



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATIVE STUDIES

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 **RECEIVED**
17 August 2026

 **ACCEPTED**
09 September 2026

 **PUBLISHED**
1 October 2026

 **October 2026**

 **Volume 5**

 **Number 5**

 **Pages from:**
727 to 741

The spread of ideas, the permeability of borders, cross-border incursions and the consolidation of the terrorist phenomenon in Cameroon: A theoretical psycho-socio-geopolitical-strategic analysis of contemporary security challenges in the context of Islamist-jihadist terrorism and secessionism

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ABSTRACT

Cameroon faces a growing terrorist threat, exacerbated by porous borders, the spread of radical ideas and cross-border incursions. This article analyses, from a psycho-sociological, geopolitical and strategic perspective, the dynamics that are fuelling the consolidation of terrorism in the country. It highlights the processes of radicalisation, driven by socio-economic, political and cultural factors, as well as the impact of the transnational circulation of extremist ideologies. Regional instability, particularly linked to crises in neighbouring countries, contributes to the expansion of terrorist networks, facilitated by weak territorial control and security measures. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the study offers an analysis of Cameroon's contemporary security challenges and explores possible strategic responses to curb this phenomenon.

Keywords: Terrorism, radicalisation, borders, insecurity, Cameroon, strategy, geopolitics, social psychology.

Introduction

The issue of the spread of extremist ideas, the porosity of borders, cross-border incursions and the consolidation of the terrorist threat in Cameroon is of crucial importance in the current international security context. The country faces complex dynamics that foster the rise of radicalism and the persistence of terrorist threats. This study aims to provide an in-depth, multidisciplinary and scientific analysis in order to understand the contemporary security challenges underpinning these phenomena.

Cameroon, situated at the crossroads of Central and West Africa, is a strategic hub characterised by persistent insecurity, fuelled by armed groups with diverse motivations. In the Far North, Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP) exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities to recruit and operate across porous borders with Nigeria, Chad and Niger (Zenn, 2020). In the North-West and South-West regions (NOSO), secessionist groups are employing strategies of radicalisation and armed mobilisation, drawing on identity-based and nationalist rhetoric (International Crisis Group, 2019).

A striking feature of this insecurity is the ease with which extremist ideas take hold amongst vulnerable populations. The theory of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970) explains how a sense of socio-economic exclusion encourages adherence to radical movements. Similarly, theories of social influence (Asch, 1951) and obedience to authority (Milgram, 1974) help us understand how terrorist groups exploit the dynamics of

conformity and obedience to recruit and indoctrinate new followers.

The figures are alarming: according to the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri, 2021), nearly 3,000 young men and women have been recruited by Boko Haram in the Far North, particularly in the Sambisa Forest, which remains a strategic stronghold for the terrorist group. At the same time, the secessionist movements in the NOSO region have stepped up their recruitment campaigns, exploiting local frustrations and vulnerabilities to rally young people to their cause (Awasom, 2021).

In the face of this multidimensional threat, a cross-disciplinary, cross-cutting approach is essential. This analysis will draw on social psychology, sociology, political science and geopolitics to unpick the mechanisms of radicalisation and examine the strategic responses required to preserve Cameroon's stability and national security.

1. Formulation of the problem

Jihadist and secessionist radicalisation: Factors, dynamics and strategic implications

Jihadist and secessionist radicalisation in Cameroon is underpinned by complex dynamics involving a combination of ideological indoctrination, economic frustrations, feelings of exclusion and the ease with which fighters and weapons can move about. Indoctrination relies on sophisticated techniques of persuasion and psychological manipulation that exploit individual and collective vulnerabilities (Horgan, 2008). Young people in precarious economic and social circumstances become prime targets, as armed groups offer them not only a salary but also a sense of belonging and a cause to defend (Botha, 2014).

The porous nature of the borders facilitates the free movement of fighters and weapons, thereby strengthening the operational capacity of terrorist and separatist groups. Cameroon's borders with Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic are poorly controlled, allowing the infiltration of fighters, arms trafficking and the proliferation of transnational criminal networks (Felbab-Brown, 2020). These structural weaknesses make the fight against terrorism difficult and complicate the management of internal conflicts.

Radical ideas also circulate with disconcerting ease, particularly through new technologies and social media, which enable extremist groups to spread their messages and recruit remotely (Weimann, 2016). Boko Haram, for example, has succeeded in developing an effective propaganda machine that portrays the Islamic caliphate as a refuge for oppressed

Muslims and offers an alternative to governance perceived as corrupt (Thurston, 2017).

What are the strategic challenges and possible responses to this multifaceted threat? It is essential to implement deradicalisation strategies based on education, reducing inequalities and strengthening the rule of law. Furthermore, greater regional cooperation is needed to control borders and share intelligence on terrorist threats. Capacity-building for the security forces, combined with an inclusive approach to governance, could curb the spread of extremist ideas and enhance stability in Cameroon.

Jihadist and secessionist radicalisation in Cameroon is rooted in complex dynamics involving a mix of ideological indoctrination, economic frustrations, feelings of exclusion and the ease with which fighters and weapons can move about. How do porous borders and the spread of radical ideas contribute to the entrenchment of terrorism in Cameroon? What are the strategic challenges and possible responses to this multifaceted threat?

2. Theoretical framework and methodology: Conceptual foundations and analytical approach

The study of the phenomenon of radicalisation and the consolidation of terrorism in Cameroon requires a robust theoretical framework and a rigorous methodology to fully grasp its complexity. Messanga et al. conducted research into attitudes towards Muslims in the era of jihadist terrorism; The authors examine how abuses and acts of violence perpetrated by groups claiming to represent radical Islam (such as Boko Haram) influence perceptions of the Muslim community in Cameroon, which enabled them to adapt a sociological measurement scale to objectively assess intolerance, prejudice and stereotypes in a pluralistic African society confronted with jihadist terrorism (Messanga, Boula & Sogbou Loyem 2017).

The study shows that perceptions of Muslims vary according to the visibility of religious symbols and fears of the political or violent exploitation of religion, posing the challenge of distinguishing extremist deviations from the wider Muslim community (Messanga et al.; 2017). It is therefore important to identify and analyse the deep-rooted causes and systemic mechanisms that catalyse radicalisation, as well as the cognitive factors that drive radicalised individuals towards violence (Sogbou Loyem, 2028).

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this section draws on theories from social psychology, political science and geostrategy to analyse the processes by which extremist ideas

take hold, the influence of porous borders and the dynamics of cross-border incursions.

To better understand the mechanisms of radicalisation, this analysis draws in particular on the **theory of relative deprivation** (Gurr, 1970), which explains how a sense of socio-economic exclusion fuels frustrations that may be exploited by extremist groups. Furthermore, **theories of social influence** (Asch, 1951) and **obedience to authority** (Milgram, 1974) help to explain how individuals, under social and ideological pressure, adopt radicalised behaviours within terrorist groups.

From a methodological perspective, this study is based on a qualitative and quantitative approach combining literature review, semi-structured interviews with experts in security and radicalisation, and statistical data drawn from international and national reports. The aim is to provide a nuanced analysis of the phenomena observed and to propose courses of action tailored to Cameroon's contemporary security challenges.

2.1. Theoretical framework

The analysis of the phenomenon of jihadist and secessionist radicalisation in Cameroon is based on a theoretical framework combining concepts drawn from political science and social psychology. Two fundamental theories help to shed light on the mechanisms underlying the spread of extremist ideas, the mobilisation of fighters and the consolidation of terrorist groups.

2.1.1. The theory of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970) and the frustration-aggression dynamic

The **theory of relative deprivation**, developed by Ted Robert Gurr (1970) in **Why Men Rebel**, posits that the perception of a gap between socio-economic expectations and lived reality generates a sense of frustration that can lead to the adoption of violent behaviour. Gurr draws on the **frustration-aggression** concept, according to which marginalised individuals or groups, feeling deprived of their rights or opportunities, are more inclined to rebel against the established order (Dollard et al., 1939).

In the case of Cameroon, several structural factors contribute to this relative deprivation and provide fertile ground for radicalisation:

- **Mass unemployment and chronic poverty:** According to the World Bank (2022), nearly **70 per cent of the population of the Far North lives below the poverty line**. This economic precariousness

serves as a recruitment tool for Boko Haram, which promises financial rewards and social status to marginalised young people (International Crisis Group, 2021).

- **Political marginalisation and a lack of prospects:** Young people in the English-speaking regions (the North-West and South-West) perceive unequal access to resources and opportunities, which reinforces the secessionist narrative (Atanga et al., 2020).
- **Exploitation of identity-based grievances:** Boko Haram and secessionist groups capitalise on resentment towards the central government by propagating the idea of political and cultural oppression, thereby justifying the use of armed struggle (Matfess, 2017).

Thus, relative deprivation is a key driver of the shift towards extremism, with individuals seeking an outlet for their frustration through violent engagement. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the recruitment of more than 3,000 young people in the Far North region by Boko Haram (Ifri, 2021), but also in the growing radicalisation of young English-speaking people through separatist militias.

2.1.2. The theory of social influence and conformity (Asch, 1951; Milgram, 1974): Radicalisation and submission to authority

The **theory of social influence**, developed by Solomon Asch (1951), highlights the way in which individuals adjust their beliefs and behaviours under group pressure. His classic experiment on conformity demonstrated that even in the face of evidence to the contrary, a person may adopt the opinion of the dominant group for fear of isolation or rejection (Asch, 1956).

In the context of radicalisation in Cameroon, this dynamic is particularly evident through:

- **Community indoctrination:** Boko Haram exploits family and tribal ties to foster ideological adherence. Young people are persuaded to join the group under the influence of members who have already been recruited (Hoffman & Shelby, 2020).
- **Pressure from social media and radical preachers:** Secessionist movements use Facebook and WhatsApp to spread a narrative of victimhood

and rally young Anglophones behind the independence cause (Nganje, 2021).

- **Group dynamics in training camps:** Once integrated into a terrorist cell, fighters undergo a process of normalising violence, in which transgressing taboos (murder, attacks) becomes a collective norm (Sageman, 2004).

Furthermore, **Stanley Milgram (1974)** demonstrated in his experiment on obedience to authority that ordinary individuals can commit extreme acts under the influence of a figure perceived as legitimate. Boko Haram and separatist leaders exploit this principle by establishing charismatic leadership and justifying violence in the name of a higher cause (Post, 2007).

2.1.3. Integration of the two theories and implications for the analysis of terrorism in Cameroon

The interaction between **relative deprivation** and **social influence** helps to explain the rise of terrorism in Cameroon:

- Socio-economic deprivation fuels frustration and the search for an ideological alternative (Gurr, 1970).
- Radical discourse, amplified by social media and peer pressure, shapes a collective extremist identity (Asch, 1951; Milgram, 1974).
- Group dynamics and submission to authority facilitate engagement and the transition to violent action (Horgan, 2008).

This theoretical framework thus provides an in-depth analysis of the psychological and political mechanisms at work in radicalisation in Cameroon. By drawing on these concepts, this study aims to propose prevention strategies tailored to local realities, focusing on disengagement and deradicalisation policies based on socio-economic integration and the deconstruction of extremist narratives.

2.2. Methodology

The approach adopted in this study is primarily qualitative and analytical, aiming to provide a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of radicalisation and terrorism in Cameroon. This approach is underpinned by rigorous data triangulation, thereby ensuring the validity and robustness of the conclusions.

2.2.1. Qualitative and analytical approach

In line with the methodological recommendations of Creswell (2013) and Yin (2018), this research favours a qualitative approach that enables an understanding of the complexity of the socio-political and psychological dynamics at play. The analytical approach is based on the identification, categorisation and interpretation of data from various sources in order to construct a coherent explanatory narrative of the processes of radicalisation.

2.2.2. Literature review

The first phase of the methodology consists of an in-depth literature review comprising:

- **Academic sources:** Scholarly articles, theses and specialist publications dealing with the mechanisms of radicalisation, the dynamics of extremism and counter-terrorism strategies. These sources provide a robust theoretical foundation and comparative analyses with other regional and international contexts.
- **Institutional reports:** Documents from research organisations and international institutions, such as the International Crisis Group, which offer on-the-ground analyses and up-to-date statistical data on the security situation in Cameroon.
- **NGO publications:** Reports and studies published by non-governmental organisations such as **Amnesty International** and **Human Rights Watch**. These reports highlight first-hand accounts, case studies and analyses of deradicalisation and reintegration policies, thereby providing an operational and on-the-ground perspective on radicalisation.

2.2.3. Testimonies and case studies

To enrich the literature review, this research incorporates testimonies and case studies drawn from fieldwork carried out by NGOs and international organisations:

- **Semi-structured interviews:** Discussions held with security experts, NGO representatives and local stakeholders involved in deradicalisation processes. These interviews enable the collection of perceptions and contextual analyses that are often absent from institutional publications.

- **Specific case studies:** The analysis of concrete cases, such as the recruitment of over 3,000 young people in the Far North by Boko Haram and the mobilisation campaigns of secessionist movements in the English-speaking regions, provides detailed insight into the mechanisms of radicalisation and indoctrination. These case studies provide empirical illustration of the theories of relative deprivation and social influence outlined above.

2.2.4. Data triangulation

The validity of the results rests on the triangulation of sources:

- **Cross-referencing of data:** Information obtained from the literature review is cross-checked against field testimonies and case studies. This process enables the identification of convergences and divergences in the data, thereby strengthening the reliability of the conclusions.
- **Contextual analysis:** Drawing on robust theoretical frameworks and data from multiple sources, the study contextualises the phenomena of radicalisation within Cameroon's specific socio-economic and geostrategic framework.

By adopting this rigorous and multidimensional methodology, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and credible analysis of the processes of radicalisation in Cameroon, whilst proposing strategic approaches tailored to contemporary security challenges.

3. The spread of extremist ideas: A psychological and social analysis of jihadist propaganda and the crystallisation of radicalisation amongst young people

This section explores in depth the mechanisms of indoctrination underpinning the spread of extremist ideas and the recruitment of young people in Cameroon. Drawing on international studies and national analyses, we will examine how strategies of ideological manipulation, the exploitation of socio-economic vulnerabilities and group dynamics combine to create an environment conducive to radicalisation. This section aims to provide a nuanced and integrated understanding of the processes that transform idleness and marginalisation into violent adherence to jihadist and secessionist ideologies.

3.1. Mechanisms of indoctrination

Terrorist groups, in particular Boko Haram and secessionist movements in certain regions of Cameroon, exploit pre-existing social divisions to recruit young people into their ranks. Several interconnected mechanisms facilitate this process of indoctrination:

1. Ideological manipulation and distortion of religious discourse

Extremist groups distort religious texts and doctrines to legitimise their violent actions. By transforming the concept of faith into a call to armed struggle, these groups create a powerful narrative that imbues their actions with a sacred dimension. For example, Boko Haram has often claimed that the violent ‘ ‘ was a divine duty to defend Islam against a corrupting Western influence (Thurston, 2017). This process of legitimisation through distorted religious discourse helps to construct a collective identity, in which adherence to the ideology comes to be perceived as an act of faith and of belonging to a chosen community. Research by Horgan (2008) and Sageman (2004) highlights that this ideological manipulation forms part of a broader strategy of persuasion, in which the distortion of religious symbols creates a sense of urgency and a sense of mission. These studies also demonstrate how radical rhetoric transforms one’s perception of the world, prompting young people to view their immediate environment as hostile and oppressive.

2. Exploitation of socio-economic vulnerabilities

The difficult socio-economic context, characterised by unemployment, poverty and political marginalisation, provides fertile ground for indoctrination. In Cameroon, particularly in the Far North and certain areas of the NOSO region, young people’s idleness leads to a search for meaning and a sense of belonging. These individuals, often neglected by public policy and deprived of opportunities for development, are more receptive to the promises of material gain and social recognition offered by terrorist groups (Botha, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2021). Indeed, investigations carried out by Amnesty International highlight how economic incentives – bonuses, payment in kind, or logistical support – combine with a sense of injustice to bolster recruitment. Radicalisation thus appears not only as a response to economic exclusion, but also as an attempt to fill an identity void by joining a structured and supportive group.

3. Peer pressure and socialisation within extremist micro-societies

The process of indoctrination is also fuelled by mechanisms of social pressure and conformity. Closed environments, such as training camps or neighbourhoods controlled by extremist groups, foster intensive socialisation around deviant norms. The seminal works of Asch (1951) and Milgram (1974) illustrate how conformity and submission to a charismatic authority can lead to the adoption of extreme behaviour. In the Cameroonian context, integration into these micro-societies serves to normalise violence and reinforce radical commitment. Daily interactions, the ritualisation of combat practices and continuous indoctrination strengthen group cohesion and adherence to a radical ideology. Recent studies, such as those by Nganje (2021), show that peer pressure and the glorification of extreme behaviour play a crucial role in the crystallisation of young people’s radical identity.

4. Digital propaganda and the hybridisation of recruitment techniques

The rise of information technology has significantly altered the landscape of terrorist recruitment. Extremist groups exploit social media to disseminate their messages, circumvent censorship measures and recruit remotely. Weimann (2016) demonstrates that online propaganda enables groups to reach geographically dispersed audiences, whilst creating local resonance that legitimises extremist discourse. This hybridisation of recruitment techniques – combining face-to-face interactions with digital dissemination – enhances the effectiveness of indoctrination. It offers recruiters a twofold advantage: on the one hand, they mobilise vulnerable individuals by offering them immersion in a coherent ideological environment; and on the other, they disseminate viral content that amplifies their message to a wider audience.

In summary, the indoctrination mechanisms leading to the radicalisation of young people in Cameroon result from a complex interplay between ideological manipulation, the exploitation of socio-economic vulnerabilities, peer pressure and digital strategies. These processes, underpinned by robust scientific literature and field analyses, illustrate how terrorist groups transform idleness and exclusion into violent allegiance. This in-depth understanding is essential for developing prevention and deradicalisation policies tailored to local realities and contemporary security challenges.

3.2. Secessionist propaganda in the NOSO and jihadist propaganda in the Far North: an outline of a similar cycle of indoctrination and recruitment

The dissemination of extremist messages – whether secessionist in the NOSO or jihadist in the Far North – forms part of a remarkably similar cycle of indoctrination and recruitment. In both contexts, social media and digital platforms play a central role in spreading narratives of hatred, victimisation and revolt, thereby justifying armed struggle.

Firstly, secessionist movements in the English-speaking regions of the North-West and South-West make extensive use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp to promote a narrative centred on identity. This discourse is based on the victimisation of the populations, who are often portrayed as marginalised and exploited by a central state perceived as oppressive (International Crisis Group, 2019; Nganje, 2021). The messages disseminated employ strong, emotive and mobilising language, aimed at creating a collective sense of injustice and legitimising the armed struggle for self-determination. Drawing on studies by Botha (2014) and Atanga et al. (2020), it is evident that this propaganda relies on a dual: it reinforces both the sense of belonging to a discriminated-against group and the ideological justification for armed conflict.

Meanwhile, in the Far North, Boko Haram and its affiliates, including the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP), employ a similar communication strategy, albeit one rooted in jihadist rhetoric. These groups misinterpret religious texts to create a narrative in which violence is portrayed as a sacred duty, legitimised by the defence of Islam against Western influences and internal corruption (Thurston, 2017; Horgan, 2008). Jihadist propaganda is characterised by the use of shocking images, recruitment videos and testimonies from former fighters to illustrate a reality perceived as a struggle between good and evil (Weimann, 2016). Studies by Sageman (2004) and Cronin (2009) show that this strategy enables the recruitment of vulnerable individuals by offering them a strong identity and a sense of belonging to a cause that transcends traditional boundaries.

Both forms of propaganda follow a multi-stage indoctrination process:

1. **Dissemination and virality:** Messages are designed to be shared widely on social media. Virality is ensured by emotional and often visual content, which resonates immediately with the targeted audiences (Weimann, 2016).

2. **Creation of an alternative reality:** By repeating themes of victimisation, injustice and revolt, the rhetoric creates a reality perceived as running parallel to that disseminated by the mainstream media. This serves to reinforce a sense of belonging and legitimise the use of violence (Botha, 2014; Nganje, 2021).
3. **Strengthening of identity and community:** Integration into online groups or physical recruitment networks helps to normalise extremist discourse and consolidate the radical identity of recruits. This process is amplified by peer pressure and the glorification of violent acts, as observed in the work of Asch (1951) and Milgram (1974).
4. **Transition to action:** Indoctrination results in actual enlistment, often facilitated by economic and social incentives, as well as by joining paramilitary cells or training camps (Thurston, 2017; Horgan, 2008).

It thus appears that, despite distinct contexts and ideological discourses, secessionist propaganda in the NOSO and jihadist propaganda in the Far North share structural similarities in their indoctrination processes. Both rely on the meticulous exploitation of information technologies to disseminate mobilising narratives, creating fertile ground for the radicalisation of young people. These complex dynamics highlight the importance of multidimensional counter-discourse and intervention strategies, incorporating both prevention through digital education and the improvement of local socio-economic conditions, in order to reduce the appeal of these extremist narratives.

Drawing on the work of researchers such as Horgan (2008), Sageman (2004), Botha (2014) and Weimann (2016), this analysis offers an integrated and nuanced view of the propaganda mechanisms that contribute to the consolidation of radical ideologies. It highlights the need for a comprehensive strategic response that takes into account the fluid nature of information and the growing influence of social media in terrorist recruitment, both at the secessionist and jihadist levels.

4. Porous borders and cross-border incursions

This section examines the strategic role of porous borders in the proliferation of terrorist movements in Cameroon. By analysing geopolitical, institutional and socio-economic factors, we highlight how these cross-border areas facilitate the movement of fighters, arms trafficking and the organisation of criminal networks. This analysis draws on a

wealth of academic literature and field data from international reports, thereby offering an integrated and nuanced perspective on the security challenges facing Cameroon.

4.1. Open borders and terrorist flows

Cameroon shares particularly vulnerable borders with Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), making it a prime transit route for the movement of fighters and arms trafficking. Several studies have highlighted that the porosity of these borders is the result of a range of interdependent factors, ranging from geographical constraints to institutional weaknesses and transnational criminal networks.

Geographical constraints and inadequate infrastructure:

Cameroon's borders are characterised by a complex topography, comprising forested areas, deserts and terrain that is difficult to access, which complicates the establishment of effective control measures (Asong, 2018). The lack of effective surveillance infrastructure, combined with often inadequate security coverage, allows terrorist groups to move about freely. Zenn (2020) highlights that uncontrolled cross-border roads serve as prime corridors for the movement of fighters and the transit of weapons.

Institutional weaknesses and corruption:

Beyond purely geographical challenges, the institutions responsible for border security face problems relating to funding, training and corruption. These institutional weaknesses hamper the state's ability to effectively monitor and secure its borders (Botha, 2014). Reports by the International Crisis Group (2021) indicate that corruption at the local level facilitates the circumvention of control measures, thereby providing terrorist groups with additional opportunities to organise cross-border incursions.

Transnational criminal networks and links to terrorism:

Porous borders are not only used for the transit of fighters; they also facilitate the trafficking of arms, drugs and other financial resources necessary for the sustainability of terrorist activities. Felbab-Brown (2020) highlights how these criminal networks operate in parallel with terrorist groups, creating an ecosystem in which smuggling and illicit financing reinforce one another. This phenomenon is of particular concern in the Cameroonian context, where the interconnection between criminal and terrorist actors complicates the fight against these threats.

Impacts on national and regional security:

The opening of borders has direct repercussions on Cameroon's national security and on the stability of the region as a whole. The free movement of fighters strengthens the operational capacity of terrorist groups and complicates coordination efforts between the security forces of the countries concerned (International Crisis Group, 2019). Furthermore, ineffective border controls contribute to the proliferation of lawless areas, thereby facilitating the establishment of terrorist cells and the organisation of cross-border attacks.

In conclusion, the porous nature of Cameroon's borders is a key factor in the recruitment and movement of terrorist networks. Geographical constraints, institutional shortcomings and the complicity of criminal networks create an environment conducive to cross-border incursions, thereby exacerbating the security threat. To counter these dynamics, it is imperative to strengthen regional cooperation, invest in modern surveillance infrastructure and implement institutional reforms aimed at improving governance and transparency at the borders. These measures, combined with an integrated approach to security, could help to significantly reduce terrorist movements and stabilise the region.

4.2. The criminal economy of terrorism

Terrorist groups, whether jihadists in the Far North or secessionists in the NOSO, are funded by a complex and multifaceted war economy based on various illicit mechanisms. This funding not only supports their military operations but also consolidates their organisational structures, whilst exacerbating the economic and social costs of the conflicts.

Sources of funding and mechanisms:

1. Kidnappings and ransoms

Kidnappings for ransom represent one of the major sources of income. Terrorist groups, notably Boko Haram, regularly use this strategy to secure immediate funding. According to the International Crisis Group (2019), ransoms from kidnappings are estimated to have generated between 5 and 7 million dollars a year at the height of their activities in certain areas of Nigeria and the Far North region of Cameroon. Similarly, secessionist groups in the NOSO resort to this method to fund their operations, with estimates suggesting annual revenues ranging from 2 to 3 million dollars (Amnesty International, 2020).

2. Arms trafficking and smuggling

Porous borders enable groups to facilitate the trafficking of arms and ammunition, thereby contributing to the war economy. Smuggling through unmonitored corridors bolsters their operational capacity. Research conducted by Botha (2014) and corroborated by Felbab-Brown (2020) indicates that arms trafficking accounts for a significant proportion of revenue, with financial flows estimated at several million dollars annually, although the exact figures vary depending on the conflict zones and time periods.

3. Exploitation of natural resources and smuggling of illicit goods

In addition to arms, the exploitation and trafficking of natural resources (oil, minerals, agricultural products) constitute a significant source of revenue. In the Far North, for example, networks linked to Boko Haram are involved in the illegal extraction and trafficking of oil, potentially generating additional revenue estimated at between 2 and 4 million dollars a year (International Crisis Group, 2021). These same dynamics, although receiving less media attention, are found in certain areas of the NOSO region, where the smuggling of agricultural and handicrafts supports the underground economy of secessionist movements (Nganje, 2021).

4. Extortion and the collection of illicit ‘taxes’

In the territories under their control, terrorist groups impose forms of extortion in the form of taxes or levies. These forced levies on local economic activities enable them to finance their day-to-day operations. Studies by Horgan (2008) show that extortion contributes substantially to overall revenue, particularly in areas where the state is absent or ineffective.

The cost of conflict and the impact on the war economy:

The armed conflicts instigated by these groups entail considerable economic costs for the states concerned. Felbab-Brown (2020) emphasises that the war economy strengthens the capacity of terrorist groups by creating a vicious circle: the greater the funding, the more the conflicts intensify, which in turn generates new revenue for illegal actors. Consequently, investment in smuggling infrastructure, endemic corruption and the proliferation of transnational criminal networks exacerbate the security and economic situation.

The figures cited illustrate the scale of the problem:

- **Boko Haram:** According to some estimates, ransoms from kidnappings and arms trafficking could generate between 5 and 7 million dollars a

year, in addition to revenue from illicit oil, estimated at between 2 and 4 million dollars annually (International Crisis Group, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2021).

- **NOSO secessionist movements:** Combined revenues from kidnappings, smuggling and extortion could reach between 2 and 3 million dollars a year (Amnesty International, 2020; Nganje, 2021).

These financial flows, although difficult to measure precisely due to the clandestine nature of the activities, clearly illustrate how the criminal economy fuels and perpetuates armed conflicts in the region.

Outlook and strategic implications

The diversification of funding sources shows that the fight against terrorism cannot be reduced to a military approach. To destabilise the war economy, it is essential to:

- Strengthen regional and international cooperation to better control cross-border flows,
- Improve transparency and governance at local levels to reduce corruption,
- Develop local economic development strategies that offer viable alternatives to vulnerable populations.

These measures, combined with enhanced monitoring of smuggling and trafficking activities, could help to limit the financial resources of terrorist groups and, consequently, reduce their capacity to act.

5. The consolidation of terrorism and strategic responses

This chapter examines how terrorist groups consolidate their power and explores the various strategic responses implemented to counter this threat. It highlights the limitations of purely military approaches and advocates an integrated strategy combining security interventions, socio-economic measures and ideological prevention initiatives.

5.1. Limitations of military strategies

Despite the significant deployment of national armed forces and their active participation within the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF), the fight against Boko Haram and other armed groups in Cameroon faces major challenges linked to the asymmetric nature of the conflict.

The complexity of asymmetry and the adaptability of terrorist groups:

Guerrilla tactics, the use of ambushes and the exploitation of terrain that is difficult to monitor enable Boko Haram to effectively evade conventional forces. Researchers Horgan (2008) and Sageman (2004) have shown that asymmetry in terrorist conflicts stems from the flexibility and adaptability of these groups, which often operate in small, mobile units. By blending into the civilian population, these units complicate the task of the armed forces, which find themselves in a 'hybrid' war situation, combining conventional armed conflict with diffuse insurgencies.

Joint coordination and institutional disparities:

Participation in the Multinational Force and Mission (MFF) requires coordination between several nations with varying doctrines, equipment and levels of training. According to Felbab-Brown (2020), these disparities create operational friction and undermine the overall effectiveness of the military intervention. The multiplicity of actors also makes it more difficult to gather accurate intelligence, which is essential for targeting terrorist cells in real time. The International Crisis Group (2019) emphasises that, despite joint operations, the absence of a unified strategy and an integrated command structure limit the ability to effectively neutralise terrorist networks.

Economic costs and socio-political repercussions:

Intensive military operations in the Far North carry a considerable economic cost. For example, an analysis by the International Crisis Group (2021) indicates that the defence budget allocated to counter-terrorism has increased by nearly 25 per cent over the last decade, without any significant reduction in Boko Haram's operational capacity. These massive expenditures, often financed through borrowing or budgetary redeployments, place pressure on the national economy and can lead to social tensions. Furthermore, the excessive use of force can result in human rights violations, which fuels resentment amongst local populations and risks bolstering terrorist recruitment (Cronin, 2009; Botha, 2014).

Adverse effects of military pressure:

Several studies have shown that intensive military interventions, when not accompanied by deradicalisation and socio-economic development initiatives, can have adverse effects and may actually catalyse radicalisation. Horgan (2008) explains that the militarisation of conflict can inadvertently exacerbate local grievances, fuelling a cycle of violence and reprisals. The brutal repression of communities

perceived as accomplices or victims can reinforce the legitimacy of terrorist groups in the eyes of marginalised populations. Thus, rather than reducing the threat, military pressure that is not coordinated with strategies for ideological prevention and development can contribute to the persistence – or even the expansion – of terrorism.

Strategic implications and avenues for improvement

To overcome these limitations, several recommendations emerge from the academic literature and field analyses:

- **Strengthen inter-regional cooperation and intelligence coordination:** Better integration of the forces of FMM member states, accompanied by real-time information sharing, is essential to improve the effectiveness of interventions (Felbab-Brown, 2020).
- **Adopt an integrated approach:** As Cronin (2009) emphasises, the fight against terrorism must combine military action with socio-economic development, deradicalisation and reconciliation measures. Community initiatives and reintegration programmes for ex-combatants could help break the cycle of radicalisation.
- **Encouraging transparency and accountability:** Improving the governance of the armed forces and combating corruption within security institutions strengthen public trust and minimise the counterproductive effects of military operations (Botha, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2019).

Although the military strategies deployed, notably by the FMM, are essential for containing the spread of terrorist groups, they remain insufficient when implemented in isolation. The asymmetric nature of Boko Haram and other radical groups, combined with institutional challenges and high economic costs, requires a holistic approach. Only an integrated strategy, combining security, development and community engagement, can hope to neutralise the terrorist threat in the long term and restore regional stability. These analyses demonstrate that, to counter terrorism effectively, it is imperative to go beyond mere military responses and adopt a multidimensional approach incorporating institutional reforms and development policies tailored to local contexts.

5.2. The importance of an integrated and inclusive approach: taking gender and cultural specificities into account in deradicalisation and reintegration processes

In the face of persistent and evolving extremist ideologies, a one-dimensional response proves insufficient. The deradicalisation and reintegration of former combatants require a holistic approach incorporating psychosocial, economic, cultural and gender-based interventions. This model aims not only to counter violent narratives but also to offer concrete alternatives for reintegration, thereby contributing to social stability and the prevention of future radicalisation.

Psychosocial Interventions and Cognitive Behavioural Therapies

One of the cornerstones of deradicalisation lies in the transformation of cognitive and emotional patterns.

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT, or cognitive behavioural therapy (often referred to as TCC in French), is a structured psychotherapeutic approach that aims to identify, challenge and modify negative or irrational thought patterns and the behaviours that stem from them. Based on the idea that our thoughts influence our emotions and actions, CBT helps individuals adopt more realistic ways of thinking and develop effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, depression and other psychological disorders (Beck, 1976; Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, & Fang, 2012).

In practice, this therapy often takes place over a series of structured sessions, during which the therapist and client work together to identify dysfunctional thoughts; assess their validity and their impact on behaviour; implement cognitive restructuring techniques to modify these thoughts; and practise new behaviours to reinforce more adaptive patterns. CBT is recognised for its effectiveness and its generally short duration, making it one of the most widely studied and used approaches in modern psychotherapy.

The Contribution of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to the Deradicalisation, Resilience and Reintegration of Jihadist and Secessionist Combatants

CBT, a psychotherapeutic approach based on the identification and restructuring of dysfunctional thought patterns, has demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in various areas of mental health. Its application to deradicalisation processes is based on its ability to help

individuals reframe extreme beliefs, reduce the intensity of negative emotions and develop more appropriate coping strategies. This section examines how CBT contributes effectively, efficiently and sustainably to the transformation of radical ideologies, drawing on the scientific literature and some compelling examples from Cameroon.

Mechanisms of Action of CBT in Deradicalisation

- **Cognitive Restructuring and Identification of Cognitive Distortions**

CBT helps to identify the irrational or extreme thoughts that underpin jihadist and secessionist ideologies. For example, by helping former combatants to question beliefs such as the inevitability of injustice or the legitimacy of violence as a solution, CBT facilitates the deconstruction of extremist narratives. Research by McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017) shows that changing cognitive schemas is a key factor in reducing violent behaviour, a finding that is also echoed in the research of Moghaddam (2005).

- **Emotion Management and Reduction of Arousal**

CBT-based deradicalisation processes include techniques for managing stress and emotions. Individuals who have experienced trauma linked to conflict or forced recruitment can learn to manage their anger and fear, thereby reducing their vulnerability to radicalised rhetoric. Studies in applied psychology indicate that reducing emotional arousal contributes significantly to resilience (Beck, 1976; Hofmann et al., 2012).

Development of Social and Coping Skills:

CBT, often used in group settings as part of reintegration programmes, provides a safe environment where ex-combatants can share their experiences, strengthen their sense of belonging and learn new coping strategies. This collective process contributes to the reconstruction of personal identity and the reduction of isolation, two factors often associated with radical recidivism (Victoroff, 2005).

Examples of Success Stories in Cameroon

Although specific research into the application of CBT in deradicalisation in Cameroon is still developing, several programmes incorporating this approach have shown promising results:

- **Reintegration Programme in Garoua:** A study conducted by Ndongmo (2018) in the Garoua region assessed the impact of a reintegration programme for

ex-combatants, incorporating CBT and psychosocial support modules. The results indicated that nearly 75 per cent of participants improved their stress management skills and successfully reintegrated into civilian life, significantly reducing the risk of a return to radicalism.

- **Reintegration Project Led by Amnesty International:** Amnesty International has documented cases of successful reintegration in the NOSO region, where CBT interventions were integrated into broader deradicalisation and socio-economic integration programmes. These initiatives have helped to create community support networks, facilitating the reconstruction of non-radicalised identities (Amnesty International, 2020).

- **Summary and Strategic Implications**

CBT is distinguished by its ability to offer individualised interventions tailored to the specific needs of ex-combatants. By addressing cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions, it not only reduces the appeal of extremist rhetoric but also strengthens individuals' resilience and adaptive capacities. To be truly effective in the Cameroonian context, CBT must be integrated into a broader deradicalisation model that includes:

Economic interventions aimed at offering concrete alternatives to violence through job creation and vocational training.

Community engagement involving local leaders, women and moderate religious figures to promote an inclusive reinterpretation of religious and cultural narratives.

Long-term follow-up to ensure the sustainability of cognitive and behavioural changes, as well as to support the social reintegration of ex-combatants.

The successes observed in local initiatives in Cameroon demonstrate that CBT, when applied in an integrated and contextualised manner, can contribute substantially to deradicalisation. By combining this approach with socio-economic measures and community mobilisation, it is possible to break the cycle of radicalisation and lay solid foundations for lasting peace. CBT has proven effective in changing extreme beliefs and reshaping the negative perceptions that fuel adherence to radical ideologies (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Moghaddam, 2005). Through structured dialogue and cognitive restructuring

techniques, former combatants can learn to identify and challenge the cognitive distortions that justify violence.

CBT is an essential component of the overall deradicalisation approach, as it addresses the cognitive and emotional foundations underpinning adherence to extremist ideologies. Combined with economic and community-based interventions, it offers a promising model for bringing about lasting change in the life trajectories of former combatants, thereby contributing to security and social stability in Cameroon.

- **Narrative therapy and interventions based on identity reconstruction:** As a complement to CBT, narrative therapy helps individuals redefine their personal history by incorporating alternative narratives that promote peaceful and inclusive identities (White & Epston, 1990). Studies conducted in various post-conflict contexts show that this approach can reduce the likelihood of a return to radicalism by offering a new, empowering narrative (Sageman, 2004; Horgan, 2008).
- **Support groups and community interventions:** The creation of psychosocial support networks helps to break the isolation of ex-combatants and promotes sustainable reintegration (Victoroff, 2005). These group-, often facilitated by mental health professionals, help to address trauma linked to radicalisation and conflict, whilst strengthening individual and collective resilience.

Economic Approaches and Resource Redistribution

Economic inequalities provide fertile ground for radicalisation. An integrated approach must therefore tackle structural disparities through:

- **Local economic development programmes:** Investment in job creation and vocational training offers ex-combatants and vulnerable young people credible alternatives to violence. Studies show that microcredit and technical training initiatives have helped to reduce recidivism rates in post-conflict contexts (Botha, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2019).
- **Equitable redistribution and strengthening of safety nets:** Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1970) highlight how unequal access to resources breeds intergroup tensions and how

situations of frustration lead to aggression (Gurr, 1970). Public policies aimed at redistributing resources – by improving access to equitable, high-quality education, healthcare and social services – can alleviate the feelings of exclusion that fuel the resort to violent extremism within communities, particularly in northern regions where there is a notable lack of high-quality infrastructure to meet the urgent needs of the population.

- **Public-private partnerships:** Collaboration between the state, NGOs and the private sector help to create sustainable economic opportunities by mobilising financial resources for community projects that directly target high-risk areas (UNDP, 2020).

Gender Dimension and Women's Inclusion

The involvement of women in deradicalisation processes represents a strategic lever that is often underutilised.

- **The role of women as agents of change:** Research by Khan (2020) and reports by UN Women (2015) show that women's active engagement in peace and reintegration initiatives helps to transform the dynamics of conflict. Women, who often embody community values and solidarity, can play a central role in mediation and in rebuilding the social fabric.
- **Programmes specifically for women:** Targeted interventions, such as workshops to build self-esteem, tailored vocational training and forums for community dialogue, have proven effective in post-conflict contexts (Crenshaw, 1991; Enloe, 2000). These programmes aim to empower women, whilst integrating them into decision-making and reconciliation processes.

Religious Reinterpretation and Mobilisation of Cultural Leaders

The religious dimension, which is often exploited by extremist groups, can be reframed to promote peaceful, systemic deradicalisation.

- **Reinterpretation of sacred texts:** The involvement of moderate religious leaders in proposing a contextualised and humanist interpretation of the Qur'an is crucial. Initiatives in Indonesia and Nigeria show that promoting a theology of peace can help

reduce the appeal of violent rhetoric (Horgan, 2008; Sageman, 2004).

- **Engagement of community and cultural leaders:** Traditional leaders (Ayatollahs, Léira, Djaoro, Lamidos, etc.), who enjoy considerable legitimacy amongst local populations, can facilitate dialogue and establish reconciliation processes. They play a central role in mediating conflicts and promoting values of tolerance and social justice (Borum, 2011).

Complementary Approaches and Strategic Innovations

In addition to the traditional approaches mentioned, certain methodological and strategic innovations have proven effective in deradicalisation:

- **Transitional justice programmes:** The establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, enables historical grievances to be addressed and offers ex-combatants a pathway to reintegration by taking responsibility within a framework of collective redress (Hayner, 2011).
- **Intergenerational and inter-community dialogue initiatives:** Dialogue programmes involving different generations and communities help to build bridges between social actors, fostering the construction of a shared memory and the prevention of future conflicts (Lustiger & West, 2003).
- **Use of information technology for counter-narratives:** The development of digital platforms dedicated to disseminating peaceful narratives and promoting tolerance is an innovative approach to countering online radicalisation (Weimann, 2016). These tools facilitate the mobilisation of support networks and the circulation of verified information, thereby countering the disinformation spread by extremist groups.

Summary and Strategic Implications

The effectiveness of an integrated approach rests on the synergy between psychosocial interventions, economic measures, reintegration initiatives, and cultural and religious reinterpretations. By adopting a multidimensional strategy, deradicalisation policies can address the multiple causes of radicalisation whilst offering concrete alternatives to former combatants and marginalised populations. The pillars of this strategy include:

- **Cognitive and emotional transformation** through therapeutic interventions such as CBT and narrative therapy.
- **The reduction of economic inequalities** through local development programmes, equitable redistribution and public-private partnerships.
- **The active inclusion of women** and the integration of gender dynamics into reconciliation processes.
- **The reinterpretation of religious discourse** and the involvement of community leaders to promote an inclusive and humanist vision.
- **Technological innovation and dialogue initiatives** to foster the circulation of a positive counter-narrative and the rebuilding of social bonds.

This integrated approach, underpinned by a solid theoretical foundation and empirical evidence from contemporary research (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Botha, 2014; Khan, 2020; UN Women, 2015), provides a strategic framework for breaking the cycle of radicalisation and establishing lasting peace. It demonstrates that the fight against terrorism can only be approached from a holistic perspective, where the transformation of socio-economic and cultural structures goes hand in hand with security and psychotherapeutic interventions.

This comprehensive analysis highlights the crucial importance of an integrated and inclusive approach to deradicalisation. By combining psychosocial, economic, cultural and gender-based interventions, it is possible to address the multifaceted nature of radicalisation and promote successful reintegration, thereby ensuring long-term stability and social cohesion.

Conclusion

Radicalisation in Cameroon appears to be the result of a complex interplay of socio-economic vulnerabilities, sophisticated ideological propaganda and strategic opportunities exploited by terrorist groups. This multidisciplinary analysis has highlighted how the manipulation of discourse, the exploitation of economic inequalities and porous borders combine to fuel and perpetuate processes of indoctrination and recruitment. In particular, the study emphasises the importance of integrating psychosocial, economic, cultural and gender-based approaches – such as cognitive behavioural therapy, local development strategies and the engagement of community

leaders – in order to deconstruct extremist narratives and facilitate the reintegration of former combatants.

Despite the security threat at the country's borders, the research highlights the complexity of social responses, where traditional bonds of solidarity and inter-religious coexistence often act as barriers to the widespread Islamophobia observed in other parts of the world (Messanga, Boula & Sogbou 2017).

Scientific evidence from the work of McCauley and Moskalenko (2017), Horgan (2008), Botha (2014) and others demonstrates that only an integrated response, involving close cooperation between national and international actors, can hope to effectively contain this growing threat. Thus, to restore stability and foster lasting peace, it is imperative to develop policies for preventing and combating terrorism that go beyond a strictly military framework and incorporate dimensions of socio-economic development, religious reinterpretation and transitional justice.

Ultimately, a holistic approach, capable of addressing the deep-rooted causes of radicalisation, stands out as the most promising way to bring about a lasting transformation of Cameroon's security landscape and prevent the emergence of future conflicts.

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