater public and political role for Islam. It was joined by several other reform movements, including the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSS), widely regarded as a platform for young radical preachers, and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, a more radical offshoot of the MSS better known as the Muslim Brotherhood, or Zakzaky, after its leader (Zenn, 2013:13-18). A smaller, but far more radical movement emerged around the same time as Izala. Mohammed Marwa, nicknamed *Maitatsine* (meaning “the one who curses” in Hausa), a young preacher from northern Cameroon, took an aggressive stance against Western influence, refusing to accept the legitimacy of secular authorities. As his following swelled during the 1970s with unemployed urban youth, relations with the police deteriorated. In December 1980 a confrontation at an open-air rally in Kano sparked massive, weeks-long rioting, leaving many hundreds dead and spreading to other states. Marwa died in the initial riots, but pockets of violence continued for several years (International Crisis Group, 2014:3).

A similar group appeared in the North East, initially referred to as the *Yusufiyya* or Nigerian Taliban and later as BH. Comparable to the *Maitatsine* group, but more threatening, the BH was founded and led by Mohammed Yusuf, with the aim of establishing *Sharia* Law and eliminate westernization in Nigeria. This isolated religious community based on *Salafism* and social *Talibanism* pedestal in Kanamma village in Yobe State attracted a handful of followers from poor Muslim communities of Niger, Chad and Cameroon, estimated between a few hundred and 10,000 after his establishment of a complex and religious school with a Jihadis intension. In fact, denouncing police and state corruption, the strength of this sect grew as it used its political consideration within the government to dictate its pace (Ploch, 2013: 11-12). The pace being the creation of a strict Islamic state in the north and the strict adherence to the Quran and the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed), and their interpretation as sanctioned by Ibn Taymiyyah (the preferred scholar of Mohammed Yusuf, the sect's leader). Like the majority of Salafi organisations, it is most concerned about what it means to be a good Muslim, defined by observance of the prescriptions of the faith, notably the categorical distinction between what is licit (*halal*) and what is forbidden (*haram*) (International Crisis Group, 2014:9). This “good Muslim” opinion soon influenced the extension of the Islamic state to the creation of Caliphate to encompass the northern parts of Nigeria, Cameroon and southern part of Niger, due to their ethnic and cultural intertwine. But Bakari (2013:13) claims that the “Caliphate creation was not due to ethnic or cultural

linkages, but provoked by the recent discovery of huge oil deposit, and thus such a state and its control would be the most interesting and enriching venture ever made”.

As a matter of fact, the group’s multi-nationalistic character has for long exerted influence in Nigeria, meanwhile retaining an arsenal of weapons for what it considered “defense.” For more than a decade later, its activities provoked a sight of one of the world’s most recent but ruthless, violent, and aggressive terrorist organizations with a clearly offensive strategy, even though with more an inwards focus. The turning point in this group’s rise to full-fledged militancy occurred in July 2009 after a four-day battle with Nigerian government forces in Bauchi, Kano, Yobe and Borno provinces, which resulted in a dead-toll of 800 of its members, its leader Mohammed Yusuf inclusive. The avenging of his death, notoriously video-recorded, widely became the principal rallying point for BH after reconstituting itself in September 2010 (*www.usip.org*: 2010:1-6).

With the change of leadership from Yusuf, a preacher, to the more radical and violent Abubakr Shekau (see plate 1) in 2010, the latter tied BH to the international jihadi movement in his statements by adopting anti-American rhetoric and showing support for jihadists in Algeria, Yemen, Somalia and Iraq. BH also stepped up attacks on the Nigerian population, targeting police stations, churches, schools, media houses and state institutions and kidnapping individual and groups of person (over 500 men, women and children – including the 276 Chibok school girls in April 2014), and these mostly occurred in north-east, north central and central Nigeria. Between July 2009 and June 2014, over 6,000 civilian were killed in Nigeria, including at least 2,500 in the first half of 2014 (*BBC News*, 2015-01-03). With these actions, especially the suicide bombing carried out at the UN headquarters in Abuja, a more critical international attention was activated thereto. This attention was also at the level of its support. According to the *Human Right Watch* (15 July 2014) only for the first six months of 2014, BH carried out 95 attacks that led to the death of over 2, 500 civilians, and of which 1,446 occurred in the Borno State.

Bamgbose (2013:132-134) and Ogaba (2011) understand that this group does not exist in isolation as they try to show its link with other terrorist organizations. Meanwhile they all cite the American Government’s declarative close ties of Abubakar Shekau, Abubakar Kamar and Khalid Al-Barmawi, (the three leaders of the group) with Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb, Obayuwana (2011) indicates the connections between the BH and Al Shahab in the Arabian Peninsula and Somalia. Bamgbose (2013:132-134) insists that in March 2010, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb confessed of helping Nigerian extremists with training and weapons to confront the Nigerian state. The group was reputed to have said that ”We are ready to train your people in weapons and give you whatever support we can in men, arms and munitions to enable defend our people in Nigeria.” The *Punch Editorial* (2012) cites Niger Foreign Affairs Minister to show the sufficient link between BH and Al-Qaeda in the



Islamic Maghreb in the light of weapons and training. Adisa (2012:2) and Mohamed (2012:12) also reveal that the group also known as *Al- Muntada* Trust Fund with headquarters in the United Kingdom is financially assisting the sect, as well as the Islamic World Society with headquarters in Saudi Arabia.

**Plate 1. Portrait of Abubakr Shekau and men**



**Source: BIR<sup>5</sup> (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua photo Album, 2015**

According to the International Crisis Group (2014:23-26), the BH members have links with a number of radical groups, including al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. In the aftermath of their June 2009 insurrection, 30 members were arrested in Adamawa state and returned to Maiduguri, where they reportedly admitted having received training in Afghanistan. It maintains that between 2000 and 2002, Osama Bin Laden issued two audio messages calling on Nigerian Muslims to wage jihad and establish an Islamic state. His interest dated from his 1992-1996 stay in Sudan, where he reportedly met Mohammed Ali. He was a Nigerian from Maiduguri studying at the Islamic University in Khartoum who later became his disciple and was trained in Afghanistan. Bin Laden asked him to organise a cell in Nigeria with a 300 million naira budget (approximately \$3 million in 2000). Ali returned home in 2002 and began funding religious activities of Salafi groups that were unaware of the plan. Mohammed Yusuf and his group allegedly were the major beneficiaries. Links appear to be most significant with Ansar Dine (“Supporters of the Faith” in Arabic), AQIM and the MUJAO, an AQIM splinter group.

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<sup>5</sup> The BIR was formed in 1999 as the *Bataillon Léger d’Intervention (BLI)*, a special intervention force designed to eliminate foreign rebels, bandits and deserters (the “coupeurs de routes”) who were destroying the security of Cameroon’s northern provinces through cattle rustling, abductions, murder and highway robbery. As part of military reforms carried out in Cameroon in 2001, the unit took on its current BIR designation. BIR officers are selected from the graduates of the *Ecole Militaire Interarmées* in Yaoundé. Recruits were sent to the different battalions created and spread all over the considered trouble spots in the country.

Many of these groups' leaders and fighters from Mali, Mauritania and Algeria engaged in lucrative criminal business with arms traffickers, narcotics smugglers, kidnappers and human trafficking gangs. Some fighters were trained and armed by the former Libyan strongman, Muammar Qadhafi, to destabilize their home governments. His fall opened many arms depots to local militants. The three Islamist groups boosted BH. In particular AQIM made its financial resources, military arsenals and training facilities available. During his police interrogation, Yusuf reportedly provided information on the flow of weapons to the sect from, among others, private sources in Niger, Cameroon and Chad. In fact, a fall-out from Nigeria military's crackdown indicated that BH members easily travel to these neighbouring countries owing to the porous borders and shared ethnicity, like the dominant Kanuri which constitutes a regional ethnic group that straddles the borders). In July 2009, Nigeria expelled dozens of BH members who were citizens of Niger (Ibid.).

It was also not uncommon for the Alpha operations of the BIR-Maroua, to arrest, interrogate and imprison and/or transfer some commoners as well as rich and political influential personalities in the Far North Region of Cameroon to Yaoundé for severe interrogation accused of participating in helping the BH. The help was either in the form of lodging, financing, arms or recruits, and this arrest occurred only after investigations and house search that sometimes resulted in the discovery of huge amounts of illicit arms (see plate 2). Thus, true, this group did not only depend on international help but got domestic help either from their Cameroon and/or Nigeria counterparts through their very complex network system. As a matter of fact, these supports, as well as the ransoms states have been paying to release their nationals, gave the BH the latitude and ease with which to get its sophisticated arms, operate and to put up a rigid resistance against its enemies. For the past months, it assumed a transnational character with the staging of kidnap scenes and deadly attacks on Nigeria's neighbours especially Cameroon and plunging the entire population in abject panic, fear and uncertainty. Thus, why have the presence of armed groups in Africa been on the rise? Why did the BH attack Cameroon? What characterized these attacks? How did the local and international community response to these attacks? all constitute the paper's concerns, divided in two major parts. The first dwells on the theoretical interpretation of the emergence-scenery of non-state violent armed groups (NSAVGs) in Africa, the second profiles BH disposition in Cameroon. The paper sums up with the domestic and international response to the BH in Cameroon. But it also tries to answer the crucial question of how effectively can this BH phenomenon in the sub-region be brought to a final end.

**Plate 2. Illicit arms gotten from BH members**



Source: BIR (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua photo Album, 2015.

### **1. Paradigm Interpretation of NSVAGs Emergence-scenery in Africa**

The increasing presence of NSAVGs (ethno-religious groups, armed wings of political parties, rebel and terrorist groups) in stability questions in Africa has raised important concerns about the institutionalization of violence as a means of redressing grievances, thus exposing the citizenry to vicious violence. This disposition often minimizes state competence to provide public security, democracy and development, and so has raised scholarly interest in comprehending these groups, especially rebel movements. Okumu and Ikelegbe (2010: 9-11) qualify rebel movements as organizations, which engage essentially in armed opposition and resistance, and particularly insurrection or insurgency against governments and ruling regimes. Harbom and Wallenstein (2006) see them as armed insurgent opposition organisations that are incompatible with, and challenge existing national governments with prime objective of change (replacement of existing governments; change existing frameworks in order to participate in and control governments; devolution of authority to grant autonomy to regional governments or the redesigning of national boundaries in favour ethnic separate).

Meanwhile their actions are often challenged by the government, in terms of character, legality and legitimacy, Clapham (2000:198) and Addison (2003: 1) identify different rebel movements in Africa; namely liberationists (who resists foreign rule and seeks independence), “insurgentists” who seek political change and power; and the irredentists who pursue secessionist goals with warlords trying to overthrow regimes and create “personal territorial fiefdoms.” Okumu and Ikelegbe (2010: 9-11) exemplify the Mau Mau (Kenya), *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN, Algeria), *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, South West Africa People’s Organisation (Namibia), Zimbabwe African People’s Union, *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* and the Boko Haram as liberation groups against foreign domination. Some of such groups commence as liberation movements only to assume reform insurgencies later, while others start as liberation movements and became reform insurgencies, but all with “warlordism” as a



rule. One outstanding characteristic of liberationists is that they are recognised in international law and subject to it (Musila, 2010: 89-119).

Some insurgent rebel movements grew out of grievances and agitation associated with identity-based exclusion and alienation by corrupt and autocratic regimes that abused and repressed the opposition and marginalised groups. This is what Gurr (1970:9) calls the inequality thesis. He says violence is more likely to occur in this case when people's expectations about what they should be achieving exceed their actual levels of achievement. He popularizes the concept in his seminal *Why Men Rebel*, in which he suggested three different patterns that relative deprivation could take: decremental deprivation, in which a group's value expectations remain relatively constant but capabilities decline; aspirational deprivation in which capabilities remain static but aspirations increase; and progressive deprivation, in which there is a simultaneous increase in expectation and decrease in capabilities. Gurr's formulation of the relative deprivation theory places its explanatory power squarely on the shoulders of participation: relative deprivation leads to frustration and aggression, which manifests itself as emergence of armed groups and violence. Thus, grievances motivate individuals to participate in rebellion. In Burundi, the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie / Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* and the *Forces Nationales de Libération*, (former *Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu*) fought against marginalisation by the Tutsis leadership for over a decade and in Chad, the *Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement* tried to topple Idriss Deby's government. More so, ethno-regional based governance, marginalization and exclusion separatist rebel movements such as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Southern Sudan and the Tuareg rebellion in the northern parts of Mali, Niger and South Algeria had long sort for independent states.

More so, the operational environment greatly determines the strategies and members' behavioural patterns of these groups. Krijn (2010: 389-417) posits that groups challenged by unfriendly milieu (restriction to jungle camps or sparsely populated villages) resort to forced conscriptions, abductions, harsh punishments for escapees, confiscation of materials and deadly reprisals. But those who depend on larger communities for critical support rather show greater sensitivity to them. Adams (2010: 389-417) agrees with the latter case in these words: ". . . those which seek acceptance and legitimacy from national, regional and international audiences tend towards more moderate behaviour with inhabitants of the controlled territories- what determines the group's success on the field." All this agrees with the security paradigm. But the recent hegemony of the collective action paradigm in explaining participation in rebellion or terrorist actions has led a number of scholars like Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) to argue that because civilians are often victimized in war, however, joining rebellion is rather a way to minimize potential costs. They say that the type of conflict violence (indiscriminate versus selective) is a measure of the risk for civilian victimization. This idea that physical insecurity can lead to increased participation is not a new one. Indeed,

how state repression can generate—or suppress—incentives for participation is leads to an individual opting to join rebellion to prevent victimization at the hands of the state (Lichbach, 1987; Mason and Krane, 1989; Sambanis and Zinn, 2005) or as an emotional response to state violence (Petersen 2002).

Similarly, the ethnic security dilemma literature as Kaufmann (1996) and Posen (1993) suggest that members of ethnic groups are likely to join rebel groups out of concern for their safety. But Tullock (1971) states another facet of this literature. He suggests rather that repression is largely conceptualized as a cost in the cost-benefit calculus found in rational actor models. When the costs of repression are too great, actors will not participate in rebellion. Repression thus depresses the likelihood of participation. Interestingly, both predictions rest on individual safety as the driving mechanism behind abstaining or participating. The difference is that one assumes that it is safer to abstain from participation when the state employs repressive tactics, while the other assumes that it is safer to participate (and thus obtain rebel refuge). Either way, it is an individual's calculations regarding their personal security that is the deciding factor in their decision.

Another paradigm to the issue is the greed and natural resources value. Olson (1965), Popkin (1979) and Tullock (1971) claim that the critical element to selective incentives is that an individual must take part in the rebellion to be a beneficiary of selective incentives. The three types of selective incentives are material, social, and purposive. Of the different types of incentives, the material incentives have received the most attention. A number of economists have produced models which apply market analogies to rebellion. In them, economists have emphasized the expected private returns to insurgents, in which only active insurgents share in the booty taken in a successful insurrection (Grossman, 1991; 1999). In these types of models, insurrections are treated as an economic activity that competes with production for scarce resources: a peasant family can obtain income from production, soldiering, or participating in insurrection. Soldiering in many economic models is thus analogous to supply and demand concerns in the labor market (Andvig and Gates, 2007; Beber and Blattman 2008; Gates, 2002). In these formulations, however, booty from insurrection is granted in the future and conditioned upon capture of the state and therefore depends on the success of the insurrection. As a result “greed vs. grievance” question is raised by Collier and Hoeffler (2001). In it, greedy rebels capture material resources otherwise unavailable to them without the cover of war. In the literature that has grown up around this idea, natural resources and their rents, as well as the looting of civilian populations (Azam 2002; Azam and Hoeffler, 2002), provide funding that can be used to distribute immediate selective incentives. Collier later moderated his rhetoric from “greed” to the less inflammatory “opportunity structures” approach. The key is that the grievances could never be expressed without the financial opportunities that resource exploitation offers rebel groups. Perhaps this is why the Ogaden

National Liberation Front in Ethiopia fights over the control oil-rich Ogaden region with the Ethiopian government (Mkandawire, 2002: 181-221).

Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002: 3) confirm this relationship between natural resources, rebel movements and violent conflicts. They claim that grievance and greed tend to have a symbiotic relationship with rebellion. To get started, rebellion needs grievance, whereas to be sustained, it needs greed. This claim is grounded on evidence of the association between mineral wealth and the occurrence and duration of conflicts; the existence of violent scrambles for resources in conflict regions; the concentration of conflicts in resource-rich zones of conflict regions; the profiteering from war and conflicts by rulers, warlords, traders and fighters; the high levels of economic crimes and underground economies; the involvement of mercantilists, syndicates and black marketeering companies in resource-rich zones of conflict regions, and the interference of neighbouring countries that tend to be motivated by struggles for privileged resource access. But another thesis adds to this list the character of the state, regimes, politics and state failures, economic decline and deepening poverty, unemployment, collapse of social services, urban congestion and decay, rising school dropout levels, globalization and the proliferation of small arms.

Perhaps Muhammed Kabir Isa (2010: 313-334) and George and Ylönen (2010: 341-364) are inspired by these to theorize NSVAGs' social bases. They are often well structured with a coordinate system of leadership, strict rules and strong ideological foundation and political education. Their membership always ranges from a hundred to thousands divided into the thinkers and the foot soldiers. Foot soldiers – largely disenchanting and frustrated men and youths - dominate the groups, examples being the *Moryham* (Somalia), the *Raray* (Sierra Leone), *Bayaye* (Kenya and Uganda), *Machicha* (Tanzania), *Hittiste* (Algeria), *Tsotsis* (South Africa), *Area Boys* and *Yan Daba* (Nigeria). But Adams Oloo (2010: 147-183) points the social base of the Kenya militias to the lower class, namely, the urban poor and slum dwellers. But Ikelegbe and Garuba (2007: 124-147) see the leadership to be often educated and responsible for the think-tank and liaison affairs with the outside world. Peters (2010:381) claims that the entry and initial base of mobilisation and recruitment in these groups are also marginalised and oppressed ethnic groups, such as the Mano and Gio in Charles Taylor's NPFL, and the Mende in Foday Sankoh's RUF (Sierra Leone). McIntyre (2007: 22) adds that membership is often voluntary and based on identity patriotism, solidarity and the depth of grievances. But in some cases, recruitment is restrained by space, arms and maintenance resources. However, as engagements broaden and confrontations become more extensive and stressful, and as they begin to lose contact with communities, these groups may turn to conscription and forced recruitment from within and outside their identity base. Juvenile, girls and children are sometimes captured, conscripted and used as fighters, spies, ordnance carriers, sex slaves and cannon, and drugs are used to psychologically empower them.

Examples of child rebel are Charles Taylor's *Small Boys Unit*, the *Gronna Boys*, Museveni's *Kidogos* (Uganda) and the Green Bombers (Zimbabwe).

But Reynal-Querol (2002) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) relate the emergence of these numerous group more to a structural interpretation. They say that within most structuralist accounts, the causal story is often based on participation as a mechanism, but the logic of the mechanism is often not spelled out. However, the leading attributes to such a situation is often the nature of the state. In situations when states are weak, rebel group behavior cannot be stopped. Individuals will opt to join insurgencies not only because the likelihood of being caught and punished is much lower in weak states, but also because the likelihood of victory is greater. It is worth mentioning here that there exist a significant relations with these the paradigms and the emergence and actions of the BH in the area around the Lake Chad and Cameroon as a whole.

## **2. Brief Profile of BH disposition in Cameroon**

The entrance of the BH in Cameroon followed a systematic sustained form in respect to their leadership, recruitment and belief system. In fact, the recruitment of their members was done among the illiterate or unschooled population of the Logone and Chari and Mayo Sava Divisions. Every commander was in charge of recruiting in his action zone and this involved a long procedure that generally commenced with the process of philanthropic and gift-giving gestures to targeted people. After a while, the Islamic sect sent an emissary to galvanize the potential recruits on the necessity to strictly follow God and motivated them financially for that choice. At this time, there is no forceful but subtle persuasive recruitment. In most of the Kanuri and other borderline villages, it was very easy for the sect to make new recruitments, especially among the idle and uneducated youths who were often exposed to the activities of the BH. The recruits were sent and kept at the Zambissa forest, where they were carefully trained; a training that followed strict ideological and military contents (see plate 3). Besides, the Zambissa centre in itself produced martyrs, priests and suicide bombers. Sometimes, some recruits escaped the centre due to the nature of the training and the expectations of the sect after such training, but those who completed the training were immediately deployed to their respective combat zones by the leaders of their respective area.

Other factors, like the closure of the Nigerian borders with her neighbours, also helped gave the BH more members. Achuge *et al.* (2014) and Funteh (2015) claim that the federal government of Nigeria, on 23 February 2011, sealed its northern border with Cameroon in an effort to curtail the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents, maintaining that the closure extended from Borno State by Lake Chad, to the southern end of Adamawa State, around halfway along Nigeria's 1,500-mile border with Cameroon (one of three states in the northeast placed under emergency rule following waves of attacks this group). This decision to shut the Adamawa side of the border with Cameroon was imperative to stop illegal

movement in and out of the country, and also that the closure was “meant to effectively reduce the activities of the insurgents. According to the Nigerian Army, BH were carrying out attacks in the north-east of the country, hiding out in under populated regions of neighboring countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger. It claimed that this came after the unearthing of a cache of arms, suspected to have been smuggled in from Cameroon to Borno State, Nigeria. The arms included AK47 rifles, pistols, rocket launchers, bombs, and detonating bomb cables. It sustained that fighters set up bases in sparsely populated areas of its northeastern neighbours Cameroon, Chad and Niger which were used to flee across the border after staging attacks to avoid military pursuit (Ibid.). Because the closure of this borderline had a direct effect on the situation of human and goods movement on the Cameroon-Nigeria borders, all the youths involved in trans-border commercial beneficial activities got their bread winning activities cut off, and the only means to survive hardship was to yarn to the attractive offers of the BH. These offers included a new motorcycle and money worth 150, 000 F CFA for joining the group. These motorcycles were also used on the battle front, and it explains why the Cameroon as well as the Nigerian governments could attack and impound these medium of communication as means to control the BH attacks (see picture 4). These idle illiterate youths had no option but to be involved. And in order to prove their completion of training, full acceptance into and loyalty to the sect, some Cameroonian recruits slaughtered their parents under the pretext that they were not respecting the precepts of Prophet Mohammed and as presented to them by their leaders. In fact, because of this many of those who joined the group were denounced by their families (Intelligence Report of the BIR, 2014, Maroua).

**Plate 3. BH trainee poised for action**



**Source: BIR (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua photo Album, 2015.**

It is perhaps important to indicate here that this leadership, better still, the organization of the BH was well structured into the central and local organs. Meanwhile the movement is directed by the 30 members of the Council of Choura, it is a centralized organization with a general coordinator, five advisors among which one is in charge of external operations and the representative of the BH in Niger. The central structure is presented as follows:



- Abubakar Shekau- General Coordinator
- Moustapha Chad- (Chadian)
- Abbib Mohammed Youssouf (Son of the Founder)
- Moudou Abba (In Charge of External Operations)
- Mohammed Gomna
- Modou Issa.
- 

Besides this central structure, the BH disposes of numerous organs within the different North-eastern Nigerian states, in Chad and even on the Cameroon frontier zones, our interest area. In fact, six groups operate along the Cameroon-Nigeria frontier lines, namely:

1. In the northern zone, the section of N'Djamena and Kousseri, the group is commanded by Rawana;
2. In the zone of Dabanga-Fotokol- Blangoua and Hile Alifa, the Group is commanded by Bana Fai
3. At the centre, from Dabanga To Homeka, it is ommanded by Alhaji Mahommed Ibrahim
4. In the south between Banki, Limani and Amchide, the name of the commander is Soimi, a driver of a transport vehicle (Hiace) that plies Kerawa and Mora Road.
5. The BH operations in the towns of Maroua and Mora were carried out under Bana Bachira of Nigerian Kanuri origin.
6. The last group, which operates from Kerewa to the zone of Mokolo is directed by a certain Chiwani (Intelligence Report of the BIR, 2015, Maroua).

It is also important to note here that all these BH-Cameroon affiliations possess an amount of autonomy and liberty of initiative, but are all answerable to Aboubakar Shekaou who controls the strict respect of the hierarchy. This explains why, even though the Cameroon groups consistently get involved in high way armed robbery, burglary and even petty theft to empower their positions, their actions were often reconnected to the respect of BH ideology (Ibid.).

#### **Plate 4. BH impounded Motorcycle by Government Forces**



**Source: BIR (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua photo Album, 2015.**

In Nigeria like elsewhere, the BH succeeded to infiltrate the ranks and files of the state and at very high-levels. Thanks to its financial power, this sect caused political and military figures to compromise their position. As earlier highlighted, it was not very uncommon for city counselors, local influential persons and some military personnel in the northern parts of

Nigeria and Cameroon. Xinhua (2014) says that more than 100 suspected BH militants were killed and over 200 arrested during an operation conducted by Cameroonian army in Far-North Region of Cameroon. In some cases, especially in Nigeria, it got to a point when soldiers refused to go the battle for not just cause, pretended to be sick when given the opportunity to fight against this group or even served as spies and information leakers for the BH within their respective command groups. It was also not uncommon for such soldiers, like other political figures as the mayors of city councils to be arrested and question and sometimes sanctioned on the BH related issues (Intelligence Report of the BIR, 2014, Maroua).

The character of the BH assumed three dominating strategies, namely the abduction of foreigners, theft and open field attacks. As concern hostage taking, the first occurred on 19 February 2013 with the French family of Moulin Fournier. In a video of 21 March, Abubakar Shekau, the movement's chief declares that "we are delighted to affirm that we are in keeping of the 7 French hostages. We are keeping them because the Nigerian and Cameroonian authorities have arrested members of our family. . . . We affirm not to release the French hostages when our families are imprisoned. . . ." He maintained that the force was not only to liberate these "family members," but they were ready to defend themselves by the use of force. At any time even the opportunity (BIR, Alpha operation- Cameroon, Maroua video collection, 2015). But after serious negotiations of the Cameroon government via some local personalities, the French family was liberated on 19 April 2013. In the same light, on the night of 13 and 14 November 2013, Georges Vandenbeusch, a 42 year old French Catholic priest was abducted at Nguetchewe, a Cameroon Far North Region locality, but was also released on 31 December 2013 after serious negotiations between the Cameroon government and the BH elements. In the night of 4 to 5 April 2014, at Tchère some 20 kilometres from Maroua, the regional headquarters, two Italian priests Giampaolo Marta and Gianantonio Allegri, and a Canadian nun, Gilberte Bussier were also kidnapped by armed men. But these religious elements were finally released on 31 May and 1 June 2014 following a crucial negotiation with the BH elements. Also, on 7 October 2014, more than 2 girls were kidnapped at Ouzda-Vreket, Mozogo (Mayo Tsanaga Division) (BIR, Alpha operation- Cameroon, Maroua archives, 2015). At Dangawa et Goudouzou, around Mora in the Mayo Sava area, on 7 May 2014, the BH incursion in 10 villages left serious death-toll and the kidnap of 2 rich glaziers as well. On the night of 16 and 17 May 2014, the BH came along with 5 four-wheel drive vehicles and attacked the camp of Chinese road constructors at Waza of the Logone and Chari division, killed 1 Chinese and abducted 10, took way 10 pick-up vehicles and explosives (Ibid.).

This attack occurred during Head of States' Paris summit against this sect. From information collected from BH combatants imprisoned in Cameroon, this attack was to

mobility facility and future attacks. It was also hoped that Cameroon would be under pressure to negotiate for the release of these foreigners, and in doing so, the release of their combatants in the Cameroon prisons would then be a non negotiable condition; not forgetting the benefit they must have of made from the ransom to be given by the Cameroon in the process. Such benefits, especially the acquisition of guns and explosives, guided the attack of the police post at Goulfey in Logone Chari (1 May 2014) by 6 heavily armed BH members during which the only police on guard with 10 other persons were severely wounded. Four days after, the Gendarmerie Brigade of Kousseri was also attacked, which resulted in a death and the injury of many. Here, the post was looted of arms and vehicles (BIR, Alpha intelligence report, Maroua, 2014).

But before the release of the Chinese on 11 October 2014, 17 Cameroonians were captured as prisoners by the BH when they attacked and ransacked Kolofata, a Kanuri group, on 27 July 2014. According to intelligence report, the Vice-prime Minister Ahmadou Ali, a member of this entity was the target. If captured, the BH would have compelled the Cameroon government to negotiate at an exorbitant price, but fortunately for him, he was rather in Maroua. But his wife was regrettably kidnapped in the process but was later on released (BIR, Alpha intelligence report, Maroua, 2014). This just came after a German was abducted at Gombi, in the Adamawa state by a band of armed men on 16 July 2014. All these hostages were declared by the BH on 31 October. The German was released on 21 January and so too was the Ali's wife, and Cameroon government claimed this was the result of a special military operation by Cameroon and her allies (BIR, Alpha intelligence report, Maroua, 2015). But many Cameroonians think it was not the case. It was surely done through the usual negotiation process.

Whatever, on 2 March 2014 at Fotokol following the serious BH slaughter of the inhabitants, the Cameroon army responded in a prompt way. This was the first time both forces met in open battle. This action made the government to reconsider its ontake on the BH as it sent the Alpha Operation of the BIR, notably *Emergence II*, to protect the Far North region and its environs against the incursions of the BH. It was in this light that this operation launched a series of forceful attacks on the BH, like Fotokol (a sit of several battles), Tourou on 7 June, Bargaram on 24 et 25 July, Amchidé and Limani on 15 and 16 Octobre, Amchidé on 17 december, Achigachia on 29 december 2014, and Kolofata on 12 January 2015 (see map 2). These attacks were both on the hunt for the BH as well as an open field-combat response to their actions as they constantly attacked the Cameroon military field-established camps. Villages like Amchidé, Fotokol and Kolofata had almost been wipe-out by the BH, as more than 60 percent of the inhabitants were killed and their houses completely burnt down. This brought a complete halt of both public and private life. The survivors were displaced to Mora. In place like Amchide and Limani former trans-border trade seats, became ghost

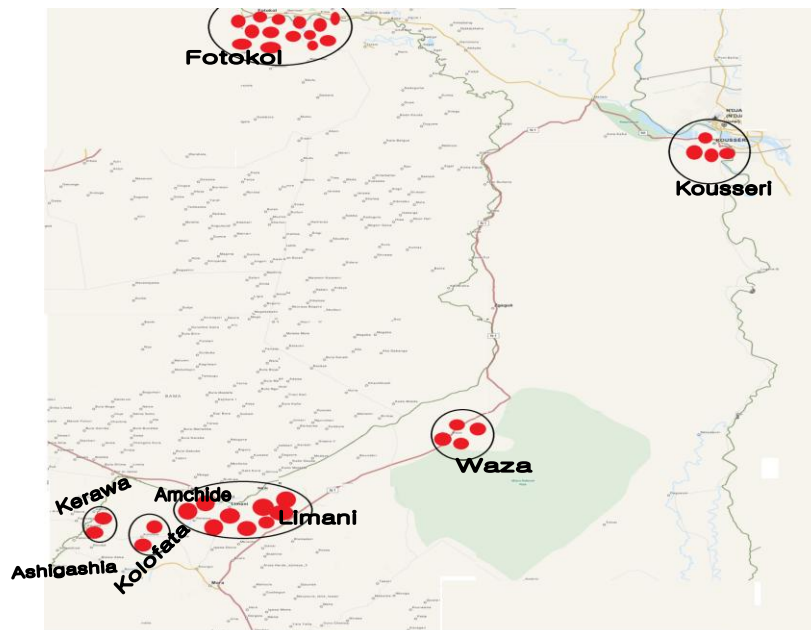
villages and of course a huge blow on the economy of the area.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking the BH caused closed to 15,000 displaced persons and the death of thousands in the Far northern region of the country.

As a matter of fact, all along the 2014 year, the BH made regular entrance into the Cameroon territory, particularly along the borders of the two most northern regions, applied light armed force in villages and took away huge amount of cattle, fowls, cereals and foodstuff. The constancy of these acts, other reasons, was aimed at feeding the young djihadists camps being built in the region by 45 instructors, incubating 84 young recruits (between the ages of 7 and 15). These camps were dismantled on 20 December 2014 by the BIR. Such BIR interventions became more upright and sleepless with increasing present of the BH in region, and specifically in 4 of the division victimized by the attacks (see table 1 and diagram 1) and leaving behind unprecedented human and material damage on both sides which included 40 military personnel, 20 BIR and more than 2 civilians (see diagram 2) and the displacement of many. By 2015, the death toll had risen to untold proportion and the number of displace in the northern part of Cameroon was also enormous. Part of this was the brutal hunting down of the BH, seizure of their means of mobility (cars and motorcycles) and very heavy weaponry, and stepping up of intelligence activities. But because the response of the Cameroonian army did not seemed to be providing the desired outcome, the President of the Republic, Paul Biya appealed for international support. This was the reason why on 29 and 30 January 2015, the BH faced the first stiff opposition from the Chadian force. This was an international response. As this was unfolding, the Cameroon population, gripped with the BH fever, also was responding in support of their soldiers on the field (Intelligence Report of the BIR, 2015, Maroua).

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<sup>6</sup> For the Economic consequences of BH on the Cameroon-Nigeria borderlands, see Funteh (2015: 30-48).

**Map 2. Areas of major occurrences in 2014**



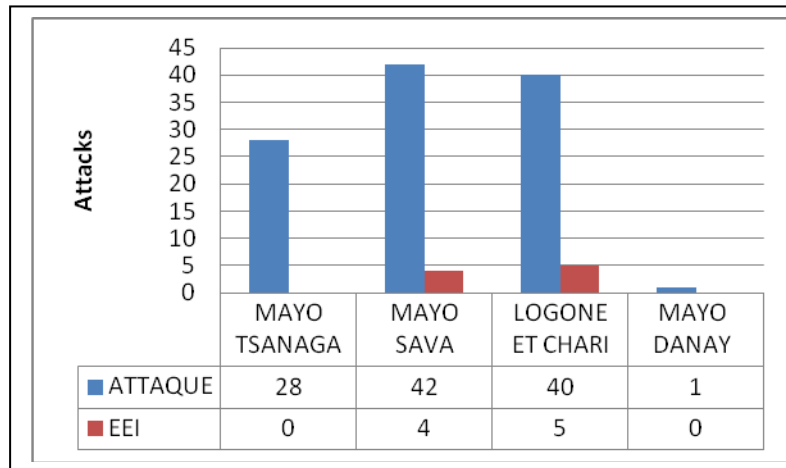
Source: 015-400/MRP/RMIA4/OPSALPHA/CO/G3 DU 09/03/2015 (Maroua Alpha archives).

**Table 1. Number of Attacks per Division**

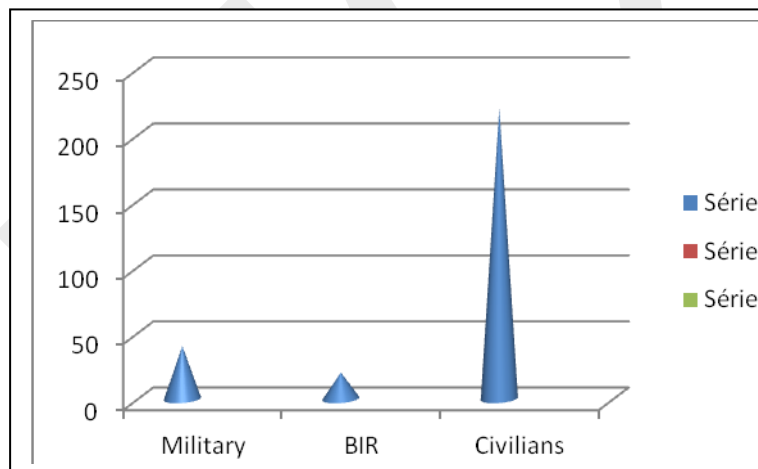
Division	Attacks	Retaliation (EEI)
MAYO TSANAGA	28	/
MAYO SAVA	42	4
LOGONE ET CHARI	40	5
MAYO DANAY	1	/
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>9</b>



**Diagram 1. Graphic representation of attacks per Division in 2014**



**Diagram 2. Graphic Estimation of Death of Cameroonians in 2014**



**Source:** All these statistics originate from N° 015-400/MRP/RMIA4/OPSALPHA/CO/G3 DU 09/03/2015 (BIR, Alpha, Maroua archives).

Note: This death estimate represents only fresh corpses counted by the BIR. Some who are Cameroonians join Boko Haram and fight against the Cameroonian [army]. When they are killed, their tribes bury them so early so that the [military] forces [cannot] identify that those killed were Cameroonians. But that of the BH members was inestimable, and because they would always explode the corpses of their member after each attack, it was not possible to count (Kindzekam, 15 July 2014 online).

## Conclusion

The frontiers of Cameroon and Nigeria reflected eventful spaces of openness and ethnic intertwine. The human and commodity cross-frontier fluidity that characterized these had a serious effect on the security bend of the entire region around the Lake Chad Basin. The raise of the BH in Nigeria and its eventual encroachment into and animation of insecurity threats on the Cameroon soil was facilitated among other reasons by the border character, the educational, development and poverty levels of the area, not to forget the degree of state presence, the religious inclines and expectation of the people of this Cameroon-Nigeria northern frontier-line. With the financial influence and strategy of the BH leadership both the youths and top state officials were common targets for the attainment and sustenance of their terrorist actions. Their activities which ranged from abduction of foreigners and Cameroonians, open attacks and slaughter of law enforcement officers, military camps and village (civilians alike) to high-way robbery, and burglary, caused enormous panic, deaths and displacement in and across Cameroon border. Every single area of the four divisions that make up the Far North Region of Cameroon was seriously affected, but with much of the attack concentrated around the areas of Fotokol, Tourou, Bargaram, Amchidé, Limani, Amchidé, Achigachia and Kolofata. Due to the unprecedented terror the group inflicted on the population, the state, local populations and the international community joint hands to bring this phenomenon to an end. However, the latter two only reacted to what the former had prescribed as the best form to withstand BH owing to the non-contenting strength of the *BIR* against the BH force. The diplomatic strategy of Cameroon and Nigeria to think together in bringing the situation to an end, amidst other responses of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) of Nigeria, Chad and Niger, UK, USA, Russia and China thing were gradually putting things back in good shape. I mean security stability. Both countries met severally in Yaoundé (2013), in Abuja (2014) within the confines of creating a Nigeria/Cameroon Trans-border Security Committee, and from which the creation of a Coalition Force to fight terrorism announced on 30 November 2014 by Cameroon. This force would include 3,500 soldiers from Benin, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria. In as much as the operational value of this force was to be felt, the intervention of Chad in the issue gave a serious blow to the strength of the BH, as it fought with the Cameroonian soldiers in Fotokol and crossed over to Nigeria to regain for the Nigerian government most of the territories it lost to the BH. As this was going on, the Cameroon population responded vigorously from the Parliament by passing the 4 Dec anti-terrorist bill, the patriotic march in denouncing BH performed by the populations of ten regions of the country (see plate 5), the more-than-three billions worth of money, drugs and food stuff contributed by peoples of all works of life in support of the soldiers on the battle front (see plate 6) to ecumenical prayers and services for the peace of the country. But this paper wonders, though being the immediate and appropriate approach to the BH treats, if these efforts were the best to bring such phenomenon to a complete halt or preempt the raise of future such organizations in the region. It proposes an effective structural

presence in terms of education, employment, development opportunities, especially for the youths in and along the border towns, who are often left at the mercy of peripheral uncontrolled developed precepts. It is only when these are done that these areas can know prolonged peace and security.

**Plate 5. Cameroonians contribute money to fight BH.**



**Source: BIR (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua photo Album, 2015.**

**Plate 6. Patriotic match in Yaoundé**



**Source: BIR (Alpha operation) Cameroon, Maroua photo Album, 2015**

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