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**WHAT ABOUT THE RISE OF BOKO HARAM
FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS IN CENTRAL AND
WEST AFRICA?**

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In this policy brief, the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute will be focusing on the rise of Boko Haram female suicide bombers in central and western Africa regions, notably in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad. We will look at some fact checking and attempt to understand the reasons behind Boko Haram reliance on females as explosive devices. We will further provide some recommendations.

A VERY BRIEF BACKGROUND ON BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is the extremist organisation that came into being in Nigeria before expanding its activities in other parts of western Africa notably Niger and Central Africa especially in Cameroon and Chad. Since 2009, the extremist group attacked schools, churches, mosques, abducted thousands of people including the 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 that 82 were released in May 2017 following by the release of several other girls this year after months of negotiations. Boko Haram have been perpetrating terrorist attacks in a bid to ban so called western education and establish an "Islamic Caliphate" in the Borno state region of Nigeria. The increasing use of female suicide bombers by Boko Haram has become one of its trademark. Since 2009, the group is responsible for the



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death of more than 20,000 people and forced displacement of nearly 3 million other.

FACT CHECKING

In the night of 12 and 13 July 2017, a woman suicide bomber perpetrated a terror attack in the far north region of Cameroon. The attack was carried out in a crowded area in Waza, a city located at around 8 km from the Nigerian border. During the same night, a second woman suicide bomber who was heading toward the headquarters of the Rapid Intervention Battalion ((BIR) the Cameroon special unit in charge of combating terrorism was gunned down by soldiers of this unit. The explosive device found on her remains was defused thanks to local bomb-disposal experts. Overall both attacks resulted in 14 dead including the two attackers and 35 wounded. It was the 48th terror attack attributed to the extremist group Boko Haram in the region since the beginning of the year 2017.



July 2017, multiple female suicides attacks in Cameroon and Nigeria

Moving on the other side of the border, on 17 July just a few days following the attacks in Cameroon, another attack was carried out in Nigeria. In Maiduguri the capital of Borno state in north eastern Nigeria, a female suicide bomber detonated an explosive device, leaving nine people dead and 18 wounded. The attack occurred shortly before early morning prayers when the attacker was attempting to enter a mosque. Even though nobody claimed the responsibility of this suicide attack, it was highly likely that Boko Haram was behind it for, using female suicide bombers has become one of their favourite signature.

Similarly, around a month later, on 15 August at a market in Mandarari located at about 25 km from the city of Maiduguri, people were about to close their shops when three female suicide bombers triggered their explosive devices killing 28 people and wounding 82 others. The attacks bore once again the hallmark of Boko Haram which by now had intensified



its activities in the North Eastern Nigeria, that resulted in nearly 250 dead in the region since June 2017. Its better-known faction, led by Abubakar Shekau, has mainly based itself in the sprawling Sambisa forest, and been characterised by its use of women and children as suicide bombers targeting mosques and markets. A rival faction which is based in the Lake Chad region is led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi and has sworn allegiance to Islamic State (ISIL or ISIS or IS). In terms of the use of female suicide bombers, as reported by the US based organisation Combating Terrorism Centre, of the 434-total number of Boko Haram's suicide bombers, 244 of the bombers are identified as female— a rate of at least 56% of bombers in total and 72.2% of bombers with an identified gender. This organisation went on to observe that having deployed 244 women suicide bombers between April 2011 and June 2017, Boko Haram has now used more female suicide bombers than any other insurgency in history, surpassing the record established by the Tamil Tigers, who used 44 female suicide bombers over 10 years.

THE REASONS BEHIND THE RISE OF BOKO HARAM FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS



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The rise of Boko Haram female suicide bombers, a dramatic twist and escalation of gender based-violence

The rise of Boko Haram female suicide bombers can be perceived as a dramatic twist and escalation of the phenomenon of gender based-violence. By continuously coercing women within the household, private and other public arenas and now in the sphere of terrorism and political violence, the enjoyment of toxic patriarchy and masculinity has successfully achieved an unprecedented amount over women in terms of violence and domination. The increasing use of female as engine of death attests to the fact that they represent nothing not only within the socio-economic and cultural life but also in politics and war. In such contexts females are merely homo sacer, that is they can be sacrificed and killed without the fact that their killing constitutes a crime. Women are coerced into suicide bombing missions not because of some sort of expertise they may have acquired but only because of their gender. Resultantly, being a female in a space conquered or subject to terrorism is equivalent to a death sentence. The males who are the thinking mind behind terrorist activities have positioned themselves as gods. They have now acquired the divine right over the life and death of females. These men sovereignly design and decide not only the circumstances but also specify how, when and where the life of 'their' females will cease.



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The second cause of the rise of boko haram female suicide bombers reside in poverty and lack of education. Poor and uneducated are ignorant and often lack the intellectual capacity to assess critical situations and manipulations that may result in deadly consequences for them and their family. According to the information we have been able to gather from the hot spot in the northern part of Cameroon, one of the techniques used by Boko Haram to turn female into suicide bomber is as follows: Being aware of the emergency atmosphere in terms of security in the region, Boko Haram members often target crowded areas and hand around. They often use female or children of the area and will 'send' them to deliver parcels against some money; parcel to be delivered in a bar, market and other crowded areas. In fact, these parcels contain explosive devices that will be remotely activated once the woman, girl or child has reached the target area. This is one of the modes of operation by Boko Haram. Alternatively, females who accept to become suicide bombers may do so because her husband or family might have been hostage of the extremism group. By complying with the orders received, she will accomplish the supreme sacrifice for the sole purpose to guarantee her family's safety.

Poverty is determinant in the rise of Boko Haram female suicide bombers. It is a fact that the borders between the countries subject to Boko Haram attacks in the western and central Africa regions are made up of villages that seem to be have been abandoned by the state. There are no infrastructures, no service deliveries, no schools, no hospitals and people living in these areas must sometimes walk several kilometres to have some water. Such living conditions are safe haven for the terrorists who unscrupulously prosper in the void left by the state. The information we



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were able to gather from the ground are consistent with the fact that such circumstances are fertile ground for radicalisations. In their deadly enterprise, Boko Haram members went far to the extent that they rely not only on fear but also on seduction to prey on poor and desperate women who will later be turned as suicide devices. It therefore crucial to understand that populations might either succumb to radicalisation or swear allegiance to extremist groups not because they share similar ideals but out of poverty, desperation and fear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

development projects, education, women empowerment, respect of rule of law and human rights are prerequisites for a sustainable peace and reduction of violence in the region

The respective governments must initiate development projects, schools, infrastructures and service deliveries in sections of their territories that have remained abandoned for too long. Without infrastructures, without roads, it is very difficult to generate life in deserted areas. These recommendations are urgent and need to be taken seriously.



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Secondly, large portions of the population in general and particularly women need to be empowered. The first step toward this direction is the reduction of chronic and rampant gender inequalities in public and private spaces. This will have an impact in poverty reduction and deprivation which remain fertile ground for radicalisation. Another important initiative is to focus on girl education and implementing legislation on child bride and force marriage. Campaigns against the phenomenon of gender-based violence need also to be initiated and states must initiate studies to identify the causes and patterns statistic on this phenomenon.

Thirdly, a successful fight against terrorism, must also be couple with human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Sometimes law enforcement agencies treat indiscriminately civilian populations and terrorist suspects in the same manner. This may lead to a hostile feeling of civilians against the state which the only purpose is to secure and protect them.



About the author:

Gerard Emmanuel Kamdem Kamga was trained in law and political science, human rights, critical theory, security and gender analysis. Holding a doctoral degree in laws with focus on emergency regimes from the University of Pretoria, he has over the years, developed a sound expertise in emergency and security issues. Gerard is the Executive Director of the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute.