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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Cameroon

Overview: In 2019, Cameroon experienced a resurgence of terrorist activity in the Far North Region. While the Government of Cameroon attributed most terrorist attacks to BH, ISIS-WA likely perpetrated a significant number of assaults. A December 11 Amnesty International report stated that 275 people were killed by BH and ISIS-WA in 2019, nearly double the number in 2018. Terrorists targeted civilians in villages on the western border with Nigeria and in the northern tip of the Far North Region, within the Lake Chad Basin. They carried out ambushes, abductions, raids, beheadings, and targeted killings of vigilance committee members. The terrorists targeted significantly more soldiers and military posts compared with 2018.

In 2019, ISIS-WA transitioned from seizing resources, often extorting illegal taxes from locals, to attacking villages and security forces in the northern tip of the Far North Region. In June, ISIS-WA perpetrated an attack on Darak Island near Lake Chad that resulted in at least 24 deaths, 16 of which were security forces. This was the largest number of casualties from an attack since BH's initial penetration into Cameroon in 2014. Following at least two separate attacks, ISIS-WA fighters hoisted their black flag in localities within the region.

In May 2019, the government opened the border crossing with Nigeria at Amchide, Far North Region that had been closed since 2014. The border closing had had repercussions for trade with Nigeria and Chad. In July, the government announced a \$2.5 million project that will benefit youth in areas most affected by BH. In August, President Paul Biya provided financial and material support to vigilance committees engaged in the fight against BH and ISIS-WA. While some efforts were made to establish the rehabilitation and reintegration center for BH recruits in Meme, Far North Region announced by the government in 2018, the center had not yet become operational. Significant numbers of ex-combatants abandoned BH and surrendered to security forces.

Cameroon continued its CT cooperation with the international community. Over the course of the year, Cameroon contributed to Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) operations, including providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance flights by two U.S.-donated C-208 Cessnas. Cameroon also remained a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and a member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP). Countering terrorist threats remained a top security priority for the Government of Cameroon, which continued to work with the United States to improve the capacity of its security forces. In 2019, the United States' CT assistance to Cameroon included an increase in projects implemented by the Department of Justice and the Global Center for Cooperative Security.

2019 Terrorist Incidents: In a December 11 report, Amnesty International stated that in 2019, BH and ISIS-WA killed at least 275 people in attacks on the Far North Region, compared to 153 in 2018. This represents an increase of nearly 80 percent in fatalities in 2019, compared to 2018. *L'Oeil du Sahel* newspaper, which regularly tracks terrorist-related casualties in the region, estimated that between January and November, BH and ISIS-WA fighters killed at least 111 civilians and 32 security force members. Attacks included indiscriminate killings, targeted murders, abductions, ambushes, arson, and raids in search of supplies. A representative sample of attacks in the Far North Region include:

- February 8: BH terrorists killed at least five civilians in Majirde.
- April 12: Four soldiers died in Gouzda-Vreket when their vehicle passed over an IED, allegedly placed by BH.
- April 18: BH terrorists killed at least 10 civilians in Tchakamari.
- June 10: ISIS-WA terrorists killed at least 16 soldiers and 8 civilians in Darak, an island in Lake Chad.
- July 30: BH terrorists cut off the ears of at least three women they abducted following an attack on Gakara.
- August 1: BH terrorists killed at least four civilians in Gederou.

- September 13: ISIS-WA terrorists killed at least six soldiers and injured nine others in Soueram.
- October 21: BH terrorists killed at least four civilians and abducted several others in Goledje.
- October 31: BH terrorists killed at least four civilians in Kotséhéré.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: In 2019, Cameroon prosecuted numerous BH-affiliated defendants for terrorism-related crimes, primarily in the military tribunal in Maroua. Most trials that the U.S. Embassy observed in February at the Maroua military tribunal related to individuals who were alleged to have provided logistical support to BH, as opposed to actual fighters. The low conviction rate is due in large part to poor charging decisions by prosecutors at the outset of cases and to subsequent lack of credible evidence to support convictions at trial. The lack of trial evidence is often the result of an absence of live witness testimony, which is not required under Cameroonian law but is increasingly expected by judges deciding cases.

Cameroon continued to use the anti-terrorism law enacted in 2014 to suppress criticism and freedom of expression by arresting journalists and activists in connection with the ongoing crisis in the Anglophone regions. In October, the government released 333 low-level detainees arrested for suspicion of being Anglophone separatists and facing misdemeanor charges. However, hundreds of others remain in detention. The government continued to characterize people espousing separatism for the Northwest and Southwest Regions as terrorists and, in August, sentenced separatist leader Julius Ayuk Tabe to life imprisonment.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Cameroon is a member of the Task Force on Money Laundering in Central Africa (GABAC), a FATF-style regional body. Cameroon’s FIU, the National Agency for Financial Investigation, is a member of the Egmont Group. There were no significant updates in 2019.

Countering Violent Extremism: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) remains the focus in the Anglophone regions, where a significant number of former terrorists abandoned BH and surrendered to security forces. In July, national DDR coordinator Francis Fai Yengo told former fighters at a MNJTF camp in Mora, Far North Region, that the government would finance their economic projects.

In July, the government launched a “Youth and Stabilization for Peace and Security” project within the Far North Region. This project envisions promoting tolerance and coexistence, and will finance studies, trainings, and the establishment of income-generating activities for 30,000 youths ages 12 to 25 from six of the municipalities most affected by the security crisis in the Far North Region. The United Nations and the European Union are providing technical and financial support to this initiative, estimated at \$2.5 million.

Cameroon’s Council of Imams and Muslim Dignitaries organized a three-day seminar in July aimed at building the capacity of 300 imams and preachers on the ills of “religious extremism.” The training envisioned promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence irrespective of religion and educating Muslims that BH’s extreme ideology does not represent Islamic principles.

International and regional Cooperation: No changes since 2018.

ecoi.net summary:

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Austrian Red CrossAustrian Centre for Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telephone) +43 1 589 00 583**F (Fax)** +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

Contact

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