Chapter 13

Impediments to Nigerian Democracy: Ambivalent Role of Vigilante Groups in Maintaining Security in the Wake of the Boko Haram Insurgence in Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on security efforts of local vigilante groups against Boko Haram (BH) insurgency in Northern Nigeria. The fight against BH insurgency is a major source of concern throughout the Nigerian Federation. The use of charms and locally fabricated small arms by the Vigilante and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is a factor in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgents. Through data obtained from interviews, newspapers and secondary texts, the article analyses the emergence and role of the vigilante in the fight against insurgency. The groups serve as an alternative security in the areas affected by the insurgency. The different groups use variety of locally made charms in their confrontation with Boko Haram group. Furthermore, this paper attempts to evaluate role of CJTF/Vigilante in the fight against insurgency, the nature of traditional mechanisms use by the local groups in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency. In this context, the innovation and cultural practice by the vigilante groups greatly helped in the fight against insurgency. It is concluded that there is likelihood the vigilante to pose danger to the security in the post war against insurgency period.

INTRODUCTION

The political developments in Nigeria since 1999 marked an important landmark in the development of democracy in Nigeria. This developments later influences the socio-economic and religious parameters in different parts of the country. As part of such development Northern Nigeria has witnessed demands for the implementation of Shariah across the Muslim dominated areas. These agitations among other
political dynamics in the country gave birth to the emergence of extreme and radical Muslim religious
groups such as the Boko Haram (BH) that call for the overthrow of the state and the installation of Is-
lamic state in the area. In order to achieve their target. Therefore, the BH resorts to violent attacks on the
security formations and the public places. The attacks more than other security challenge pose a serious
threat to the Nigeria’s fragile democracy and the regional security of the area.

The Nigerian state like other states bedeviled by activities of insurgents adopted a coercive military
strategy in the fight against BH (Aghedo & Osumah, 2014). The Nigerian fight against the BH Insur-
gency has been described as one of the greatest tasks ever confronted since the Nigerian civil war in the
late 1960s. Sagir (2014) describes the Nigerian Army fight against BH as a war overwhelmed by a great
number of intricacies dominated by a limited view of space and fire. He asserts in his observation that;

There is limited view of space and fire, visibility and maneuverability is limited, and ambush attrition
losses are high. Buildings provide good snipping posts, while alleys, refuse dumbs and sand filled streets
like in most of the North East are ideal for booby traps. This contributed to the lost of military and other
security personnel through ambushes staged by terrorists (Sagir, 2014, para 2).

The Nigerian Armed Forces are in the battlefield in which they fight insurgency some of the most
difficult and challenging battles in asymmetric warfare. The enemy usually strikes in built up areas where
people are crowded like market places and motor parks. However, the activities of BH are no longer as
they used to be known before 2013 when the group prioritised attacking Christians places of worship,
government officials, attacking and kidnapping of school children, police stations and army barracks,
as well as kidnapping western expatriates and assassination members of Islamic establishments that
criticized them (see. Akinpala, 2014). The rampant attacks on towns and villages by BH since July 2014,
greatly signifies a change in the strategy adopted by the insurgents. The innovations in the fight against
BH insurgents are in the use of youth vigilante and use traditional charms to confront the insurgents.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Vigilante and other self-security outfits like the CJTF/LVGs represents security outfits mostly composed
of volunteers, operating under the mandate of communal consesus to fight crimes (Olaniyi, 2005). The
need for vigilante as security outfit is generally intensified by the growing state failure to meet local
security needs, on one hand, and on the other hand, the growing desire for peace and rule of law among
communities (Abrahams 1987; Fourchad 2008). In the Nigerian context local security groups emerged
as a result of the state’s weak security apparatus, which resulted in the government’s failure to fullfil
its responsibilty of providing maximum security to the public. As argued by Onuoha (2015) “the failure
of public security in Nigeria has lead communities to indulge in different forms of ‘self-help’ security
measures, ranging from vigilante groups to community-owned arms stockpiling”(p.54). Specifically
vigilante activities were meant to combat crime when the government and the police had failed to ef-
fectively provide protection. To some extent it represents a sign of vote of no confidence in the state’s
ineffectiveness in providing public security, law and order (see. Abrahams, 1987; Heald, 1986).

Though, the phenomenon of vigilante and use of self-security is not a new to African societies, and
Nigeria in particular, the activities of Vigilante and CJTF against Boko Haram insurgency represent a new
dimension self-security in the fight against insurgency activities. The use of vigilante and self-security in