

## **VIGILANTISM AND THE FIGHT AGAINST BOKO HARAM IN THE FAR NORTH REGION OF CAMEROON, 2014-2018**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study sets out to explore the contributions of vigilante groups in the fight against Boko Haram and their role in the reduction of the atrocities of this Islamic sect in the Far North Region of Cameroon. The study makes use of qualitative approach in the design, data collection method and analysis. The main instrument for collecting data was interviews administered on 30 interviewees made up of public administrators, traditional chiefs (lamidos), military personnel and civilians in Amchide, Fotokol, Kaele, Maroua, Mora and Mokolo. These interviews were followed by the use of observations and focus group discussions. After analysing the data, the researchers found out that the activities of Boko Haram led to the re-emergence of vigilante groups in the region and such groups contributed significantly in the reduction of the violence of Boko Haram in many ways. They did this through the provision of intelligence reports to the military and the identification of suspects within their regions of operation. The research equally found out that vigilante groups were well structured in hierarchical form and members were recruited based on their mastery of their areas of operation. The study also showed that vigilante groups have become very popular in the region due to their assistance to the military and their contribution to security in the region; but they however pose as a source of insecurity in the future. Thus, the government blue print programme for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups like Boko Haram should include all these vigilante groups that are operating in the region so as to prevent them from turning into thugs or armed robbers in a post Boko Haram setting.*

**KEYWORDS:** Boko Haram, Civil-Military Cooperation, Far North Region, Vigilante, Vigilantism

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The word vigilantism has been used to describe movements of different nature and composition across the world. Vigilante is an appellation given to community based self-appointed law enforcement groups in a number of instances where law officers and courts were non-existent, inefficient or corrupt (Denkers, 1985). The presence of socially unwanted people in various

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communities across the globe as a whole gave birth to vigilantism. Vigilantism therefore originally arose as a response to the threat and reality of crime (Karmen, 1996). There has been a similar situation in the Far North Region of Cameroon where in this case, Boko Haram has been the socially unwanted factor in the Region. The Boko Haram cross border campaign began in 2011 in the Far North Region. It compelled the indigenes to create vigilante groups which the government of Cameroon officially approved, and called for the engagement of vigilantism in the fight against the insurgents through the Minister of Defence Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o who served in this position from 2009-2015.

This call came several months after Boko Haram first attacked a small border village called Wouri-Marou near Fotokol on March 02, 2014. This attack was considered a response to an incident in January of 2014 during which Boko Haram fighters who were retreating to seek refuge in the Mandara Mountains of the Far North Region of Cameroon clashed with security forces of Cameroon in a border village called Banki. After this incident, Boko Haram released fliers in the Far North Region of Cameroon under the name of Abubakar Shekau, warning that pro-government vigilantes would “pay dearly for what you do unless you repent” and telling Cameroon that “we have not attacked you, do not attack us” (fr.africatime.com February 6, 2014).

Since then, Boko Haram intensified its attacks against the country, making Cameroon the second most targeted country in terms of the number of attacks by the group after Nigeria. Thus, on May 17, 2014, Paul Biya, the President of the Republic of Cameroon declared war on Boko Haram at the Paris Summit aimed at uniting West African States against Boko Haram in the following words. ‘We are here to declare war on Boko Haram’ (De Marie, 2016). Following this declaration, Boko Haram became very active in the region through the use of suicide bombings, burning of towns and villages and direct confrontations with the army in many towns of the Far North Region. As a matter of fact, a report by Amnesty International showed that, from July 2015 to July 2016 about 200 attacks were carried out by the sect including about 40 cases of suicide bombings in the Far North Region of Cameroon.

Conscious of the official declaration of war on Boko Haram by Cameroon, the sect has employed non-conventional tactics such as guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings as well as the planting of improvised explosive devices in various towns of the Far North Region to unleash terror on the people. Therefore insecurity became widespread in the region. The peak of insecurity in the region was in 2015 when the insurgents increased their indiscriminate assaults on civilian and military targets. Faced with such an insurgent group that uses multiple methods of assault and pledging allegiance to the notorious terrorist group ISIS (Muir, 2015), vigilante groups resurfaced in the Region to counter the threat, but, this came with its own predicaments.

This was so because since vigilantes were becoming very popular and powerful in the region, it became difficult to control their actions due to their acquired power and influence. It equally became a worrisome situation as a security threat was very eminent especially as some vigilantes were already behaving like thugs and armed robbers. More so, there were elements of uncertainty in the role of vigilante groups in the fight against Boko Haram since issues of double standard and score settling among the locals rendered the credibility of the members questionable particularly

those along the border with Nigeria. The central theme of the paper therefore focused on the examination of the re-emergence of vigilante groups, their structure, recruitment methods, equipment used and their role in the fight against Boko Haram, as well as the challenges that ensued following the decrease of the threat of Boko Haram in the Far North Region and providing a way forward.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows; section two reviews the key concepts surrounding the study; section three presents the methodology adopted by the study. In section four, the findings of the study are presented in line with the various themes that emerged from field work. The last section concludes and provides suggestions for policy.

### **Conceptual Issues**

The key concepts that run throughout this research paper to enhance succinct comprehension are vigilante, vigilantism, counterinsurgency, civil military cooperation and Boko Haram.

#### ***Vigilante***

To begin with, the word “vigilante” is of Spanish origin and means “watchman” or “guard” but its Latin root is *vigil*, which means “awake” or “observant” (Karmen, 1996). A vigilante therefore is an individual who assumes the responsibility of community safety and values on a voluntary base. Vigilante is an appellation given to community based self-appointed law enforcement groups in a number of instances where law officers and courts were non-existent, inefficient or corrupt and where municipal institutions were disorganized; established authorities seemed unable to cope with the lawlessness and disorder in the community (Haefele, 2004). Karmen, (1996) says the act of taking the law into one’s hands is also known as vigilantism. Meanwhile, Ayildiz, (1995) argues that it means ‘self-defense’.

#### ***Vigilantism***

The root concept of vigilantism is the collective use of threat of violence in response to an alleged criminal act (Moncada, 2017). Vigilantism is centred on an organizational attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities, often by resorting to violence in the perceived absence of effective official state action through the police and courts. Vigilantism often emerge when there is a perception of increase criminality or social deviance which threatens social order. However, vigilantism flourishes not only in places where states lack the capacity to protect citizens from crime, but also where the state itself is believed to be corrupted or untrustworthy (Heald, 2006).

Thus, the concept of vigilantism revolves around crime control by civilians. According to Johnston (1996), vigilantism is a concept of social reaction to crime; actions taken by civilians (whether as individuals or as members of clandestine groups, large crowds or mass movement) as opposed to government officials; a response that involves violence that exceeds the legitimate use of force in

self-defence; an attempt to inflict punishment and pain to avenge a previous wrong or to deter future misconduct or to incapacitate dangerous persons. A belief that force is necessary and justifiable because government agents cannot or will not provide protection or enforce the law.

The appellation vigilantism differs from one community to another. In Africa for instance, the name depends on the ethnic group or geographical location of a community. The Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria refer to vigilantism as *sodesode*. Laurent Fourchad (2008) equates *sodesode* to vigilantism in the following argument.

“In the past, night guard system in Bere was called *sode sode*. In Yoruba, *sode* is the contracted form of the verb *se* (which means to do) with its object *ode* (which means hunter). If *ode* originally means hunter in Yoruba, by extension, the term came to designate both a guard and a hunter. Hence, *sode sode* can be approximately translated to mean keep watch in...” (Fourchad, 2008, p.24)

In addition, the inhabitants of the geographical area of South-East Nigeria generally referred to vigilantism as *Olopa* (Fourchad, 2008). Meanwhile, in the Far North Region it is referred to as *doka* by both the Mandara and Fulfulde people in the region.

There are six necessary features of the concept of vigilantism: (i) it involves planning and premeditation by those engaging in it, (ii) its participants are private citizens whose engagement is voluntary, (iii) it is a form of autonomous citizenship and as such, constitutes a social movement, (iv) it uses or threatens the use of force and, (v) it arises when an established order is under threat from transgression or the imputed transgression of institutionalized norm and, (vi) it aims to control crime or other social infractions by offering assurance of security both to participants and to others (Johnston, 1996). Thus, the general idea of the concept of vigilantism is connected to the fundamental issues of dissatisfied morality, injustice and failures on the path of the state as well as corruption of state agents.

However, vigilantism can be perceived as having a dual character embodying both a law abiding hero and a law-breaking villain (Ayyildiz, 1995). In the former case, vigilantism operates on the frontiers of the state, blurring the boundaries between the state and what normally falls outside it. According to Buur and Jensen (2004), authority is not necessarily lodged in the state or particular institutions, but it is shared between different actors (state and non-state actors). Consequently, state representatives can and do, sometimes use vigilante organizations for legally sanctioned violence. Vigilantism can thus be accepted at local levels of the state, since it addresses issues of security and moral order that are relevant to people living on the margins, beyond the reach of the formal state apparatus (Buur and Jensen 2004). It is in this light that the concept of vigilantism is perceived in this paper as an auxiliary force to the state security apparatus and its counter-insurgency program.

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### ***Counter-vigilantism***

Counter-insurgency involves a combination of measures such as military and political undertaken by a legitimate government of a country to curb or suppress an insurgency that threatens the security of a state (Eyituoyo, 2013). In Africa, the African Union (AU) High-Level Inter-Governmental Meeting on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism was held in Algiers in September 2002 and adopted the AU Plan of Action on Terrorism. The Plan focused on counter-terrorism measures that addressed Africa's security challenges. These included intensified police training on tracking down of terrorists, border control, legislative/judicial measures, disruption of terrorists financing and exchange of information between African states. The July 2010 Kampala AU Assembly Session, equally underscores the need for renewed efforts and increased mobilization of funds and personnel due to the increasing threat of terrorism across the continent. The AU Special Representative for Counterterrorism Cooperation was also instituted and serves as the Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACRST).

The AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism was also entrusted with the responsibility of providing advice on issues relating to counterterrorism actions, including preparation of model legislation to assist Member States. Thus, the Commission developed the African Model Law on Counter Terrorism which was endorsed by decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.369(XVII)] adopted by the 17th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU, held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in July 2011. The main issues in the legislation included the following: state parties were required to criminalize terrorist acts under their national laws as defined in the Convention. It also defined areas of cooperation among states, the establishment of state jurisdiction over terrorist acts, and provided a legal framework for extradition as well as extra-territorial investigations.

This Model Law was developed to assist member states in implementing the provisions contained in the various continental and international counterterrorism instruments. Member states were encouraged to fully take advantage of it to strengthen and/or update their national legislations on counter-terrorism. It was in this light that on December 29, 2014, Cameroon adopted the law on the suppression of acts of terrorism. The spirit of the law was to suppress all forms of terrorism in the country. Thus, terrorism has been criminalized as advised by the AU Convention on terrorism. The law has provisions that cover a wide range of terrorist related activities such as funding, training, and recruitment of terrorists. It is within the jurisdiction of the military tribunal that any act related to terrorism is being handled.

The military dimension of Cameroon's counter-terrorism mechanism comprises of structures like Operation Alpha led by the *Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide* (BIR) code named BIR-Alpha. This is a special anti-terrorism squad established in 2001. There is equally the *Operation Emergence 4*, led by the fourth inter-service military region (RMIA4, the regular army). In addition, the bilateral Operation Logone set up by Cameroonian and Chadian armed forces in 2015 is another counterterrorism mechanism. The deployment of the Cameroonian sector of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in October 2015 constituted another dimension of Cameroon's counterterrorism measures. According to the International Crisis Group, Cameroon's

counterterrorism measures have been relatively effective in the Far North Region (Crisis Group, 2016), whose effectiveness is measured by the consolidation of peace and security in the operational region by integrating a civil-military component.

### ***Civil Military-Cooperation***

Civil-military cooperation is the interaction between the armed forces of a state as an institution and the other sectors of the society in which the armed forces are embedded (Thomas, 2017). It is the coordination and cooperation in support of a mission between the armed forces and civil actors including the national population, and local agencies as well as national and international non-governmental agencies. In this article civil-military cooperation will be examined in the light of the role played by vigilante groups in the Far North region of Cameroon to assist the military to combat Boko Haram.

### ***Origins of Boko Haram***

The origin of Boko Haram has been examined from diverse perspectives. Awoniji (2013) and Obaro (2013) have put forth strong arguments to explain the religious motivation for the emergence of Boko Haram. Awoniji says Boko Haram emerged as an expression of resentment against perceived negative elements propagated through western education and thought. He insisted that Boko Haram is opposed to what they 'consider depraved' from the Islamic standpoint and inconsistent to Islamic principles. Straziuso (2012) and Onuoha (2011) as cited by Obaro (2013) added that:

*"The sect treats anything western as completely un-Islamic. It considers western influence on Islamic societies as the basis of the religion's weakness. Hence ... conventional banking, taxation, jurisprudence, western institutions and particularly western education are infidel and must be avoided by Muslims. Its ideological mission is to overthrow the secular Nigerian state and impose strict Islamic Sharia law in the country. Its members are motivated by the conviction that the Nigerian state is a cesspit of social vices, thus 'the best thing for a devout Muslim to do was to 'migrate' from the morally bankrupt society to a secluded place and establish an ideal Islamic society devoid of political corruption and moral deprivation'" (Obaro, 2013, p 36, 37).*

Furthermore, Ahokegh (2012) argues that Nigerian government inability to discharge its constitutional responsibility of protecting her citizens and the political manoeuvring that disrupted the policy of zoning with the PDP paved the way for the rise of Boko Haram. Consequently, Boko Haram is a response to internal political, social, economic and to some extent religious discontentment that have led to acts of terrorism unleashed in Nigerian society (Ahokegh 2012 and Awoniji, 2013). These arguments are strengthened by Zumve, Ingyoroko and Akuva (2013) who opine that official corruption manifested in economic deprivation, marginalization, frustration, and desperation experienced by greater population of Nigerians explains the upsurge of terrorism. Thus, terrorist acts have been associated with the Nigerian born Islamic sect Boko Haram.

Boko Haram therefore, translated from the local Hausa language means “western education is a sin” or “western education is forbidden” (Ntamu, 2014). However, African language expert Paul Newman does not agree with this translation. He questions that how could two words (Boko Haram) convey so much information. It appears there is not much debate about the word “haram”. It means prohibited or sin in Islamic jurisprudence. Paul Newman therefore asserts that ‘they are what French call “*faux amis*”, which refers to two similar sounding words with no relation when it comes to meaning’. *Boko* means “inauthentic” or “fake” according to Mohammed Kabir of BBC Hausa Service. It does not literally mean education and can be argued as such based on an article by Cook (2011) in which Boko Haram made a clarification in relation to the meaning of its name in the following words:

“For the first time since the killing of Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, our leader, we hereby make the following statements. First of all, that Boko Haram does not in any way mean “western education is a sin” as the infidel media continue to portray us. Boko Haram actually means Western civilization is forbidden. The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West, that is Europe which is not true, the second affirms our believe in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western education” (Cook, 2011, p. 13, 14)

The article continues that:

“In this case we are talking of Western ways of life which includes; constitutional provision as it relates to, for instance, the rights and privileges of women, the idea of homosexuality, lesbianism, sanctions in terms of terrible crimes like drug trafficking, rape of infants, multiparty democracy in an overwhelmingly Islamic country like Nigeria, blue films, prostitution, drinking beer and alcohol and many others that are opposed to Islamic civilization” (Cook, 2011, p. 14).

Thus the ideology espoused by Boko Haram hinges on upholding Islamic culture as the supreme way of life.

*The advent of* Boko Haram could be traced to the Yan Tatsine outburst of violence in the 1880s that eventually spread to Maiduguri, Yola and Kaduna and the religious/ethnic nervous strain that came near the end of the 1990s (Ntamu, 2014; Eyituoyo 2013). This ushered in the popularity of Mohammed Yusuf who created his own religious group in 2001 (Ntamu, 2014). According to Ntamu, Yusuf supporters referred to themselves as Jama’atul Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad (which in Arabic means ‘People Committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s Teaching and Jihad) but the government later called them Boko Haram. *He continues that* Mohammed Yusuf founded the movement in 2002 in Maiduguri ‘with the plan of setting up a Shari’a government in Borno State ...’ and the ideology has remained a strict implementation of the sharia law in Nigeria (Obaji 2013) as a whole. In 2009, clashes erupted in Bauchi, maiduguri and potiskun and Yusuf was killed among many others. A new leader, Iman Abubakar Shekau started a vast deal of violent movement against the federal state between 2010 and 2012. He pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in an audio statement posted on the group’s twitter account and adopted a new name,

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the Islamic Province of West Africa ([www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538)). The ideology has been to create an Islamic state in the Northern parts of Nigeria and Cameroon corresponding to the former Kanem-Borno Empire. In this line, Pieri and Zenn argue that “Boko Haram leaders draw their inspiration and legitimacy from Usman Dan Fodio’s 1804 Fulani-led jihad and his subsequent establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria but seek to implement this style of caliphate in the Kanuri homelands of former Kanem-Borno Empire” (Pieri and Zenn, 2016).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study makes use of qualitative approach and the study design is basically historical. Data was collected using interviews, documentary research, case narrative, observation and focus group discussion. The participants in the focus group discussion were people residing in the Far North region and who have lived the experiences of the war in the Far North. In addition, many were civil administrators. The use of interviews was meant to capture direct quotations from people’s personal perspectives and lived experiences as well as to collect first-hand information on the role of vigilante groups in the fight against Boko Haram. Consequently those interviewed were either directly affected by Boko Haram insurgent or counter-actions by vigilantes. The interviews further enabled the authors to collect in-depth description of the people’s perception, feelings and opinions about vigilantism in their locality (a comprehensive list of those interviewed has been provided as appendix after the conclusion). Observations were carried out in Mora during vigilante patrols to see exactly the nature of their operations as well their composition and equipment used. Observations were used primarily because other methods such as interviews and focus group discussions did not reveal important data about the vigilantes due to the unwillingness on the part of informants to give detail information about vigilantes. This was because the region was still in crisis and people were very suspicious of dishing out information. Data collected from these sources were complemented by those collected from documentary sources and case narratives. The data collected was analysed using the chronological and thematic approach. Four main themes emerged from the data as follows; the re-emergence of vigilante groups; their recruitment, structure and equipment used; the eminent threats posed by the popularity of the members of the vigilante groups; and the necessity to integrate former members of vigilante groups into civil life.

## **FINDINGS**

Some of the odious activities perpetrated by the Boko Haram group in Nigeria and other groups like Al-Shabab in Somalia consist of intimidation, suicide bombing, kidnapping and gunfire attacks on unarmed civilian (Afriyie, 2019). Boko Haram assaults were often unleashed with impunity and posed terrible treat to national security not only in Nigeria but equally in Cameroon following the extension of its activities to the Far North Region in 2011. It was as a response of the severe atrocities committed by Boko Haram on the population of the Far North Region of Cameroon that led to the re-birth of vigilante groups coupled with government support to act as a veritable force in combating the insurgent group. The structure, recruitment and equipment used facilitated the pursuant of the function to assist the military to combat this evil. Their contribution to the reduction of the atrocities levied on the population was applauded although they later



threatened to pose as a source of insecurity themselves. Consequently, with the lowering of the Boko Haram scotch there was the need to engage the ex-vigilante in gainful activities to maintain peace and security in the region. To address these issues a number of questions were asked including what factor(s) accounted for the re-birth of vigilante groups? How were they structured? How did they recruit members and what equipment did they use in performing their functions. Other questions posed centred on their role in reducing destructive activities of the sect and lastly how does the population perceive the vigilantes following the reduction of Boko Haram onslaughts in the region. The responses collected have been presented and analysed in the section that follows.

### **Re-emergence of vigilante groups in the Far North Region**

The majority of the interviewees asserted that the re-emergence of vigilante groups in the Far North Region of Cameroon was a response to the increasing cross border attacks by Boko Haram, which was claiming the lives and properties of the population. As a matter of fact, Issa Yakobou, a vigilante member of Mokolo town, Far North Region had this to say “our traditional leaders had to create vigilante groups to protect and guarantee our security due to Boko Haram threats” (Personal Communication, August 6, 2018). Equally, majority of the participants of the focus group discussion pointed out that “the re-emergence of vigilante groups was a reaction to Boko Haram activities”. They further argued that before the emergence of the sect, they did not witness the type of vigilante groups they were now living with. The terror exacerbated on the population resembles that of Al-Shabab (Afriyie, 2019) although it did not investigate how the population organized itself to counter the activities of this terrorist group.

Meanwhile, by observing the activities of vigilante groups the authors of this article point out that their re-emergence in the Far North Region was a reaction to Boko Haram insurgency. This conclusion was based on the fact that after the authors observed the rebirth of various vigilante groups in the region, it was observed that towns such as Yagoua and Maroua, that had lower level of attacks by Boko Haram, also had the least number of vigilante groups. On the other hand, towns with frequent or constant attacks such as Mora, Mokolo, and Kousseri among others had more vigilante groups operating. This demonstrated the fact that the growth of vigilante groups was to respond to the frequent Boko Haram attacks. Thus, it can arguably be ascertained that the re-emergence of vigilante groups in the Far North Region was a counter insurgent mechanism to threats and atrocities of Boko Haram instituted by the communities.

Besides, Boko Haram cross border activities in the Far North Region of Cameroon started in 2011 and intensified in 2014. According to Heungoup (2016), these activities included spreading of their religious ideologies and beliefs, recruiting Cameroonians as fighters and the seeking of refuge after being attacked in Nigeria. Also, members of the Boko Haram group always bought food in Far North markets, got involved in illegal activities of trafficking, vending of adulterated fuel and the smuggling of motor bikes. A network of arms caches was also established within this period with Kousseri as the base. In response to the increasing activities of Boko Haram, the government officially called for the engagement of vigilantism in the fight against the insurgents. The call was made as stated earlier by the Minister of Defence, Edgar Alain Mebe-Ngo’o as recorded by Moki in the following words.

“Boko Haram is becoming a serious nuisance, menacing the population more than ever before with the use of suicide bombers, burning and looting. I am asking all Cameroonians, especially in border zones to be members of vigilante committees and collaborate with the military to make sure that these new forms of Boko Haram attacks are stopped” (Moki, 2016, para. 3)

As of 2018, a total of about 107 vigilante groups were created in the region, thus, a response to Boko Haram activities and strengthening community or civil-military cooperation to combat the evils perpetrated by the sect. Table 1 shows the the numbers of vigilante groups in each division and the number of members in each of the divisions in the Far North Region.

Table 1: List of Number of Members of Vigilante Groups in the Far North Region

S/N	Division	Number of Groups	Number of Members
1	Diamaré	46	230
2	Mayo-Tsanaga	08	96
3	Mayo-Sava	22	324
4	Mayo-Danay	10	80
5	Mayo-Kani	04	60
6	Logone et Chari	17	180
Total		107	970

Source: Governor’s Office, Far North Region 2018.

However, some interviewees and participants of the focus group discussion indicated that about 35 vigilante groups operated in the region before the advent of Boko Haram. Their main activity was to address the issues of community crime and they had the support of the local traditional authorities such as Lamidos and chiefs. Despite this, Boko Haram activities led to proliferation of vigilante groups that came in to being in the region and they more than tripled what was there in the pre-Boko Haram era. For the vigilante to provide security to the communities they belong, their structure, composition, recruitment and equipment used comes in to focus.

### **Description of Vigilante Groups and Reduction of Boko Haram Activities**

When the vigilante groups re-emerged the question of its structure had to be regulated by the government to ensure order in their operations. To this end majority of the interviewee’s said that vigilante groups were organized in hierarchical order. That is, they had leaders who gave orders to subordinates under them. Some made allusion to the fact that they were organized just like the military. Results from participant observations equally pointed to the fact that each group had a president and a vice that provided leadership and who were responsible for communication between the groups and state authorities. All the interviewees also stated that vigilante groups in the region were dominated by young people below the age of 45. This was so because the task of vigilantism remains very demanding and thus, young people constituted the largest number because of their physical resistance. Notwithstanding, a few persons above 45 were also seen as

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part of the vigilante groups. It is these category of persons that mostly produced bows and arrows for the vigilantes.

Majority of the interviewees pointed out that members of vigilante groups were recruited from those living within particular localities or quarters and as such were sometimes religiously oriented. In this way, vigilante groups were made up of Muslims (e.g. Kakatare group in Maroua Town) in Muslim communities and Christians (Pitoare group still in Maroua Town) in Christian communities but they were mixed in mixed communities (communities with both Muslims and Christians). This was so because Muslims and Christians live mainly in separate localities in the region. Most of the respondents also held that recruitment as vigilante member favoured the male sex although there were a few women within the groups. For instance, two females were found to belong to the vigilante group of Mora during the field research.

Again, individuals recruited as members of the vigilante groups provide personal identification documents, were recognized by community dwellers and the recruitment was voluntary. These were the main strategy of recruitment so as to avoid recruiting Boko Haram spies into their groups who will then monitor their movements and activities and alert the enemy. Vigilante members equally stated that all their members were required to hand a copy of their National Identification Card to the Divisional Officer of their division of operation and to all the police stations within their divisions which was later transmitted to the Governor's office of the Region. This permitted administrative authorities to have in their possession a list of all the vigilante groups and its members.

Vigilante groups were armed with weapons such as spears, bow and arrows, machetes, and dane guns to enable them execute their assignment. These weapons were provided to them by the local authorities of the different communities although some were acquired by the groups themselves. As the Boko Haram threats increased, the government realised vigilantes were useful in the fight on terror and provided them with equipment such as rifles, touches and night vision gear (Heungoup, 2016). Again, they usually received briefing on matters of operation from the administrative authorities (Divisional Offices) and military offices. This was meant to enable them carry out their role of watchfulness with probity and contribute to combat or reduce Boko Haram activities in the region.

The re-emergence and proliferation of vigilante groups in the Far North Region of Cameroon contributed greatly to the reduction of the activities of Boko Haram in the region. This assertion was arrived at from the responses obtained through interviews and focus group discussion which revealed that vigilante groups co-operated with the military to combat Boko Haram. To this end, they provided vital information and helped identify strangers they believe could be potential suicide attackers in their community. Between 2014 and 2016, the Amchide vigilante group and similar ones in Limani, Kerawa and Tolkomani were involved in low intensity fights with small groups of about half a dozen Boko Haram fighters. In some cases they were able to surround Boko Haram cells or win a fight against attackers although they were sometimes unsuccessful and suffered casualties (Heungoup, 2016). To substantiate this, Moussa Kaele residing in Mokolo stated that:

We can sleep today with our eyes closed due to the effort of our children, brothers and sisters who act as vigilante in our territory. We think they have been very instrumental in the fight against Boko Haram. They patrol at night when most of us are sleeping while they risk their lives for our safety. Most of them also stand at border villages like Amchide guiding the local people. They also identify strange people in our communities and this helps to track Boko Haram suicide bombers. So, I believe they are playing a vital role in maintaining peace and security here (Personal Communication, August 6, 2018).

Equally, all those interviewed agreed that the military success against Boko Haram was held thanks to the assistance provided to them by the vigilante groups. Hassan Ali stated that “they are the ones who know every path here and the military rely on them for guidance. They also go to the bush and look for Boko Haram hideouts and expose it to the military” (Personal Communication, August 5, 2018). The majority of respondents of the focus group discussion also attributed the military success against the sect to information provided by the vigilante groups. However, these assertions were not to minimise the professionalism of the military to bring success but to depict the significant contributed of vigilante groups to the reduction of Boko Haram activities in the Far North Region. The contribution of vigilante in the fight against Boko Haram gave them fame and popularity especially following government approval of their activities.

### **Popularity of Vigilante Groups, Threats to Security and Integration in the Disarmament Programme**

Vigilante groups became very popular in the region following their re-emergence and proliferation as from 2014. Many interviewees declared that the popularity of vigilante groups in the Far North Region was unprecedented. They recounted that, when Boko Haram started cross border attacks into the Far North Region in 2011, people were unwilling to join vigilante groups. Again most of the vigilante members were generally seen as jobless and idle people in the society. However, this perception shifted drastically in the wake of vigilante successes against Boko Haram between 2014 and 2016. Respondents stated that since the government approved the creation of vigilante groups, vigilantism became very popular as people came to know that the government has also recognised their significant contributions to the fight against Boko Haram.

Similarly, during observations, it was noticed that the local population sang songs of praises to the vigilante groups whenever they came into contact with them. The population equally offered voluntary support to vigilante groups in the form of food items and verbal encouragement. Moreover, many youths scrambled to join vigilante groups’ demonstrating the popularity of vigilantism in the region. As a matter of fact, vigilante groups became integral part of the security apparatus of the region acting principally as a spy network for the security forces. Sergeant Marcel of Cameroon’s elite force, Bataillond’ Intervention Rapide (BIR) who works with vigilante groups in the region stated that the significant contribution of such groups has earned them what he called “civilian soldiers” (Personal Communication, November 29, 2017).

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According to Heungoup (2016) although vigilante groups were praised by government and local authorities, the vigilante groups were not exempted from criticism. This is because some of the vigilante members became a source of insecurity in the region, causing fear to the population. This argument is established in this study based on analysis of data from interviews and focus group discussions. Most respondents (about 80%) indicated that vigilante groups had started to demand for financial rewards due to the security assistance they provided to the communities and to which they were attempting to use violence in such demand. They also held that some of them were becoming thieves or kidnapers following the reduction of the crisis due to their experience from the field. Moreover, there have been cases of cattle theft in Amchide, a locality in the region associated with vigilantes. They also pointed out that there have been several cases of mob justice meted on suspects in some localities by vigilantes. They viewed these as a way of slipping away from state control which could become a major source of insecurity in the future.

These criticisms levied against vigilante were confirmed by Heungoup's (2016) observation that vigilantes have sometimes denounced local inhabitants as members of Boko Haram just to settle private account. Heungoup (2016) added that vigilante group members suspected of providing information to Boko Haram were arrested by the military. Furthermore, the first vigilante group formed by the BIR in Amchide constituted of only Christian members but who harassed and extorted money from the local Muslims majority. Meanwhile, most of the vigilante members do not have a source of income; they depend on food stuff donated by the population for survival. It is therefore probable that in a post-Boko Haram setting, such people will not have what to live on. This alone constitutes a serious security threat in the region as they will continue to resort to illegal means of survival such as armed robbery and kidnappings.

Pertaining to this situation, Mousa Kaele, a resident of Mora among others stated that "if care is not taken, the government would have been training kidnapers (vigilantes) for the future" (Personal Communication, August 6, 2018). The fear of kidnappings is very eminent among the residents of the region because kidnapping is a common crime in the Northern part of Cameroon in general. However, some of the respondents held the view that since vigilante members were drawn from their areas of residence it may be difficult for them to turn against their own population whom they were out to protect although they could harass people in other communities. This explains the necessity to include them in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration (DDR) program.

The Cameroon Government signed a degree creating a commission charged with the disarmament process of former Boko Haram fighters in the Far North Region and separatist fighters in the North West and South Regions on November 30, 2018 with the northern regional centre in Mora. However, it appears the disarmament programme has no place for vigilantes as it is focused only on disarming ex-Boko Haram fighters. The implication here is that the government has not identified vigilantes as a potential source of insecurity in the region. Nevertheless, this research has established that vigilante groups could become a source of insecurity in the region because some have been involved in cattle theft, mob justice, kidnappings, and demanding financial support from the population to provide security among other evils. Moreover, most of them are

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unemployed coupled with low level of education. Thus, integrating vigilante groups in the disarmament programme is vital for the security of the region. Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

This article sets out to explore the contributions of vigilante groups in the fight against Boko Haram and their role in the reduction of the activities of the insurgents in the Far North Region of Cameroon between 2014 and 2018. The research evaluated the re-emergence of vigilante groups in the Far North Region, provided a description of the groups and assessed their role in the reduction of Boko Haram activities. The study also considered the popularity of vigilante groups, their threats to security and integration in the Disarmament Programme. The success witnessed due to reduction of Boko Haram activities in the region made members of vigilante groups to become popular and influential although it later on tended to threaten the security in the Far North Region. The paper equally demonstrates that vigilante threat to security emanated from the fact that most of them were jobless and had found 'a job as vigilante'. With the reduction in the activities of Boko Haram they had no or less work to do and therefore returned to their former state of unemployment. Most of them resorted to unscrupulous means of survival with all its ramifications for the Far North Region and this showed signs of worsening if prompt actions were not taken. Therefore, integrating vigilante members in to Cameroon Government DDR Program remains a very important element to fight insecurity challenges posed by members of vigilante groups.

Judging from the data collected from the respondents and from observations, the re-emergence of vigilante groups in the Far North Region was a reaction to heinous cross border attacks by Boko Haram into the region. The local population quickly with the help from the *Lamidos* and chiefs assumed the responsibility of the safety of their community by forming vigilante groups to counter the threats and atrocities in the region. Shortly, the government endorsed the vigilante groups and encouraged their creation with support from state administration and the military. As a collaborative force, they contributed significantly to the reduction of Boko Haram activities and influence through the provision of intelligence reports and other forms of assistance to the military which enabled accurate operations against the insurgents using various means like road barricades and patrols. It repeats info described before. I expected to read mature conclusions here

They were equally instrumental in the identification of suspects within their communities which was very effective in reducing Boko Haram suicide bombings as it was often carried out by strangers. Again, by patrolling the borders with Nigeria and leading the military through bush paths in pursuance of Boko Haram *it* made Boko Haram ambush against the military less productive thereby reducing their attacks in the region. The effectiveness of vigilante collaboration with the military sustains the philosophy of civil military cooperation to counter Boko Haram activities. In this regard, the significant contribution of vigilante groups to the fight against Boko Haram has earned them an unparalleled popularity and influence so much so that it became a privilege to be a member. However, such popularity and influence was later associated with fear of insecurity in the region as vigilante members resorted to vandalizing the population in many ways as discussed above.

Unlike many studies which argues that the logic of vigilantism lay in public belief in a just world, police corruption, public mistrust in the judicial system, political factors and challenges posed by the downward economic trajectory; this study is unique in that it argues that the re-birth of vigilantism and its proliferation in the Far North Region of Cameroon was aimed at countering the atrocities committed by the Religious sect Boko Haram that invaded the area in 2011 from Nigeria. However, the study agrees with the views of Prattern (2008), Haeefe (2008) and Monday and Okpanachi (2009) who posit that Boko Haram is dangerous and possesses the culture of administering extra judicial punishment to of those tagged as unwanted. It is important to state that despite the praises and courage ascribe to vigilante groups their existence and encouragement as a force to enhance peace and security requires thorough reflection into ways that could permit them foster the growth of civil-military cooperation in the maintenance of peace and security in the region.

The government should formulate a blue print programme for the disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration of all the former members of vigilante groups that are operating in the region so as to prevent them from turning into thugs or armed robbers in a post-Boko Haram setting. Disarming vigilantes in a post-Boko Haram setting will guarantee the security of the region because arms will only be in the hands of the state forces so that abuses can properly be checked. Demobilising vigilantes in the region will also break down the chain of command and reduce various groups into individuals. This should make it difficult for individuals to engage in crimes that require a good number of members such as kidnappings and high way robbery.

Re-integration seems to be the most effective part of the whole process. It requires that various vigilante members be provided with an alternative source of income. This could be in form of re-insertion packages to start a normal 'civilian life' or it could be a professional training for vigilantes which will enable them become enterprising in their communities. Vetting could also be done among the vigilantes in order to identify those who may be qualified to join the ranks of the regular army while those who do not have the requirements are handled in other ways such as providing them with vocational training or initial capital to start up a business. The integration of vigilante groups in the disarmament programme is therefore an initiative that can counteract the possible threats that could be posed by vigilante groups in a post-Boko Haram setting.

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## Appendix

### Persons Interviewed

S/n	Names	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Abba Abdurrahma	35	Driver; he drives a 19 sitter bus on the Mokolo Maroua high way. He comes into contact with vigilante groups on every trip he makes and says he has witnessed 3 different Boko Haram attacks in Mokolo	Mokolo	02-Dec-17
2	Abba Maître	25	high school student and an eye witness of Boko Haram attack on his school and he interacts with vigilante groups almost on daily bases	Maroua	29-Nov-17
3	Amadou Belo	38	Secondary School Teacher and eye witness of Boko Haram burning of his school. He says his whose brother is a vigilante and he equally meets with vigilantes frequently. (He does NOT want the name of his school to mention).	Mora	07-Aug-18

S/n	Names	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
4	Abubakar Ibrahim	42	Merchant who imports clothes from Nigeria through the border village of Amchide. He witnessed the infamous Boko Haram attack on Amchide which displaced the entire village. He was wounded in the attack and interacts with vigilantes almost on daily bases.	Mora	07-Aug-18
5	Aichatou Moussa	31	Farmer and cultivates groundnuts in Kaele but later abandoned the farm due to Boko Haram threats. The younger brother is the head of a vigilante group (Name withheld)	Kaele	05-Nov-17
6	Beatrice Menoh	36	Administrator and works at the DO's office but she doesn't want any other information about her to be published anywhere. Apparently because she abandoned her post for over 2 years because of Boko Haram threats.	Mokolo,	02-Dec-17
7	Dalhata Ali	26	Military personnel and member of the Multinational Joint Task Force. He goes for military missions alongside vigilante groups.	Mora	25-Nov-17
8	Diddi Abibatou	27	Secretary at an NGO. She has witnessed several Boko Haram attacks and comes into contact with vigilantes frequently.	Maroua	07-Aug-18
9	Ernest Minda	33	Secondary School Teacher and eye witnessed to Boko Haram burning of his school and he equally meets with vigilantes frequently	Mora	07-Aug-18
10	Etah Grace	42	Administrator and works at a regional delegation (prefers not to specify)two of her neighbours are police officers who carry out surveillance with vigilante and often interacts with them.	Maroua	15-Nov-17
11	Guiche Paul	37	Vigilante. He accompanies the military on various missions and guides them through the bushes against Boko Haram attacks	Fotokol	02-Dec-17
12	Hamidou Alihou	27	Military personnel and works alongside vigilantes to counter Boko Haram attacks	Amchide	09-Aug-18
13	Hassan Ali	28	Membre of vigilante group. He accompanies the military on various	Maroua,	05-Aug-18

S/n	Names	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
			missions and guide them through the bush paths against Boko Haram attacks		
14	Issa Yakobou	30	He is a member of Mokolo vigilante group. He accompanies the military on various missions and guide them through the bush paths against Boko Haram attacks	Mokolo	06-Aug-18
15	Ibrahim Badawi	33	Administrator and works at governor's office. Preferred not to give more details	Mora	07-Aug-18
16	Laurent Mafo	50	Trader/Retailer at Amchide market whose shop was looted by Boko Haram and the younger brother is a vigilante. He also comes into contact with vigilantes almost on daily bases	Amchide	09-Aug-18
17	Michigah Joyce	30	Trader/ she sell food items at Kaele market which is guarded by vigilantes and soldiers. Thus, she interacts with vigilantes on daily bases.	Kaele	05-Nov-17
18	Mokouri Felix	46	Works at the SDO's Office in Mora as state security in charge of coordinating vigilante operations in Mora. Author of an article on Vigilantism in Mora (Not published)	Mora	25-Nov-17
19	MoussaKaele	28	He is a member of Mokolo vigilante group and guards the Mokolo market as well as acts as an informant for the military.	Mokolo	06-Aug-18
20	Nakoh Kingsley	28	Member of the Multinational Joint Task Force and goes for military missions alongside vigilante groups	Amchide	09-Aug-18
21	Nfor Etienne	35	Member of the Multinational Joint Task Force and goes for military missions alongside vigilante groups	Amchide	09-Aug-18
22	Ngah Marcel	28	Military personnel and member of the Alpha Force in Maroua	Maroua	29-Nov-17
13	Nganeh Maxwell	48	Merchant/Retailer at Maroua central market. He has witnessed suicide blast at the Maroua central market and interacts with vigilantes on daily bases	Maroua	10-Nov-17

S/n	Names	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
24	Ngwani Federick,	37	Administrator and works at the Maroua city council. He interacts with vigilantes and has witnessed several Boko Haram attacks	Maroua	15-Nov-17
25	Sulemanou Yaya	48	Lawyer victim of Boko Haram kidnaping, meets with vigilantes frequently, and two of his siblings are vigilantes	Maroua	15-Nov-17
26	Ussoumanou Amidou	27	University Student author of an unpublished article on Boko Haram Insurgency in Cameroon.	Maroua	05-Aug-18
27	Ussouman Gambo	50	Trader and victim of Boko Haram looting in Fotokol market. Two of his sons are vigilantes.	Fotokol	02-Dec-17
28	Waziri Adouka	26	Merchant/cotton dealer in Kaele. He is a victim of Boko Haram kidnaping and interacts with vigilantes frequently.	Kaele	29-Nov-17
29	Yaya Mindif	50	Farmer. He cultivates cotton and is a witness of Boko Haram attacks and interacts with vigilantes daily.	Fotokol	02-Dec-17
30	Yewo Emmanuel	45	Administrator and works with municipal police in Maroua. He works frequently with the vigilantes as collaborators to combat Boko Haram	Maroua,	15-Nov-17